

# YOUTH WORKER EDUCATION IN EUROPE: Policies, structures, practices



Youth Knowledge #26

## Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth





# **YOUTH WORKER EDUCATION IN EUROPE:** Policies, structures, practices

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*The opinions expressed in this work, commissioned by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of either of the partner institutions, their member states or the organisations co-operating with them.*

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction: education, learning and practice of youth work under the lens

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*Marti Taru, Tanya Basarab and Ewa Krzaklewska*

**D**eveloping youth work has been for many years an area of common interest of the Council of Europe and the European Union (EU). In this sense, their partnership in the field of youth (hereinafter the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership) has been building a joint knowledge base on the topic and has supported the activities based around the European Youth Work Conventions – a forum of policy, practice and research dedicated to strengthening youth work in Europe. In 2017, the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership began a research project on mapping the educational and career pathways of youth workers. The aim of the project was to develop a better understanding of three aspects: the opportunities that youth workers have for learning by formal or non-formal routes; the recognition and validation systems in place; and the career pathways of youth workers.

This research was launched in a context of increasing interest in and focus on youth work development at European level. In May 2017 the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted CM/Rec(2017)4, a Recommendation to member states on supporting youth work (Committee of Ministers 2017). The EU had been supporting several strategic partnerships and expert groups on quality development of youth work. The new EU youth strategy and the Council of Europe plans for the next biennial work programme in the field of youth envisage an even stronger focus on youth work. Therefore, expectations were high that this research project would produce a fairly complete picture of youth worker learning, education and career paths in Council of Europe member states.

### **1.1. Project process and outcomes**

The project started with a meeting of a group of experts in Brussels in May 2017, reflecting together on what aspects of formal and non-formal education would be important to explore. Based on this input, the research team – James O’Donovan, David Cairns, Madalena Sousa and Vesselina Valcheva Dimitrova – developed a questionnaire in eight sections defining the important areas for this mapping exercise: legal and policy frameworks of youth work and definitions; formal education offers; non-formal learning offers; validation of learning; youth work quality assurance; youth worker competencies and occupational standards; associations of youth workers; and career pathways. The questionnaire was sent to the network of national correspondents of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCY), a network

that supports data and knowledge gathering from the member states party to the European Cultural Convention. In countries which had no correspondent, the questionnaire was sent to other relevant contacts.

The first phase of data collection was conducted from June to September 2017. During the process of research, EKCYP correspondents identified at their annual meeting in September 2017 various challenges linked to the data collection for the mapping; these were mostly linked to lack of information or data gaps, questions of terminology and difficulties in identifying stakeholders who could contribute. An initial benchmarking analysis based on information from 10 countries was presented to the Council of Europe Joint Council on Youth – the statutory body on youth – in October. This motivated government representatives from even more countries to complete the questionnaire. One of the findings emerging from these first steps highlighted the lack of information or structured monitoring systems on the topic. As one of the correspondents put it:

*by doing this work, we realised that we lack a system of monitoring and data gathering on youth work in our country. We definitely need to build that system.*

By January 2018, questionnaires from 41 countries had been collected. Facing the challenge of dealing with such a rich dataset, the team of researchers produced a mapping report with 15 thematic annexes (edited by O'Donovan).

The expert group reconvened in Brussels in November 2017 to review their findings and to advise how best to present the results of the research in terms of structure and, most importantly, in terms of content that could support implementation of the Youth Work Recommendation (Council of Europe 2017). For example, an initial literature review on the education of youth workers did not bring out any useful results so that research was not included in the final version. The expert group also advised removing this section and instead finding ways of presenting the results of the research that policy makers and practitioners could use. The mapping report and the thematic annexes were finalised in April 2018 after additional contributions from government representatives in the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ), which forms part of the statutory bodies on youth in the Council of Europe. Additionally, a policy-oriented analysis was conducted by Tomi Kiilakoski using the same dataset and focusing on youth work practice architectures. Both of these outputs are presented in this book.

Was the work now complete? Far from it! The analytical report revealed very diverse realities in the 41 countries in all areas that the survey covered, from policy to education, quality standards, associations and career paths for youth workers. Importantly, the research highlighted that youth work was a very dynamic policy area, with almost half of the countries initiating or updating their policy framework. However, there was a very patchy presence of formal education offers and a big gap between countries that had well-developed practice architectures (i.e. policy frameworks, systems and support to youth workers) and countries that had only a few elements. The expert group advised that the second stage needed to explore the findings in more depth. In particular, the perspectives of youth workers, and also of youth work organisers, managers and educators, did not come through clearly enough in the first phase of the research. It was also clear that, while the mapping study reflected each country's situation mostly as reported

by the public authorities, it was necessary to see how their perspective would compare with the views of youth workers, youth worker managers and organisers.

In 2018, a renewed team of researchers began work on understanding the gaps and gaining more nuanced perspectives of the two groups. The spectrum of research questions was broadened and included the role of associations of youth workers, professionalisation and the question of ethics. Data collection was carried out combining a mix of methods, including surveys and focus groups with youth workers and also with organisers, managers and educators of youth workers. An enlarged expert group meeting in Brussels in May 2018 focused on the systems for education and validation of youth workers in eight countries: Germany, Ireland, Estonia, the UK (Scotland), Serbia, Croatia, Armenia and Ukraine. It made a valuable contribution to the second phase: three international youth organisations (WOSM, EEE-YFU and IFM-SEI) presented their approaches to youth worker training and recognition; and the experts advised on the further aspects of educational and career paths where youth sector stakeholders needed to advance their understanding. It became clear that there is no single approach that could be used at European level to support all countries in developing youth worker training and education. The research identified a range of systems, tools and methods of initiating formal education or non-formal training programmes, and suggested various types of recognition, from certification of non-formal learning to fully-developed validation systems. Importantly the meeting also concluded that educational offers and validation of learning are closely linked to other aspects in the field of youth work practice, including youth work recognition across several policy fields and youth workers' labour-market situation and job security.

The research produced many questions and answers for practitioners and policy makers. While the Council of Europe is in the process of implementing the Recommendation on youth work CM/Rec(2017)4 and the European Union is launching the development of a Youth Work Agenda as part of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-27, the results of this research project lay the foundation for adapted and informed approaches to developing formal and non-formal education and validation systems for youth workers. In April 2019, the most recent meeting of the expert group explored the importance of making direct links between the research findings and these European policy initiatives.

Debate on the findings of the research project has been going on since the moment when the first draft was presented to the statutory bodies on youth, partly because stakeholders in many countries and in European policy making were asking the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership to present the findings and, even more, because of the renewed policy focus on youth work from all stakeholders. The mapping study and practice architectures report were shared in many European and national youth work fora, large and small. Ahead of the third European Youth Work Convention, where many initiatives – including the Council of Europe Youth Work Recommendation – will converge, the adoption of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-27 and the related Erasmus+ initiatives have brought the topic of education and career pathways for youth workers in front of actors not usually involved in the youth sector, including local public administrations, universities and the vocational education and training sector. These conversations, which are also supporting new and related activity that is emerging at national level, must go on, for every new

stakeholder joining the debate may hold answers and resources that are required for developing recognised high-quality, flexible pathways for youth workers' education and career anywhere in Europe.

## 1.2. Research methods and data

The project has produced a range of data sources: it started with the mapping questionnaire filled in by national correspondents and other country representatives, which was later complemented with eight focus groups and three surveys. On top of these, there came a unique dataset describing youth studies programmes in EU countries. Nearly all of the data sources are used in more than one chapter, and different chapters use different sets of data. Whereas the online surveys and mapping questionnaire were designated specifically for the purposes of the project, the focus group interviews were carried out in connection with other events. The surveys are best treated as exploratory data because of methodological and systematic difficulties in sampling and questionnaire design.

To avoid repeating the information on data sources at the beginning of every chapter, we present it all in tables 1 and 2, which give a comprehensive overview of the data sources that are used to describe European youth work in this book.

**Table 1. Overview of focus group interviews**

Reference	Date	Context of FGI	Number and profile of participants
FGI_1	27 March 2018	European Training Strategy Conference, Mainz	Number: 8 Activity: mostly youth workers Experience: from 2 to 10+ years Countries: Germany, Hungary, Latvia, North Macedonia.
FGI_2	27 April 2018	European Youth Forum Council of Members, Brussels	Number: 10 Activity: representatives of youth organisations, including EYF Experience: on average, about 10 years' experience in the youth field, primarily as participants and volunteers Countries: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Romania
FGI_3	25 June 2018	Focus group organised with support of Estonian Youth Work Centre, Tallinn	Number: 7 Activity: Youth workers and youth work organisers, at municipal and national level Experience: on average, 10 years' experience in the youth field, primarily as participants and volunteers (minimum 2 years, maximum 20 years) Countries: Estonia

Reference	Date	Context of FGI	Number and profile of participants
FGI_4	5 June 2018	Europe Goes Local conference, Cascais	<p>Number: 9</p> <p>Activity: youth workers</p> <p>Experience: on average, 10 years' experience in the youth field, primarily as participants and volunteers (minimum 2 years, maximum 20 years)</p> <p>Countries: Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Switzerland</p>
FGI_5	5 June 2018	Europe Goes Local conference, Cascais	<p>Number: 9</p> <p>Activity: employers of youth workers, organisers of youth work at the municipal level</p> <p>Countries: Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Switzerland</p>
FGI_6	12-15 June	Enter! Training course for youth workers. Evaluation seminar, Strasbourg	<p>Number: 9</p> <p>Activity: specialists working with young people (did not identify themselves as youth workers)</p> <p>Experience: modest experience in the youth field (1-5 years), though one has been involved in 'youth work' for 12 years</p> <p>Countries: Albania, Armenia, France, Hungary, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Norway, Romania</p>
FGI_7	13-15 November 2018	Peer-learning seminar on youth work and its relevance for youth policy in South East Europe, organised by the Youth Partnership, Ljubljana	<p>Number: 18 (interviewed in two groups of nine)</p> <p>Activity: youth workers and youth work co-ordinators/managers</p> <p>Experience: majority had 5+ years' experience in youth work, two had less than one year of experience.</p> <p>Countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia</p>
FGI_8	September 2018	Europe Goes Local project meeting, Zagreb	<p>Number: 6</p> <p>Activity: youth work trainers and youth work managers</p> <p>Experience: on average, about 10 years in youth work (three participants had less than five and three had more than 15 years)</p> <p>Countries: Croatia</p>

**Table 2. Overview of surveys**

Reference	Data collection method	Data collection period	Target population	Number of responses
Mapping	Questionnaire	June 2017 to January 2018	EKCYP correspondents and country representatives in Council of Europe statutory bodies on youth	49
Survey_1	Online survey	July to September 2018	youth workers in Council of Europe countries	221
Survey_2	Online survey	November 2018	employers and managers of youth workers in Council of Europe countries	30
Survey_3	Face-to-face interviews	June 2018	youth worker educators, organisers and managers involved in the Erasmus+ project Europe Goes Local	10

### **1.3. Structure and content of the book**

This research project comes as an important step in the youth work field, which has a rich policy context. The chapters in this publication give the reader detailed insights into different aspects of youth workers' educational and learning pathways. It starts with the mapping report completed by James O'Donovan, as editor, and James O'Donovan, David Cairns, Madalena Sousa and Vesselina Valcheva Dimitrova as the researchers (Chapter 2). It covers 44 regions from 41 countries of the Council of Europe so that it is not an exaggeration to say that it gives a bird's-eye view of the youth work situation on the entire continent.

As the report shows, fewer than half of the countries surveyed have put in place a system of youth work quality assurance and/or defined the competences deemed necessary for youth workers. While there is a wide range of approaches to quality assurance, not all approaches meet accepted or standard concepts of quality assurance. Nonetheless, this variety is treated as evidence of interest in providing quality youth work, and the related need for youth workers to have the necessary competences. Competence frameworks, occupational standards, recognition and validation tools for youth workers are largely evident at national level, but together they have the potential to provide a platform for European co-operation in the field, particularly through exchanges of good practice and mutual support among all relevant stakeholders. The mapping report singles out the roles of the state, whether centrally, regionally or locally – through public-funded bodies or institutions, European support programmes and the voluntary youth sector – in youth work. One of the conclusions is that the state has the greater role, responsibility and capacity in this respect, as having the legal authority, legislative fiat and financial muscle to determine the role of youth work and youth workers.

Chapter 3 by Tomi Kiilakoski applies the concept of practice architectures in an analysis of the mapping data to advance our understanding of the state of play in the youth work field in Europe. The concept is based on the idea of social learning and it also broadens our ways of thinking about youth workers' education. The approach is based on the belief that what an individual youth worker does, and is able to accomplish, is shaped by three dimensions:

1. "Sayings" – how youth work is recognised, formulated, talked about and debated;
2. "Doings" – how youth work education is supported and how youth work can be a sustainable career; and
3. "Relatings" – how youth work is recognised, supported and organised so that it can relate to young people, the general public and other professions.

By combining these aspects, Kiilakoski distinguishes four different types of practice architecture, which range from well-developed practice architecture to the less advanced and relatively poorly developed. This typology illustrates the diverse realities among the surveyed countries.

Chapter 4 by Marti Taru introduces three concepts from the sociology of occupations – professionalism as a normative value, professionalism as a discourse and professionalism as a professional project – and employs them to describe youth work. Each of the three perspectives highlights certain aspects and points out different opportunities for youth work. The occupation as a value perspective highlights the significance of specialist knowledge, indispensable when it comes to providing high-quality services. When looking through this lens, Taru suggests that youth work would benefit from institutions responsible for creating and transmitting high-quality knowledge, like university-level research and teaching centres. Looking through the occupation-as-a-discourse lens shows that youth work has been shaped by public-sector understandings and expectations of youth work as a public service. Thus, youth work could benefit from increased investment of public funds in addressing youth-related social challenges and issues, especially education and labour-market participation. By its very nature, youth work commands expert knowledge of how young people think and behave, and youth workers possess the competences needed to support young people. Increased investment in policy interventions targeting young people can create a window of opportunity for youth work, which can offer its expertise to support achieving various policy goals. Finally, the concept of occupation as a professional project emphasises the agency of practitioners themselves in achieving social and political recognition as an occupation that is characterised by attributes like professional autonomy and self-management.

In Chapter 5, Sladjana Petkovic and Ondras Bárta take a look at youth work ethics. They start with a statement that youth work can never be approached as a value-free area because almost every definition of youth work is influenced by moral, ethical, social, cultural and/or political values. This is because youth work is embedded in wider policy and practice contexts and also because it is deemed to require ethical behaviour from youth workers. An analysis of youth work ethics codes leads to the conclusion that each of the different approaches to professional ethics offers something, but none offers a complete account. Although the list of requirements for ethical

youth work practice is extensive, the mechanisms supporting their development and implementation are far from satisfactory. Petkovic and Bárta raise a number of questions that are tightly integrated with the topics of earlier chapters. What is the interplay between the ethical framework, youth work quality and youth work recognition? How does a youth work ethical framework influence co-operation with other sectors? Does an ethical code create a common language and help to build bridges with professionals from other areas? At present, we hardly have any solid answers to these questions, but all of them deserve future research to find answers.

In Chapter 6 Marko Kovacic, Nikola Baketa and Marita Grubisic-Cabo draws on an original dataset of 100 youth studies curricula (65 BA and 35 MA programmes) taught in universities in 16 EU countries. It shows that youth work is mentioned in most of the learning outcomes. The chapter casts light on several dimensions of youth studies. Policy-wise, youth studies programmes concentrate on the fields of social inclusion, education and training, health and well-being. Most of the programmes have a caritative (benevolent) and/or preventive nature, rather than an emancipatory one. In terms of their theoretical ground, most programmes put great emphasis on social justice and community. However, some of the prevailing theoretical concepts from 20th-century literature on youth (such as transition theory, youth as a problem/resource) are not so well represented in curricula. The analysis also demonstrates that performance plans and curricula mostly cover topics on methodology, project management and fieldwork, which is often incorporated in coursework.

The connection between learning (theoretical) facts about youth work and implementing all this knowledge as an expert youth worker providing high-quality youth work in real-life situations is the topic of Chapter 3 by Tomi Kiilakoski. In Chapter 7, he depicts the transition from being a freshly graduated or beginner youth worker, packed with theoretical knowledge, to being an autonomous and critically minded youth work practitioner who enjoys considerable professional autonomy in their work. He does this using a three-phase model of transition. First, there is the pre-degree phase when a young person sets out to become a youth worker. This phase consists of experiences of participation in youth work as a young person and the motivations leading to the decision to become active in youth work. Secondly, during the schooling phase, youth work “disciples” gain conceptual and theoretical knowledge of youth work. This knowledge provides the basis for independent and critical analysis of their practice later in their professional life. Finally, in the induction phase, freshly graduated youth workers go through integration into the community of youth workers. This phase may last several years and includes help and support from experienced youth workers, using various supervision and guidance methods, such as mentoring. One of the main findings is that the phase of learning theoretical knowledge through formal education (not only or not necessarily in youth work) was seen as beneficial in several ways, at individual as well as at societal level.

Even though degree-level education was perceived as beneficial, the youth work reality in many countries is that most youth workers acquire new knowledge and skills in non-formal training outside degree programmes. Learning – and recognition of that learning – outside the formal education system is the topic of Chapter 8 by Dunja Potočnik and Marti Taru. As the analysis of focus groups and survey data shows, youth workers and youth work organisers believe that the provision of non-formal

learning opportunities to youth workers is far from perfect. Many interviewees and survey respondents pointed out a range of factors which hamper the provision of learning opportunities to youth workers, who in general are very eager to learn. Among the challenges mentioned were lack of financial and organisational resources, lack of long-term educational and development strategies for youth workers within organisations and generally in the youth work sector, lack of recognition of youth work and of youth worker learning, poor social guarantees and low job security. Importantly, European initiatives and institutions play a significant role in supporting the development of youth work training and education by helping to build competence frameworks and providing organisational and financial support to youth workers, youth work organisers and educators. A lot could be done on many levels to improve the provision of non-formal training for youth workers.

Chapter 9, written by James O'Donovan, focuses on youth worker associations and networks in Europe. We learn that organisations, associations and networks vary greatly in terms of size as well as in their provision of training for their members. While they all appear to have a role in advocating and promoting youth work as an occupation, they also display and reflect on issues related to youth work in general. Associations of youth workers tend to reflect on the overlap and blurring of the lines between youth work and related fields such as social work, child welfare and leisure-time activities. In some instances, associations of youth workers are effectively subsumed into associations of social workers and teachers. Finally, associations of youth workers can effectively be trade unions with the corresponding bargaining power with employers in the state and private sectors. Interestingly, associations or networks of youth workers tend to be a feature of those countries where youth work is either well embedded, with both status and support, or at least in countries where youth work is being developed.

The closing chapter, by Marti Taru, Ewa Krzaklewska and Tanya Basarab, brings together the most important points and debates from the previous contributions. It stresses the importance of the policy momentum for concentrated action plans that support youth workers' education, learning and professional development. As the chapter argues, public institutions have an highly significant role in the development of youth work as a field of practice. It is not only a matter of financial and organisational resources; it is also legislation, support systems (such as competence frameworks with recognition, certification or validation paths) and the provision of education, training and qualifications systems that are all necessary for the development of youth work as a recognised field of practice, a family of occupations and perhaps, in the future, a profession or several professions. Further clarification of the responsibilities expected of volunteer and paid youth workers seems to be one of the themes that needs to be addressed as youth work is increasingly integrated into the realm of public services that are offered by states and strongly supported by European institutions and resources. Finally, the research findings have highlighted that there are many approaches to building national education and validation systems for youth workers, but in most countries there is little systematic monitoring and analysis of the field of youth work.

Though youth work as a practice has a long history, the education and career pathways of youth workers have captured policy makers' attention only relatively recently.

Yet this attention is crucial because there is no other group of actors capable of offering similar support to youth work and youth workers. Obviously both national and European institutions play a significant role in youth work development and institutionalisation. Young people's life world is constantly evolving, while social and educational policies are also changing and adapting to these realities, and research clearly situates youth work as a field of practice at the crossroads of these sectors. Permanent changes are also taking place in the world of work and so the ongoing development and professionalisation of youth work should be viewed as a natural process with many challenges but also many opportunities. The process has started, and youth work is evolving.

## Chapter 2

# Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers

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*James O'Donovan (ed.), David Cairns,  
Madalena Sousa and Vesselina Valcheva Dimitrova*

### **2.1. Introduction**

**T**his chapter presents a core of the research initiative “Mapping educational and career paths of youth workers”. Its main objective is to contribute to a better understanding and sharing of information about the education and training of youth workers across Europe and what employment and career paths this prepares them for, as well as the implications for the quality of youth work. Under its 2017 work programme, the European Union-Council of Europe Youth Partnership proposed to develop better knowledge on youth work, enlarge the youth work section in the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCY) and continue to upload relevant research to its virtual library.

This mapping is an attempt to answer some key questions regarding the educational paths of youth workers, the professional reality in each European country, the different forms of recognition, and the main challenges faced by practitioners of youth work. For this purpose, the following research questions guided the methodology and the work done by the research team and the expert group:

- ▶ what policy and legislation exists at national level to regulate youth work as a profession?
- ▶ what educational and training opportunities are available to support the professional development of youth workers?
- ▶ what are the quality frameworks and what are the core competences of youth workers?
- ▶ what kinds of representative and support structures exist for youth workers?
- ▶ what is the employment status of youth workers and what career opportunities are available to them?

While the understanding and practice of “youth work” varies widely across Europe, as demonstrated in the chapter, to ensure a common understanding of the main terms of reference used in the study, the following definition was provided in the Mapping questionnaire, taken from the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership glossary on youth (Youth Partnership n.d. a) and Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work, adopted at the end of May 2017:

Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making. (Committee of Ministers 2017)

## **2.2. Mapping methodology**

The mapping most of all used the knowledge gathered through a questionnaire sent to the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYC) correspondents, relevant ministries, the Advisory Council on Youth, the European Youth Forum, and other organisations delivering youth work. The questionnaire was also circulated at the same time to government representatives with responsibility for youth policy, education and training institutions, members of the Advisory Council on Youth and members of the European Youth Forum, as well as to representatives of other organisations delivering youth work. The questionnaire was issued to EKCYC correspondents in early June 2017 and the data had been gathered by December 2017.

Completed responses to the questionnaire were received from 41 countries. In all, 49 completed questionnaires were received as some countries returned more than one and miscellaneous material was also provided by individual countries. United Kingdom (England) and United Kingdom (Wales) provided separate answers, as did Belgium (Flemish), Belgium (French) and Belgium (German-speaking). From France and Finland, two questionnaires were received.

Almost half of the responses to the questionnaire were submitted by EKCYC correspondents, and ministries, universities, government agencies and civil society organisations across Europe also submitted responses. Additionally, a literature review and desk research regarding key terms, definitions of youth work and related contexts such as EU and Council of Europe youth policy and country perspectives in the field of youth work was conducted – this is presented in the following chapter.

Importantly, the work of the researchers was guided and supported by the expert group, which included representatives of the partner institutions, the Europe Goes Local project, the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, Council of Europe youth sector statutory bodies and experts involved in the drafting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work. The Youth Partnership also communicated with representatives of other initiatives (mapping on regional and local youth work by the Europe Goes Local project and the European Training Strategy co-ordinated by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre) to ensure complementarity and benefit the youth sector across Europe. Three meetings were held during the mapping exercise to discuss findings, rethink the structure of the initial report and consider approaches to strengthen the analysis and links to the data provided.

Definitions set out in the questionnaire, including the above-quoted definition of youth work also included “youth worker”, “formal learning”, “non-formal learning” and “accreditation of an education programme”, and are all taken from the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership glossary on youth and related sources. These definitions and others from the glossary also underpin the data analysis in the chapter. Other terms and terminology employed in the chapter, particularly those relating to competences and qualifications, derive from the responses to the questionnaire. For the most part they are in English and, on occasion, French. However, in some instances a translation has been provided where the meaning may be less clear, as for instance Fritidsledarutbildning (recreation leader) in Sweden and Barne- og ungdomsarbeiderfag (child and youth work subjects) in Norway. The term “country” (European Cultural Convention) rather than “member state” is used in the chapter.

All information and data included in the data analysis and tables<sup>1</sup> derive solely from the responses to the questionnaire, except where other information or data are employed for illustrative or comparative purposes. Where responses to the questionnaire categorise information and data under specific headings, such as formal or non-formal education and training, quality-assurance or competence-based frameworks, or occupational standards or job descriptions, these have been reported and treated as such for data analysis purposes, unless otherwise indicated. Accordingly, the initial report was based and reliant on the extent and quality of the responses to the questionnaire. From the data analysis it was clear that there is a significant lack of data on youth work in many of the countries surveyed. This consequently affected the completion of the questionnaire and the expected outcomes. Differences in interpretation and understanding of the questions asked also affected the nature and extent of the responses received.

### **2.3. Current European policy on promotion and development of youth work**

In looking at current European policy on the promotion and development of youth work, we are able to identify some common themes underpinning the approach of the European institutions to this field. Such work helps clarify what these institutions define as youth work, providing us with a starting point for the subsequent mapping exercise as well as an important point of orientation for this chapter.

The policy background at European level in relation to youth work includes a number of significant developments. This includes attempting to explain what constitutes youth work. In 2009, the Council of the European Union’s Resolution on a renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field defined youth work as:

a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people. ... based on non-formal learning processes and on voluntary participation (Youth Partnership n.d. b).

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1. Data from the questionnaires collected has also been collated in tables which are appendices to this chapter and which can be found on the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership website dedicated to the research findings. For details please visit <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/expert-group-researching-education-career-paths-youth-workers>.

This is very much a starting point of a definition rather than a comprehensive statement of everything that takes place within the youth sector, or indeed, encompassing all the areas in which youth workers are employed, extending beyond areas such as education and training and into other fields, including leisure. Key to this definition is, however, the fact that participation in youth work should be voluntary among young people, involve some aspect of non-formal or informal learning, and support personal social development.

We can also look at the declarations of the European youth work conventions. The Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, one of the flagship initiatives of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (November 2014 to May 2015), attempts to balance, on the one hand, the idea of youth work as an “instrument” for labour-market preparation, and on the other, a tool for supporting personal development, empowerment, citizenship, participation, social inclusion, cultural awareness, expression, friendship and having fun.

What the convention provides is a statement of renewed commitment to supporting youth work in Europe and the triggering of an institutional process towards agreement on the value and significance of youth work among the European institutions, as well as an endorsement of the work of policy makers and practitioners in the youth sector. This document essentially sets parameters in regard to what youth workers should be doing and, as it notes in its concluding summary, youth work is a central component of a social Europe (2nd European Youth Work Convention 2015; Belgian Presidency’s Council Resolution on youth work 2010).

As the convention notes, the responsibility for youth work lies with member states, meaning that we need to establish what is happening in the youth sector in countries throughout Europe. In this chapter, we will therefore try to look at the extent to which the aspirations of the European institutions are being realised. One document that is key to guiding this process is the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work. This includes the provision of a basic definition (quoted in the Introduction and abridged from the resolution cited above). The aim of this recommendation is to encourage countries to develop their youth work policy and forms of practice, in order to support youth work at local, regional, national and European levels. Significantly, this definition also acknowledges the importance of paid and volunteer youth workers, and the emphasis on non-formal and informal learning processes. Hence, this document provides an important indication of the means through which youth work should be practised. Definitions of these terms, and many others, can be found in the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership glossary on youth.

In explaining what it is youth workers actually do, dedicated research on youth work in practice is limited, although a significant number of studies have emerged, bringing together insights on the work of those within the youth sector across Europe. One example is the recent Council of Europe youth knowledge publication: *Thinking seriously about youth work* (Schild *et al.* 2017). This book takes a transversal perspective, examining country case studies from various EU member states and Council of Europe countries. From this work, we can in some ways fill out a contemporary definition of youth work in terms of occupational categories, looking

at people termed socio-cultural instructors, intercultural mediators, educators or amateurs, social workers, community workers, youth leaders, educators and trainers, cultural workers, volunteers and activists in youth organisations or youth movements. From this point of view, what we present in this chapter is a mapping of some of the regulatory frameworks, educational frameworks and career pathways open to these individuals.

## **2.4. Data analysis results**

### **2.4.1. Policy and legislation**

In this section of the chapter, we will provide an overview of policy and legislation pertaining to youth work across Europe. We begin by summarising the current position in regard to national structures and legislative frameworks across different European countries. This is followed by an assessment of definitions of youth work, other forms of national recognition and current national policy initiatives. The latter is also illustrated with the use of a map providing detail in countries in which we are aware of such arrangements. A concluding note indicates that while there is some common ground across countries in relation to policy and legislation, in regard to the foundational role played by national governments in regulating youth work, for example, the current state of policy and legislation differs markedly according to national context due to factors such as different regional histories of youth work development.

### **2.4.2. National structures and legislative frameworks**

The opening question set of the questionnaire examined policy and legislation in regard to youth work at national level. The first part asked: “Which national structures are responsible for creating the framework for youth policy and its implementation in your country?”, providing us with an indication of where ultimate responsibility for youth work lies. All national correspondents (for the 41 countries and regions for which we have information) noted that some form of governmental structure is in place in their countries. The norm in regard to youth work governance is to situate responsibility at ministerial level, with input from other parties such as youth advisory boards in a small number of countries (e.g. Bulgaria).

It is also notable that “youth” is not generally regarded as a distinct policy arena at ministerial level but is typically conjoined with other policy fields, most prominently “children” (in Ireland, Luxembourg and Croatia) and/or interpolated within the frameworks of “sport” (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, the Flemish Community of Belgium, Georgia, Malta, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey and the United Kingdom (England)) or “education” (Belarus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom (England)). In some countries, such as Croatia and Finland, “youth” traverses different policy fields. The outstanding finding from the responses made to this question is a confirmation that there is a lack of dedicated structures for the governance of youth work in these countries at ministerial level.

Moving on to consider legislation pertaining to youth work, we asked respondents if their country had a youth act/law/policy/strategy or youth work act/law/policy/strategy at national and/or regional level. It is notable that in several national contexts, there appeared to be no such legislation: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland and Sweden. This does not mean that there is no legal framework in these nations, only that youth work may fall within the jurisdiction of generic legislation relating to areas such as education; for example the Education and Inspections Act (2006) in the United Kingdom (England). It is also notable that much of this legislation is relatively recent, having been formulated in the last decade, and in some cases, the process of establishing legislation is ongoing or yet to be finalised.

### 2.4.3. Definitions of youth work

The responses to the question “Is ‘youth work’ or ‘youth worker’ defined or included in any other legislation or national policy document?” provide information about how youth work is legally defined in different countries, although in the majority of cases, no definition of “youth work” or “youth worker” was provided or noted as being codified in legislation. Examples of definitions included in the questionnaires were as follows:

- ▶ Estonia: youth work is defined in the 2010 Youth Work Act as the creation of conditions to promote the diverse development of young persons, which enables them to be active outside their families, formal education and work on the basis of their free will;
- ▶ Finland: youth work as defined in the 2006 Youth Act means efforts to support the growth, independence and social inclusion of young people in society;
- ▶ Ireland: youth work is defined in the 2001 Youth Work Act as: “a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary participation, and which is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.”;
- ▶ North Macedonia: the National Youth Strategy defines youth work as: “an organised and systematic process of education and support of authentic development of young people with the aim of fulfilling their overall personal, social and civic potential. It is directly associated with the development of the local community, whereby young people not only become active participants in the process of their own development but also active participants in the life of the community.”;
- ▶ Malta: a non-formal learning activity aimed at the personal, social and political development of young people (Youth Work Profession Act 2016);
- ▶ Montenegro: youth work is defined in the Law on Youth 2016 as activities which are conducted with young people and for young people, based on non-formal education, in line with their needs and abilities;
- ▶ United Kingdom (Wales): in the National Strategy for Youth Work in Wales 2014-2018, youth work is defined using the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work (Learning and Skills Improvement Service 2012) as work that:

“enables young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential”.

As we can observe from the above list, these definitions range from fairly literal descriptions of what is entailed in youth work and the role of the youth worker (e.g. in Armenia), to being grounded in a clear set of duties or responsibilities in institutional terms (e.g. in Ireland). There is also a strong sense of development of growth conveyed (e.g. in Serbia and the United Kingdom (Wales)), to be facilitated by a planned programme of activities (e.g. North Macedonia), implying a systematic understanding of how youth work is to be practised. More precisely, common features include an emphasis on non-formal learning and voluntary participation.

While the limited number of definitions provided limits scope analysis, we can deduce that there is common concern with issues such as quality of life and linkages with a broader process of societal or communal development. Youth work is also generally situated outside structures of formal education, with associations with non-formal learning and voluntarism. In this sense, we can observe common ground with how youth work is conceptualised at European level, including the approach of institutions such as the European Commission and the Council of Europe, and the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership.

#### **2.4.4. Other forms of national recognition of youth work**

Other forms of national recognition for youth work exist, such as recognition from civil society organisations or specific training courses. While information was provided in just over half the responses, we can see that in many of these cases a similar answer was provided in regard to highlighting the significance of national youth agencies. Also cited is the role of European agencies, notably Erasmus+, in providing national recognition for youth work (e.g. in Greece, Poland and Romania).

Even though we have an incomplete picture, we also know that recognition of youth work takes place at national level outside government structures: through courses for youth workers and youth leaders, summer camps and other forms of training organised by voluntary organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It may be that awareness of such work is limited by a lack of information or awareness. For example, in Italy it was noted that there are “fragmented initiatives” taking place, supported by local administrations/municipalities. Therefore, it must be the case that much recognition is situated at local levels rather than at national level, but the diverse and undocumented nature of initiatives makes this work less visible than it might be.

#### **2.4.5. Current national policy initiatives**

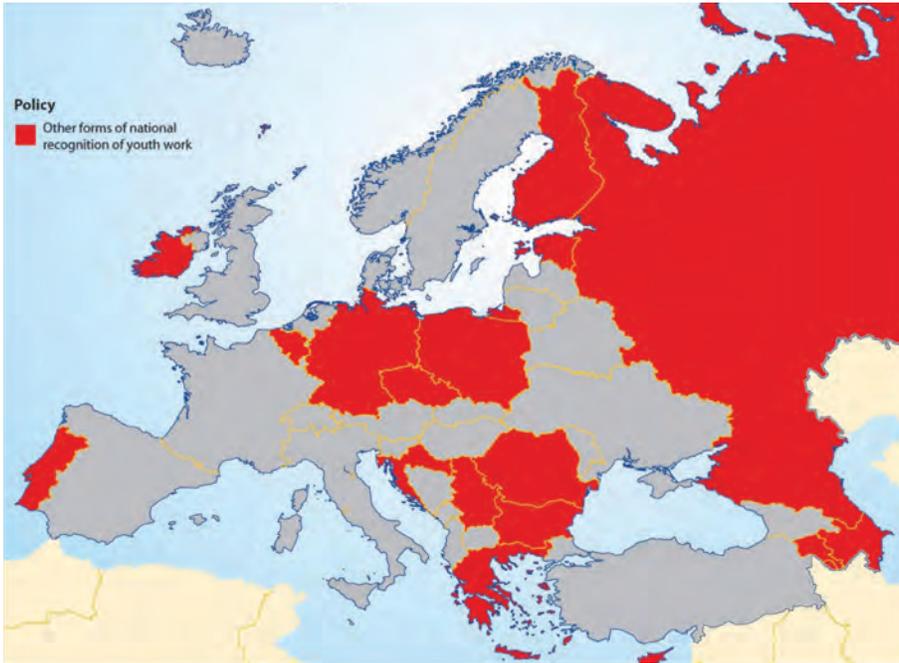
One final question in this set looked at current national policy initiatives for the recognition of youth work, e.g. legislative bills and committees. Responses covered:

- ▶ a new law proposal on youth policy, including comprehensive definitions of “youth work” and “youth worker”, has been presented to the Parliament of Azerbaijan and is currently under consideration;

- ▶ the activities of the National Youth Forum of Bulgaria;
- ▶ an ad hoc expert group on linking youth work to social work in the Czech Republic, founded in 2015;
- ▶ a mapping exercise in Cyprus regarding the validation of non-formal and informal education;
- ▶ a national expert working group in Croatia convened in 2015;
- ▶ the selection in Finland in autumn 2017 of 10 to 15 national youth work centres of expertise, seeking to develop and promote competence and expertise in youth-related issues on a nationwide basis;
- ▶ the setting up of a working group in France between October 2016 and March 2017;
- ▶ the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Georgia's work with partners to create National Professional Standards and Certification Criteria for youth workers;
- ▶ the Action Alliance for Recognition in Germany;
- ▶ the translation of concepts of "youth work" and "youth worker" into Greek in April 2017;
- ▶ the establishment of a working group by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia;
- ▶ a draft law amending the Law on Youth Policy Framework (2017) in Lithuania;
- ▶ a joint initiative for recognition of youth work in the National Qualifications Framework in North Macedonia;
- ▶ the development of youth sector infrastructure and supporting mechanisms in assurance of quality in youth work and a feasibility study on status recognition in the Republic of Moldova;
- ▶ the revision of the Law on Youth in Montenegro, 2017;
- ▶ an attempt to create a new national youth policy for 2016-2019 in Poland;
- ▶ a National Policy initiative associated with Youth Technicians in Portugal;
- ▶ research on Occupational Standards in Youth Work commissioned by the Ministry of Youth and Sport of Romania in 2016;
- ▶ a revision of the Law on Youth in Serbia;
- ▶ a declaration on recognising the contribution of non-formal education in youth work in Slovakia;
- ▶ legislative bills on youth and regulations on youth centres presented to the Ukrainian Parliament.

We can therefore see that the governance of youth work is in a state of transition in many countries, with changes in laws and forms of recognition for youth workers. This is inevitably an incomplete picture, given the fluid situation in regard to the conducting of research projects and convening of committees. It is, however, clear that there is a general movement towards better recognition of youth work and non-formal education in general across Europe.

**Figure 1. Other forms of national recognition of youth work**



## **2.5. Summary**

The diversity of youth work regulation reflects the diversity of Europe, with different national traditions leading to the development of different frameworks. One outstanding factor is the level of government involvement in regulating youth work. As we observed, the norm is to locate this within an appropriate government ministry, usually alongside other policy fields, such as “children”, “family” or “education”. Regulatory frameworks from this point diverge according to factors such as the degree of recognition awarded to youth work as a profession. In looking for reasons for divergence, we can point towards the distinct histories of the development of youth work in each country, as it is more established in some regions than others. In many places, youth work as a profession is still very much a work in progress. And as we shall observe in the subsequent discussion, distinct patterns emerge with regard to education, training and employment, following on from this initial point of orientation.

### **2.5.1. Formal and non-formal education and training**

While employment and careers can be strongly influenced by issues other than education and training, firm and robust foundations in education and training in any field are necessary for good employment prospects and successful career opportunities as well as for personal development. The questions in the survey were aimed at:

- ▶ eliciting information and data on the nature and extent of formal and non-formal education and training opportunities currently available in the youth work field;

- ▶ how these relate to the development of the competences of youth workers and prospective youth workers and how they affect their employment and career prospects.

This section comprises two parts. The first part deals with degree- and postgraduate-level courses available in the youth work field and also with vocational and further education courses available at sub-degree level. The second part deals with non-formal education and training for both paid and voluntary youth workers and focuses firstly on the provision, funding and accreditation of education and training, then examines the training methods and topics used to achieve relevant competences. Finally, an attempt is made to present some general conclusions and outline possible challenges for the future.

## 2.5.2. Formal and accredited education

### Courses at degree and postgraduate level

There are a wide variety of degree- and postgraduate-level courses available in the youth work field. Some of these courses relate specifically to youth work while others relate to associated areas such as social work. Six countries surveyed – Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Malta, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom (England and Wales) – have degree-level courses specifically in youth work. Eleven countries – Bulgaria, the Flemish Community of Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands and Romania – offer courses in related fields that are associated with and provide educational paths into youth work.

In the Russian Federation there are 42 universities providing degree-level courses in the university programme Organisation of Youth Work, which was created in 2003 by decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation as an experimental interdisciplinary speciality. It was aimed at providing competent professionals in youth work for youth organisations, as well as for state and public bodies.

The United Kingdom, Ireland and Malta share a common approach that is mainly focused on youth and community work. The United Kingdom (England and Wales) has 36 universities and higher education colleges and institutions in England and Wales that provide 57 courses at degree, graduate diploma and master's level. While most of these courses are at primary degree level and focus on youth and community work/development, youth ministry and practical theology are also noticeable features of provision.

In Ireland, three universities and four institutes of technology provide youth/community and youth work courses to primary degree level while one university provides a postgraduate course at master's degree level. Malta provides both a primary degree and master's degree course as well as a course in youth ministry that entitles the bearer to a youth worker warrant. Estonia provides three graduate diplomas in applied higher education in two universities, two bachelor-level courses that focus specifically on youth work and leisure-time management respectively and a master's degree course that focuses on youth work management. Finland provides eight degree-level courses in civic activities and youth work and there is also an emphasis on research and social equality.

The blurring of lines between youth work and other areas complicates the process of identifying formal and accredited educational and training paths for youth workers. This overlapping between the role of youth workers and others working with young people is a common and recurring feature of the youth field (Kovacic 2017). While this may have less significance for individual countries, it does impact on any attempt at formulating a “European” approach to identifying education and training paths.

Germany, for instance, has a number of degree-level courses in social work with a focus on “youth work”, “child/youth work”, and “youth in theory and practice of social work”. Courses in social pedagogy and social work in both Germany and Austria are paths into youth work as they are in the Netherlands and the Nordic countries.

The Flemish Community of Belgium has degree-level courses in “social cultural work” and “social work and social pedagogy”, while France has a degree-level course entitled the Licence professionnelle “Métiers de l’animation sociale, socio-éducative et socio-culturelle”, in five universities, roughly meaning the profession of social, socio-educational and socio-cultural animation. Luxembourg has a degree course in educational and social sciences that has been offered on a part-time basis since 2017.

The Netherlands also provides degree-level courses in “cultural and community education” and “social and pedagogical care” while Latvia has two master’s degree courses in “career counsellor and youth affairs specialist”. Iceland provides degree courses in “leisure studies and social education” and Bulgaria provides a master’s degree course in “youth activities and sport”, both of which can also be done through distance learning. Bulgaria also provides degree-level courses in non-formal learning.

There are also courses in related areas associated with youth work or encompassing youth work. For example, in Germany the professional profile of a youth worker mainly requires studying social work, social pedagogy, pedagogy, psychology and therapeutic education at universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen/Hochschulen) or universities (Universitäten) or completing vocational training as an educator/child-care worker (Erzieher/Erzieherin). The University of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule) at Potsdam (Germany) offers a European master’s degree course in childhood studies and children’s rights. The University of Applied Sciences in Kempten (Germany) has a specialised programme in youth work that combines both study and work placement, while a number of faith-based universities of applied sciences in Germany also provide specialised programmes that focus on religious pedagogy and youth work.

The only formal course offered in Greece is a master’s degree course in European youth policies and culture at the University of Macedonia.

Some countries are initiating new more specialised programmes. The University of Applied Science (Hochschule) in Koblenz (Germany) is further developing its existing bachelor’s degree in education (Bildung und Erziehung) by adding a course with a focus on youth work, while Romania has initiated a postgraduate certificate in management of youth educational resources.

In two countries surveyed, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, the situation as regards the formal education of youth workers has regressed, though there now

appear to be measures underway to address the issue. In Serbia, a primary degree and master's degree course in community youth work operated for only one year, 2008/09. A number of part-time courses in leadership and development youth work, operated in conjunction with Jönköping University in Sweden, were provided over the period 2001-07. In Montenegro, 250 youth workers gained university degrees between 2002 and 2007 under the Jönköping University initiative. Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the course in leadership and development youth work operated from 1998 to 2008, again in co-operation with Jönköping University. A project to initiate degree-level courses in community youth work at the University of Zenica was also conducted between 2009 and 2012 as part of enhancing interregional co-operation in the countries of the Western Balkans.

Most degree- and postgraduate-level courses are delivered and accredited for the most part by universities or, in some instances, higher education institutions, such as the institutes of technology in Ireland. In a number of countries – Finland, Germany and the Netherlands – the courses tend to be offered by universities for applied sciences.

### **Vocational and further education and training courses**

In terms of vocational and further education and training below degree level, the level of course provision is both varied and wide-ranging and often tailored to meet specific needs.

The United Kingdom (England and Wales) has comprehensive provision at pre-professional level for youth support workers and there is a clear education path for youth workers from certificate level to master's degree and postgraduate level. France provides diplomas (*Carrières sociales option animation sociale et socio-culturelle*) in 14 University Institutes of Technology (*Instituts Universitaires de Technologie*). Certificates of professional aptitude are also accredited by the relevant ministry, with a focus on youth, non-formal learning and sport. National diplomas, outside higher education, are awarded by the state (*diplômes Jeunesse et sports*), but the training is mainly provided by third sector organisations (*associations de jeunesse et d'éducation populaire*).

Finland provides a vocational (upper secondary) qualification – that can also be acquired as a competence-based qualification – in youth and leisure instruction (120 study weeks) that enables graduates to work as youth and leisure instructors. Portugal provides training for youth “technicians” at Level 4 in some 17 accredited institutions. Norway has a four-year course for training child and youth workers (*Barne- og ungdomsarbeiderfag*) comprising two years in upper secondary schools and two years in apprenticeship, while Sweden has a two-year course for “recreation leader” (*Fritidsledarutbildning*), which is provided by the Swedish folk high schools, and Belarus has a part-time diploma course for “specialists in youth work”. The University of Rijeka and Institute for Social Research in Zagreb commenced a certificate course on “youth in contemporary society” in 2018. In Montenegro, vocational education for Youth Activists (leaders) has been accredited and a six-month course comprising three months' education and three months' practical placement has commenced.

Luxembourg provides a three-year course, Educator (Diplôme d'état d'éducateur), while the Netherlands provides vocational training for “pedagogical staff member in youth care” and “socio-cultural worker”.

In Germany training can be undertaken in vocational schools (Fachschulen, Fachakademien, Berufsfachschulen, Berufskollegs) for educator/child-care worker (Erzieher/Erzieherin) to diploma level and some faith-based vocational training is also available.

The Russian Federation has a wide variety of training courses and internship opportunities for youth workers that include retraining courses for non-specialists in the youth field and courses for extra qualifications for specialists in the youth field that are provided by universities and certified vocational training organisations. The Ministry of Youth and Sports in Turkey provides training for youth leaders and youth and sports experts.

In terms of vocational training, the focus appears to be on the youth work practice, as in the case of both the United Kingdom and Ireland, as well as on particular activities such as leisure and culture, as is the case in Finland and Sweden. In the Russian Federation the focus appears to be on retraining and upskilling. Overall course provision at vocational and further education level is uneven across the countries surveyed, with no clear connection, except in the case of the United Kingdom, France, Finland and the Russian Federation, between vocational training and degree-level courses in youth work.

When compared with the third-level sector, provision and accreditation in vocational education and training tends to be more diverse. In France, the relevant ministry plays a major role. In the Netherlands, Portugal and the Russian Federation, vocational training centres or institutions are to the fore, while in Norway the upper second level has a role to play. Romania is one of the few instances where private sector provision is referred to.

### 2.5.3. Non-formal education and training

#### Provision, funding and accreditation

In contrast with the formal education sector, in all but two of the countries surveyed<sup>2</sup> there is some level of non-formal education and training for youth. In general, the education and training provided can be identified and defined in three contexts:

- ▶ provided by state-supported bodies or institutions;
- ▶ provided by the voluntary youth sector;
- ▶ provided by European support programmes.

The state, either centrally, regionally or locally, and through public bodies or institutions, plays a significant role in a number of countries – Belgium, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Germany, Malta and Ukraine. In some countries, such as Austria and

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2. For the data analysis, sub-degree level courses in France and the Russian Federation have been categorised as vocational rather than non-formal education and training.

Germany, the regions play an important role; in others, such as Finland and Norway, local municipalities are significant. In Malta and Luxembourg state or public institutions play a defining role. In Sweden it is local government together with civil society that play a defining role in funding non-formal education and training of youth workers.

What is perhaps striking from the survey is the extent of the role played by the voluntary youth sector in the provision of non-formal education and training. In almost half of the countries surveyed, the voluntary youth sector plays a defining role, and all these countries, with the exception of Iceland, are in either eastern or southern Europe.<sup>3</sup>

Another feature is the role that Europe plays in terms of both funding and accreditation. Some of the countries surveyed present particular challenges in accessing data and information on non-formal education and training. In the case of the United Kingdom (England), it is the sheer size and diversity of provision; in others, such as the Netherlands, Norway and Finland, it is the decentralised nature of much youth work and the “bottom-up” approach adopted. All of these countries have an active and well-supported youth work sector but, because of the factors outlined, much of youth work may be less visible with regard to the availability of information and data. Similarly, difficulties in accessing relevant information and data on youth NGOs can also mean that much of the work they do remains under the radar.

In those countries where the state plays a defining role in terms of provision, funding and recognition, some significant features and variations emerge from the survey. In both Austria and Germany, the role of the regions is paramount. In Austria, training institutes run by the federal regions – such as the WienXtra-institut für freizeitpädagogik in Vienna, Akzente in Salzburg, and in Upper Austria – offer basic and further courses for youth workers, sometimes in co-operation with tertiary education institutions. In Germany, a vast number of courses for specialists in child and youth services are provided by regional youth offices, socio-pedagogical further education institutions, youth organisations and associations and there were over 32 000 Juleica (national standardised card for voluntary youth workers) card holders in 2016.

The Youth Work Foundation in Liechtenstein and the National Youth Service in Luxembourg provide courses on an annual basis that are obligatory for professional youth workers. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Media issues youth worker certificates after completion of an approved training programme, the Kadervorming. In the Czech Republic, the National Institute for Further Education provides courses annually for youth workers. The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) provides training courses annually for youth workers, in collaboration with different university colleges. A National Education Programme “Youth Worker” is provided at both national and regional level in Ukraine; while in Malta, Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, the national youth agency, is the main provider of training. In Ireland, while the state is the main funder, the voluntary youth sector is the primary provider.

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3. Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia.

In addition to the central role of the state and the voluntary youth sector, European and other support is also in evidence. EU funding (Erasmus+, European Social Fund) and consequent accreditation (Europass, Youthpass) are seen in a number of countries, including Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania and Malta. In Ukraine, financial support for training is provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). In Armenia, the central state's role is supported in terms of both provision and funding by the Kasa Foundation, a Swiss humanitarian foundation, while civil society organisations (CSOs) in Sweden train their voluntary leaders and the Fritidsforum (an association for recreation centres and youth clubs) offers training to youth leaders in open recreational/leisure activities. In Austria, fees are reimbursed on course completion, while in the Flemish Community of Belgium certain municipalities refund part of the participation fee.

In most instances, accreditation is provided by the state, or public bodies or institutions, and incorporated into the national qualifications framework, as in Austria and Germany and on occasion, as in Sweden, where courses provided in collaboration with university colleges can sometimes result in university credits.

In those countries where voluntary youth organisations play the primary role in providing training, the nomenclature tends to vary. In most instances, NGOs are referred to; in some countries, such as the Republic of Moldova and Montenegro, CSOs are indicated, while in Portugal reference is made to youth associations. In Italy, third sector organisations, including faith-based and political organisations, are indicated. In some instances, particular youth organisations are identified as playing a central role. In Azerbaijan, the National Assembly of the Youth Organisations (National Youth Council) is indicated as playing such a role. In Croatia, the Youth Network (National Youth Council) provides a youth studies programme. Training courses are organised in Serbia by NAPOR – the National Association of Youth Workers, which comprises 68 member organisations delivering youth work and services for young people. In Bulgaria, the National Youth Academy provides training for youth leaders and youth workers organised by the National Youth Forum.

Most of these countries are heavily reliant on European funding programmes and in some – Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia and Romania – the National Agencies for Erasmus+ are the main funders of training. In other countries – Belarus, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia – the state does provide some funding at either central or local level. In Belarus, some funding is provided by the Union State of Russia and Belarus, the Commonwealth of Independent States and private donations, in addition to that provided by the state and European support programmes. Montenegro and Slovakia also receive funding from other international donors including the United Nations and the East Europe Foundation, as well as from individual countries such as Norway and private sector donors.

Where European funds are provided, Youthpass and Europass are commonly in use, particularly where no state accreditation is available. In some instances, courses are integrated into the national qualifications framework, as in Belarus, Estonia and Poland; but relatively few survey responses referred to employing the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio. Some NGOs provide certificates of participation, as in

Romania, while NAPOR in Serbia issues its own certificates, which are both recognised by its member organisations and the relevant ministry. NGOs in Iceland have their own systems of recognition.

#### **2.5.4. Methods, themes and competences**

The settings, methods and tools employed in non-formal education and training, the themes/topics focused on and the competences promoted are both wide-ranging and diverse. Settings, methods and tools employed include courses, seminars, projects, exchanges, peer learning, group work, networks, exchange of good practices and conferences.

The themes and topics addressed are equally wide-ranging and diverse and include: human rights, social inclusion, intercultural awareness, communication, information, counselling, participation and advocacy, as well as conflict management, migration, radicalisation, safety and protection, drug prevention and unemployment.

The competences that such training seeks to develop are primarily personal, inter-personal and group related and include leadership, empathy, communication skills and intercultural skills as well as organisational and managerial skills.

While in some of the countries surveyed there does not appear to be a seamless connection between methods employed, themes addressed and competences promoted, and their obvious relevance for youth workers, this is not the case in others. In some countries, the focus appears to be less on specific methods, themes and competences and more on developing effective and coherent youth work practice. In the United Kingdom (England), “Youth work training seeks to combine learning around theory and practice. Introductory level training tends to be more focused on basic principles of youth work and reflective practice whereas higher levels introduce managerial skills and knowledge”, while the aim in Malta is “Continuous professional development of youth workers, youth leaders and volunteers to increase and strengthen their understanding and capacity to implement different youth work methodologies, approaches and practices.”

In other countries, where the state, either centrally, regionally or locally, or through public bodies or institutions, is involved, then the structures for connecting methods, themes and competences appear more coherent.

In the Flemish Community of Belgium for instance, the Kadervorming effectively sets the themes and topics while the Flemish Government has defined the competences to be achieved. In the Czech Republic, standardised themes and related competences are in place under the National Institute for Further Education. Estonia also has a structured process involving integrated methods and themes that aim to achieve competences as defined by the national occupational standards for youth workers.

In some other countries, particularly those where the voluntary youth sector is to the fore, European support programmes and initiatives undertaken by voluntary organisations themselves provide the necessary structures. In Cyprus and Romania, Erasmus+ provides the necessary structures in terms of methods, themes and competences; in Serbia, NAPOR has developed a vocational-based programme for the training of youth workers that sets out specific topics and their related competences.

### 2.5.5. Summary

When considering formal and accredited education paths for youth workers across the countries surveyed, a number of overriding issues, and as a result challenges, emerge.

The relatively small number of courses available in formal education and vocational training in youth work, except in the case of a minority of the countries surveyed, and the disconnect between the two, may be an impediment for those seeking employment or a career in the field. This is the case for both paid youth workers and for those voluntary youth workers who wish to pursue employment or a career in youth work.

Limited formal education in youth work also has implications for the recognition of youth work as a profession. While only a minority of the countries surveyed appear to meet the requirements for professional recognition, lack of professional status may be a broader long-term issue for youth work. The European Union's Directive on regulated professions, which also includes European Economic Area countries and Switzerland, does not include a single entry on youth work – the minimum qualification requirement is generally a three- to four-year post-second level diploma (European Parliament and the Council 2005). Conversely, teaching has 161 entries, covering all levels from kindergarten to university, while social work has 17 entries. Lack of parity of qualification and professional recognition with those working in related fields, such as teaching and social work, may result in lack of professional parity, poor pay, lack of pay parity and job security.

The issue of providing adequate formal and accredited education and training paths for youth workers is not only a “youth work” issue, but a broader education issue dependent on the policies, provision and priorities of individual countries.

The blurring of lines between youth work and other related fields is a complicating factor as it also tends to blur education/training and career paths. The extent to which qualifications in related areas such as social work and social pedagogy render people with such qualifications as “qualified” to meet the requirements of youth work as defined by the Council of Europe is another matter (Committee of Ministers 2017). The nomenclature associated with youth work – social worker, youth specialist, pedagogical worker, leisure-time based educator, animateur, éducateur, animatore socio-educativo, youth technician, youth affairs specialist – further complicates the issue.

Such related fields as education, social work and social pedagogy appear, in general, to have clearer education and career paths than youth workers and greater professional recognition. When social workers do youth work, they retain their professional status as social workers. To what extent, on the other hand, are youth workers accorded the same professional recognition and rewards when they do social work? The blurring of lines between youth work and other related fields may not necessarily mean a two-way street in terms of professional recognition.

To what extent the various terms used in youth work, as regards both nomenclature and qualifications, could be further clarified and streamlined for policy purposes is a

task that may be easy or complex depending on the situation in individual countries. It may be the case that nomenclature and qualifications are less important than the type of work done and where it is done. However, if “youth workers” could be identified, regardless of the nomenclature, in countries as well as what education and training renders them “qualified” as youth workers, it might help bring greater clarity in understanding the diversity of education and career paths for youth workers across Europe.

Non-formal education and training across the countries surveyed is wide-ranging, multi-layered, diverse and uneven and our data on, and knowledge of it, are still very limited. Given these factors, overarching structures that ensure some level of provision, funding and accreditation and that align methods, themes and competences would appear desirable.

The survey indicates that there are three main providers of these overarching structures: the state, either centrally, regionally or locally, through public-funded bodies or institutions; European support programmes; and the voluntary youth sector itself. In some countries, one or more of these may be the main players, and their capacities may not always be proportionate, but they can all be mutually supportive. How to further strengthen and co-ordinate these capacities will largely determine the efficacy and potential of non-formal education and training.

While sources of funding, other than those of individual countries and Europe, are indicated on occasion, as for instance the role of educational foundations in the United Kingdom (England) and Armenia, the private or corporate sector – a possible source of additional funding for NGOs – appears to be largely untapped. There are also a number of innovative practices identified. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, Oscar is an online portfolio to recognise the competences of young volunteers, while Certificat, an online tool in Luxembourg, gives nonprofit organisations the opportunity to award their participants a certificate of competences (Service National de la Jeunesse n.d.). Apart from these and a number of other initiatives, there appears to be little evidence of innovative practices, particularly in the field of e-learning and new media.

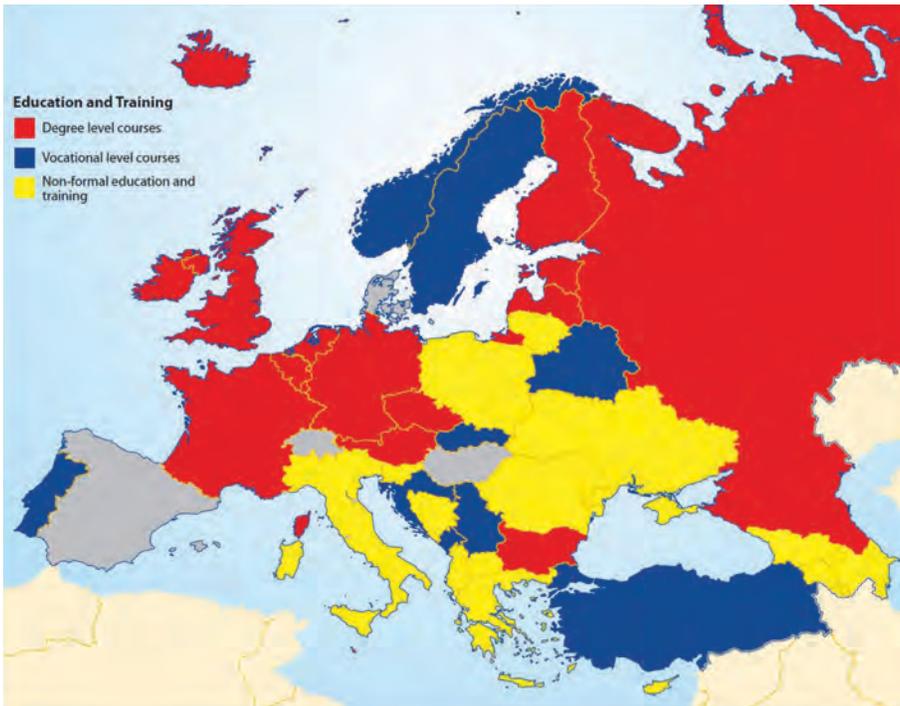
Apart from European support programmes, there is also little evidence of bilateral partnerships between countries with developed systems of youth work and those with less developed systems. Such bilateral initiatives as Jönköping University's support for the development of formal education in youth work in Western Balkan countries in the first decade of the century do not appear to have been widely followed.

What also emerges from the survey is a centre/north/west and south/east divide in Europe as regards the provision of both formal and non-formal education and training. Countries in central, northern and western Europe have, for the most part, identifiable paths for the education and training of youth workers and the state plays a central role in terms of provision and/or funding, regardless of how youth work is perceived and regulated and at what level it operates and is funded by individual countries. In most countries in southern and eastern Europe, with the exception of Malta, Turkey and the Russian Federation, the voluntary youth sector largely bears the burden of provision, while Europe largely bears the burden

of funding. The state is not entirely absent, but its role appears only intermittent and in some instances peripheral.

This divide has important policy implications, not only for education and training paths for youth workers but for youth work itself. A single all-embracing policy approach at European level may not be enough. The policy issues in those countries where youth work is well established may not necessarily be the same as those in countries where youth work is still being developed. European youth work policy and its implementation may also need to take account of and address these differences.

**Figure 2. Availability of formal and non-formal education to youth workers**



## **2.6. Quality and competences**

The quality of the work delivered as well as the professional competences of its representatives play a crucial role not only for the establishment of a profession, but also for its recognition and appreciation by society in general. In view of this, it is important to explore these aspects of the profession of youth worker to draw up a clear picture of the level of its development across Europe. This section aims to explore the regulation of youth work in terms of quality-assurance and competence requirements for youth workers in different European countries, and to arrive at some conclusions on the competences needed by youth workers and to what extent they reflect and correspond with competences at European level, such as those in the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio.

## 2.6.1. Quality assurance of youth work

Respondents from 18 of the 41 countries surveyed mention some kind of quality assurance for youth work in their countries. In 13 countries (Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey and the United Kingdom (England and Wales)), the quality-assurance framework is supported by documents at national level; in one (Iceland), it is organised at local or municipal level; and in four others (Belarus, Finland, Liechtenstein and Sweden) it is mainly organised as internal quality control techniques within the organisations delivering youth work or within a network of such organisations. In Azerbaijan and Georgia, the national quality-assurance frameworks for youth work are currently being developed by the ministries in charge of youth policy.

Before proceeding to the analysis, it should be noted that the majority of the examples provided in the questionnaires could not be defined as frameworks as such, but rather as different approaches and methods of assuring quality in youth work. The information gathered is valuable as it provides different perspectives on youth work regulation in the countries surveyed. However, the divergence between the question asked and the variety of responses received might be due to the lack of developed quality-assurance frameworks or systems in some of the countries surveyed, or it might reflect the need for a greater understanding of what “quality frameworks/systems” actually are.

Another important point to note is that the existence of some method of quality assurance in a particular country does not always mean that it is necessary or compulsory for youth workers to comply with it. For instance, while the accreditation of training courses for youth workers is compulsory for all training providers in France, the “aufZAQ” certification (in Austria and in the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano – South Tyrol) is voluntary and training organisations can apply for it. The same applies when quality assurance is included in the conditions for financial support for youth organisations (by the government or by municipalities) – only those organisations that apply for such funding are required to implement the necessary quality-assurance provisions.

Approaches to quality-assurance frameworks/techniques vary widely, from national quality marks or occupational standards, through certification of training providers, to evaluation of youth organisations.

## 2.6.2. Certification of courses/course providers for youth workers

Examples of certification for youth workers include:

- ▶ “aufZAQ”, a certification of training courses for people active in youth work. It is provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Families and Youth, the Youth Departments of the Federal States of Austria and the Youth Work Department of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano – South Tyrol. It has been certifying the quality of trainings since 2003 and has thus been contributing actively to the recognition of non-formal education in the field of youth work. The certification procedure takes place as follows: in order to certify a training course, the applicant submits the curriculum of

the training course to the aufZAQ Office. If the submission fulfils all formal criteria, the aufZAQ Advisory Board assigns an independent expert from the relevant pedagogical field to examine the quality of the training course on the basis of the submitted curriculum. If considered necessary, the expert can demand additional information and/or amendments of the curriculum. Based on the expert's report, the aufZAQ Advisory Board decides on the certification of the submitted training course. To assure continuity of quality, training providers commit themselves to sending a report to the aufZAQ Office for each conducted training cycle. In addition, any adaptations to the curriculum have to be reported to aufZAQ. In this case, the aufZAQ Advisory Board decides if the certification remains valid or if the provider has to apply for the certification anew (Aufzag n.d.);

- ▶ in France and the French Community of Belgium, organisations providing courses for youth workers should have an accreditation by the responsible institution (the Youth Service in the French Community of Belgium) or ministry (the Ministry of Vocational Training and the Ministry of National Education in France);
- ▶ across the whole of Ireland, the North/South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work (NSETS) provides for the professional endorsement of youth work programmes. NSETS works to ensure and promote quality standards in the education and training of youth workers through an endorsement process based on a rigorous assessment of all aspects of programme content and delivery.

### 2.6.3. Evaluation of youth workers

Examples of evaluation for youth workers include:

- ▶ the Youth Decree of the German-speaking Community of Belgium makes provision for a compulsory analysis of the work of youth workers every five years (social space analysis for professional youth workers and a SWOT analysis – focusing on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats – for volunteer youth workers) and, based on the analysis, a concept covering their work for the next five years. In addition to this, every six months, they have to explain their youth work practice to a monitoring committee consisting of staff members of the government, the ministry, the municipality and the associations of youth organisations;
- ▶ in Finland, some organisations delivering youth work have their own internal quality-assurance frameworks. Additionally, peer evaluation is also conducted and it “provides not only evaluative information but also a possibility for mutual understanding and learning” (Nöjd and Siurala 2015: 22).

### 2.6.4. Evaluation of youth organisations

Examples of evaluation for youth organisations include:

- ▶ the title “NGO recognised by the Ministry for providing quality youth work” in the Czech Republic can be awarded to those youth organisations that

meet 15 requirements concerning the organisation itself, its activities and professional staff (a minimum of 60% of educational staff must have a certificate for accredited training courses). The title is awarded for a four-year period and holds certain benefits, such as the guarantee of getting annual financial support from the government for long-term youth work projects, a lesser administrative burden when applying for funding, or the opportunity to present their activities on the ministerial web page;

- ▶ in Liechtenstein, as a measure of quality assurance, the annual reports and financial statements of the Youth Work Foundation are submitted to the board of trustees and the municipalities;
- ▶ in Iceland, Reykjavik municipality has guidelines for quality youth work in after-school programmes for children and youth clubs for teenagers.

### 2.6.5. National standard documents

National standards can vary in nature (quality frameworks or occupational/educational standards), scope (defining youth work as a whole, or just some of its areas), and origin (some are developed by the respective ministries, others by youth work centres/associations):

- ▶ the Estonian Youth Work Centre has developed an occupational standard for youth workers, as well as a quality framework to assess youth work at municipal level;
- ▶ in the Russian Federation, there is an educational standard for bachelor's and master's degree programmes in the Organisation of Youth Work (approved by the Ministry of Education and Science), defining how specialists in youth work should gain a degree in this speciality. In addition, a professional standard for youth workers is being discussed;
- ▶ in Germany, quality-assurance catalogues for different areas of youth work, such as youth information, are in place and include the Eurodesk Germany Quality Catalogue and the National Quality Standards to qualify for Juleica (the Jugendleiter/-in Card for youth leaders, a national standardised card for voluntary youth workers);
- ▶ Ireland has adopted the National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work (NQSF) (2010) and the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups (2013), which focus on the quality of youth work provision;
- ▶ Luxembourg has a Quality Framework for Institutions Providing Non-formal Learning Opportunities (e.g. regional and local youth centres), which defines specific objectives and outcomes to be evaluated on a regular basis. It was introduced by the revised 2008 Youth Law, which was adopted in 2016;
- ▶ the Serbian National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) has introduced a national quality assurance framework;
- ▶ the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Turkey has issued Directives on Procedures and Principles for Youth Leaders' and Sports Experts' Training, Development and Working;

- ▶ the United Kingdom (England and Wales) has developed Quality Marks for Youth Workers.

### **2.6.6. Funding requirements**

Funding requirements include:

- ▶ in Slovakia, the quality of organisation and work with youth is a criteria in applying for government funding;
- ▶ all youth organisations financially supported by the Flemish Community of Belgium must submit an annual progress report that includes a financial report and an activity report.

### **2.6.7. Combination of methods**

Some countries rely on a combination of methods:

- ▶ in Belarus, quality assurance for youth workers is determined by employment agreements between employers and youth workers as well as by local job regulations documents;
- ▶ in Sweden, a common training plan/curriculum is followed by all folk high schools providing a two-year study programme (fritidsledarutbildning), leading to a diploma in leading leisure-time activities. Since 2005, there has been a network in place for youth work, “Quality and competence in co-operation, KEKS” (in Swedish: Kvalitet och kompetens i samverkan, KEKS), which is built on common goals and a common system of quality assurance. The network has developed a quality system that is used by all members in order to advance youth work, through benchmarking, peer learning, exchange of best practices and other forms of co-operation within KEKS.

The variety of methods for ensuring the quality of youth work listed above leads to the conclusion that thus far, there is no universal approach to this matter across Europe.

## **2.7. Competences of youth workers**

While quality-assurance standards appear to exist in only 18 of the countries surveyed, the process of defining the competences needed by youth workers is at the development stage in another 20 of the countries surveyed (Austria, Belarus, the French Community of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (England and Wales)). These countries have either developed a competence-based framework or have described the competences needed for youth workers.

In two other countries (Azerbaijan and Georgia), such competence-based frameworks are in the process of being drafted, and in the German-speaking Community of Belgium a competence descriptor is expected to be completed in 2018. In Bulgaria,

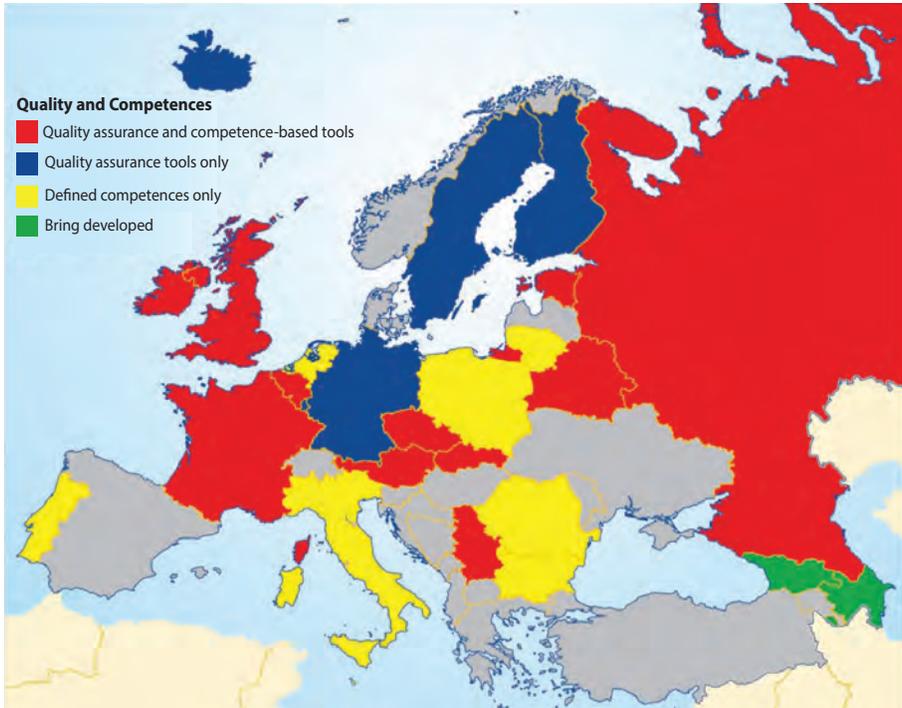
a set of competences for youth workers has been suggested by the National Youth Forum, but has still not been validated by any official or legislative document.

Competence-based frameworks are regulated on a national level in most of the countries surveyed, except Italy and Liechtenstein. In Italy, the competences are defined at regional level – each of the regions has its own repertory of professions, with their own competence descriptors. However, as in Italy, the youth work profession is still not defined by law; other professions, such as educators and social/cultural animators, can deliver youth work. In Liechtenstein, the competences youth workers require (as well as the quality of the youth work delivered) are defined by agreements between the Youth Work Association and the municipalities. The remaining countries define the competences at a national level through occupational standards (Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, Romania, the United Kingdom (England and Wales)), a catalogue of professions (Portugal), a passport of competences (Serbia) or educational standards (the Russian Federation and Belarus).

It is possible to observe two approaches to the regulatory frameworks that have been developed while keeping provision of quality youth work in mind: qualifications-based and competences-based. Qualifications-based frameworks focus on educational outcomes (see the recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2008; Council of the European Union 2018), while competences-based frameworks focus on job performance (see the recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2006; Council of the European Union 2018). Qualifications and competences may be highly integrated (as in the case of the medical profession where one may not practise without having acquired specialised knowledge) or not, as in the case of youth work, where the majority of youth work practitioners do not have a youth work degree (see Dunne *et al.* 2014; Taru, in this book). To become an expert, autonomous and reflective youth worker, education alone does not suffice. In addition to theoretical knowledge, one needs to accumulate experiences and be integrated into the community of youth workers (see the chapter by Kiilakoski on early career perspectives in this book). A number of countries have chosen to focus on educational outcomes by setting educational standards for professional education and training at degree level (Ireland, the Russian Federation); by determining the specific content of training programmes (France, the French Community of Belgium, Serbia, Slovenia); or by certifying courses for youth workers (Austria). However, the number of countries that have chosen to focus on describing youth work competences and job performance is larger. These countries focus specifically on competences that youth workers are seen to require to deliver quality youth work (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, the United Kingdom (England and Wales)). There is some variation across countries in how youth work competences are defined. Youth worker competences are defined by occupational standards (like in Estonia) or by youth work quality standards; by setting legal requirements for the desired outcomes of youth work (such as in Poland, where the 2011 law on supporting family and the foster care system defines a very general criteria for the staff of day care centres); or through other methods (as in Liechtenstein, where the competences of youth workers are defined in agreements between the municipalities and the Youth Work Foundation).

As is apparent from the examples given, a great variety of responses to this aspect of the questionnaire was received. However, the information collected is of great value in understanding the knowledge/skills/abilities/competences youth workers need in order to ensure the quality and impact of their work with young people.

**Figure 3. Existence of quality assurance and competence-based tools**



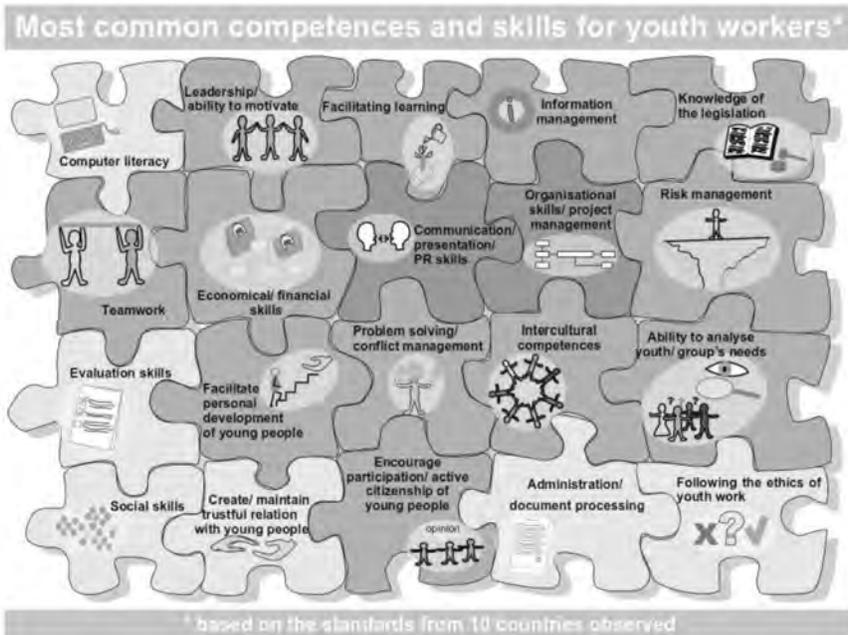
### 2.7.1. The most common competences and skills in 10 countries surveyed

In addition to defining the competences needed by youth workers, another interesting detail to explore is the particular set of competences required for youth workers as professionals. The list of competences observed are from national documents from the following countries: Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and the UK.

From the examples provided by questionnaires it is evident that some of the “competences” listed as such in national standards differ from the Council of Europe definition, which in youth work defines competence as having three interlinked dimensions: knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values (Council of Europe).

In order to explore the most common competences/skills for youth workers, they were classified into several groups and then, tracing the (occupational and educational) standards provided, ranked in accordance with how frequently they were mentioned. Competences with frequency four and higher were included in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Most common competences based on a 10-country analysis



From the analysis of questionnaires, it is possible to highlight the most common groups of competences and skills of youth workers in the 10 countries surveyed:

4. communication, presentation and general public relations (PR) skills: this includes the skills needed to successfully communicate not only with young people, but also with various stakeholders within or outside the organisation, such as colleagues, partner and funding organisations, and policy makers;
5. organisational skills/project management: in nine countries, youth workers are required to organise events or information campaigns for youth, or organise and implement their own projects within the organisation;
6. facilitating learning: in seven countries, youth workers play an important role in the learning experiences of the young people they work with. Some of the standards (e.g. in Serbia) require youth workers to organise and deliver trainings for young people;
7. ability to analyse youth (group) needs: in seven countries, youth workers are expected to analyse correctly the (social, educational) needs of young people/ youth groups in order to organise and deliver relevant youth programmes and activities;
8. problem solving/conflict management: this is considered important for youth work with young people with fewer opportunities, or simply to solve problems in teams;
9. information management: in some countries, an important task of the youth worker is providing information about different opportunities for young people;

10. facilitating the personal development of young people: this includes not only fostering learning, but also helping young people to develop self-esteem and choose career options;
11. encouraging the participation/socialisation/active citizenship of young people;
12. leadership/ability to motivate young people;
13. economic/financial skills: this refers to management of resources (as an element of project management), but also understanding the economic processes in the country (Russia and Belarus);
14. risk assessment/management;
15. teamwork: this skill has two dimensions – the ability to work together with colleagues and peers, but also to co-operate with young people or mentor/co-ordinate youth teams;
16. knowledge of legislation: this refers to the legislative environment where youth work takes place (e.g. special rules/permissions for work with some youth groups), or to the legislative framework of national youth policies and the need to involve young people in the policy-making process;
17. intercultural skills: these skills are useful not only in the context of international youth projects, but also in youth work in multinational countries (e. g. the Russian Federation);
18. computer literacy: in some countries there are specific requirements for a level of computer literacy of youth workers (Estonia);
19. social skills (understand/analyse/evaluate/interact with society): while it is difficult to define these under one skill, in five of the countries surveyed, youth workers are expected to analyse and predict social processes (Belarus), know the principles of a citizenship-based society (Estonia), or know “the historical development of society in order to help form a civic attitude” and have “the ability to interact with various social structures and institutions of the society on the creation and implementation of youth policy” (the Russian Federation);
20. administration/document processing: in four countries, youth workers have particular administrative functions;
21. ability to create and maintain purposeful/trusting relationships with young people;
22. evaluation skills: youth workers are expected to conduct evaluations that could cover learning methods or processes (Austria), current youth policies (Belarus) or activities (UK);
23. an awareness of the ethics of youth work or ethical behaviour is required by three countries (Estonia, Serbia and the UK).

It is interesting to note that the first two, and the most mentioned groups of competences/skills in the list above, are generic competences for many professions. The seven groups of competences needed particularly for working with young people in the list are 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 18 and 20.

When comparing the list above with the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio (Council of Europe) it becomes apparent that most of the competences included

in the portfolio are to some extent mentioned in the national documents of the countries surveyed. What is interesting is that the competences suggested at European level that are connected with facilitating/encouraging learning (function 2) and the personal development of young people (function 3), intercultural skills (function 4) and project management (function 8) are fully reflected at a national level by the 10 countries surveyed. The competences listed in the first (Function 1: Address the needs and aspirations of young people) and fifth (Function 5: Actively practise evaluation to improve the quality of the youth work conducted) groups of the portfolio are covered to a lesser extent (e.g. only the competences 1.3 "Involve young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of youth work using participatory methods, as suitable"; 1.4 "Relate to young people as equals" and 5.4 "Stay up-to-date on the latest youth research on the situation and needs of the young people" are partially referred to in the 10 countries surveyed). And finally, the competences from the sixth (Function 6: Support collective learning in teams) and the seventh (Function 7: Contribute to the development of their organisation and to making policies/programmes work better for young people) group of the portfolio are covered on a very small scale in the 10 countries surveyed.

### **2.7.2. Summary**

Less than half of the countries surveyed have some form of quality assurance for youth work in place or a way of defining the competences needed by youth workers. While there is a wide range of approaches to quality assurance in existence, they do not all meet accepted or standard concepts of quality assurance. Nonetheless, this variety is evidence of interest and experimentation in providing quality youth work for young people, and the need for youth workers to have the necessary competences. Competences for youth workers emerge from the survey as being largely evident at national level and provide a platform for future European co-operation in the field, particularly through exchange of good practices and mutual support among all relevant stakeholders.

## **2.8. Associations and networking**

This research question was an attempt to understand what structures, through association or networking, exist to represent youth workers, their capacity and their contribution to the professional development of both professional and voluntary youth workers. From the responses to the questionnaires and for the purposes of data analysis, youth workers are considered in both their professional and voluntary capacity.

### **2.8.1. Associations of youth workers**

Fifteen of the 41 countries surveyed have associations that specifically represent youth workers and the majority of these provide training opportunities. Eleven of the countries surveyed also identify networks of youth organisations and centres. Part of their mission is to provide initiatives to contribute to the development of the field, and to promote career paths and recognition of the work provided by youth

work practitioners. The Slovenian National Youth Network MaMa has developed a programme consisting of a number of different training courses for members, covering:

- ▶ basic youth worker's skills;
- ▶ monitoring youth work;
- ▶ evaluation of youth work;
- ▶ project management;
- ▶ international youth work;
- ▶ PR and communication;
- ▶ peer-to-peer information;
- ▶ the youth worker as mentor and instructor;
- ▶ active participation and social inclusion;
- ▶ social competences.

Besides providing training opportunities, other important tasks for these organisations include gatherings of youth workers for mutual support; creating conditions for developing professional competences; raising the prestige of their work and improving the social status of youth workers; protection of the rights of youth and community workers, as well as the interests of association members (Belarus); and supporting the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs (Georgia) in its work to create National Professional Standards and Certification Criteria for Youth Workers and to develop Qualifications Courses for Youth Workers.

The majority of the associations mentioned in the questionnaires are NGOs, but in the United Kingdom (England), a trade union organisation with a membership specifically for full-time and part-time youth workers promotes the public service and professional status of youth workers. Most of these associations represent members working locally and regionally in youth work, and they adopt different approaches to promoting the status and future of the youth work profession and its representation in influencing state policies and legislation.

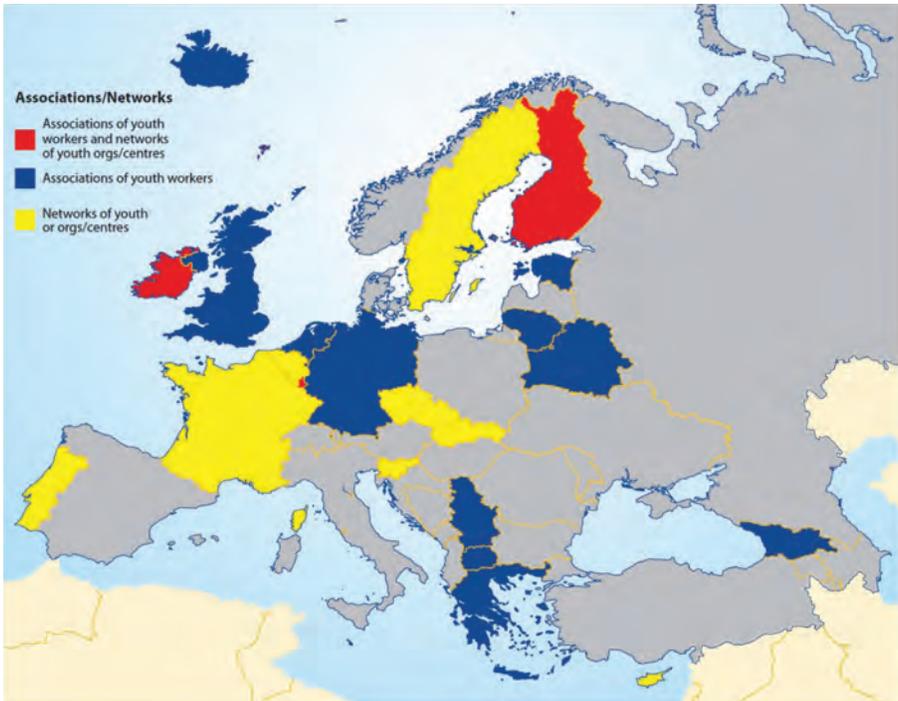
### **2.8.2. Associations representing professionals/volunteers providing youth work**

Just four of the 41 countries surveyed have organisations that represent youth work and develop initiatives to contribute to its further recognition. They are not focused on representing professionals/practitioners in the field, but rather work for the improvement of working conditions, for investment in career development, and recognition of qualifications. In the case of France, for example, the member organisations of the Committee for International Relations and National Associations of Youth and Popular Education (CNAJEP) provide opportunities for animateurs/educateurs to participate in training opportunities towards a recognised certificate – the BAFA. Other organisations mentioned may represent other practitioners in the field.

### 2.8.3. Other structures supporting training opportunities for youth workers or providing youth work

In some organisations, there is a peer-learning culture where education and learning is developed through initiatives that are supported by different programmes (e.g. Erasmus+) with the aim of improving professional competence, enhancing youth work structures and systems, and benefiting the end users – young people. Other organisations, such as national youth councils, contribute to legislative initiatives and have close contacts with policy makers and institutions in the field. Such organisations, while diverse in nature and often in aim, have an important role to play in not only promoting youth work as a profession but also in providing clearer employment and career prospects for both professional and volunteer youth workers.

**Figure 5. Existence of associations of youth workers and/or networks of youth organisations or centres**



## **2.9. Employment, career paths and professionalisation**

The issue of employment, extending to mapping career paths and the professionalisation of youth work, presents a challenge. This is in regard to establishing an accurate picture of the range of opportunities open to those seeking to become youth workers and the possibilities for advancement among those within the profession. As this part of our discussion will reveal, this situation is attributable to various factors, most prominently the lack of recognition that the job category of youth worker receives from national governments (and perhaps other parties, including

the public) in some countries, extending to a perceived lack of a visible career path and/or insufficient levels of financial support for those who do enter the profession.

We did not look specifically at the issue of voluntary youth work, since the focus was on employment and professionalisation, other than requesting statistics on the number of voluntary youth workers in each country. We are, however, aware that moving between voluntary and paid youth work is an actual experience in many regions although due to a lack of pertinent information we were not able to establish, for instance, a comprehensive perspective on how voluntary youth workers move into paid positions. There is also the relationship between youth work and social work to consider. In some countries, a degree of continuity exists between these professions, with individuals passing from social work into youth work, and vice versa. This means that there is a degree of overlap in terms of issues like certification and career pathways, making it difficult to isolate a distinct youth work career trajectory.

### 2.9.1. Youth work as an occupation

Looking at the issue of regulating youth work as an occupation, Table 3 presents an overview of responses received from the national correspondents. This illustrates the extent to which there is a standard occupational profile for youth work as an occupation, a legal/regulatory authority, and a professional register of youth workers. Standard occupational profiles, as shown in the Figure 6, are the exception rather than the norm.

**Table 3. Regulation of youth work as a profession**

Country	Standard occupational profile	Legal/Regulatory authority	Professional register of youth workers
Albania	No	No	No
Armenia	No	Yes	Yes
Austria	No	No	No
Azerbaijan	Forthcoming	Forthcoming	Yes
Belarus	Yes	Yes	No
Belgium (Flemish)	No	No	No
Belgium (French)	Yes	Yes	No
Belgium (German-speaking)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bosnia and Herzegovina	No	No	No
Bulgaria	No	No	No
Croatia	No	No	No
Cyprus	No	No	No
Czech Republic	Yes	Yes	No
Estonia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finland	Yes	Yes	No
France	No	Yes	No
Georgia	No	No	No
Germany	No	No	No

Country	Standard occupational profile	Legal/Regulatory authority	Professional register of youth workers
Greece	No	No	No
Iceland	Yes	No	No
Ireland	Yes	No	No
Italy	No	No	No
Latvia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Liechtenstein	Yes	No	No
Lithuania	Yes	No	No
Luxembourg	No	Yes	No
Malta	Yes	Yes	Yes
Republic of Moldova	No	No	No
Montenegro	No	No	No
The Netherlands	Yes	No	No
North Macedonia	No	No	No
Norway	No	No	No
Poland	Yes	Yes	No
Portugal	Yes	Yes	No
Romania	Yes	Yes	Yes
Russian Federation	Yes	Yes	No
Serbia	Forthcoming	Yes	Yes
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	No
Slovenia	Yes	Yes	No
Sweden	No	No	No
Turkey	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ukraine	No	No	No
United Kingdom (England)	Yes	No	No
United Kingdom (Wales)	Yes	Yes	Yes

The other responses to the questionnaire indicate a mixed picture in terms of regulation, with many countries lacking regulatory frameworks. This is a situation that can have consequences for the mapping of career pathways since such frameworks would in theory support professionalisation. As such, we have to acknowledge this deficit as a significant factor in the lack of recognition perceived by many youth workers at policy level, an issue explored later in this section. Relatively few countries appear to monitor numbers of professionally registered youth workers in a comprehensive fashion, with only 10 of the countries/regions doing so, limiting what we can establish about the dimensions of the European youth worker population.

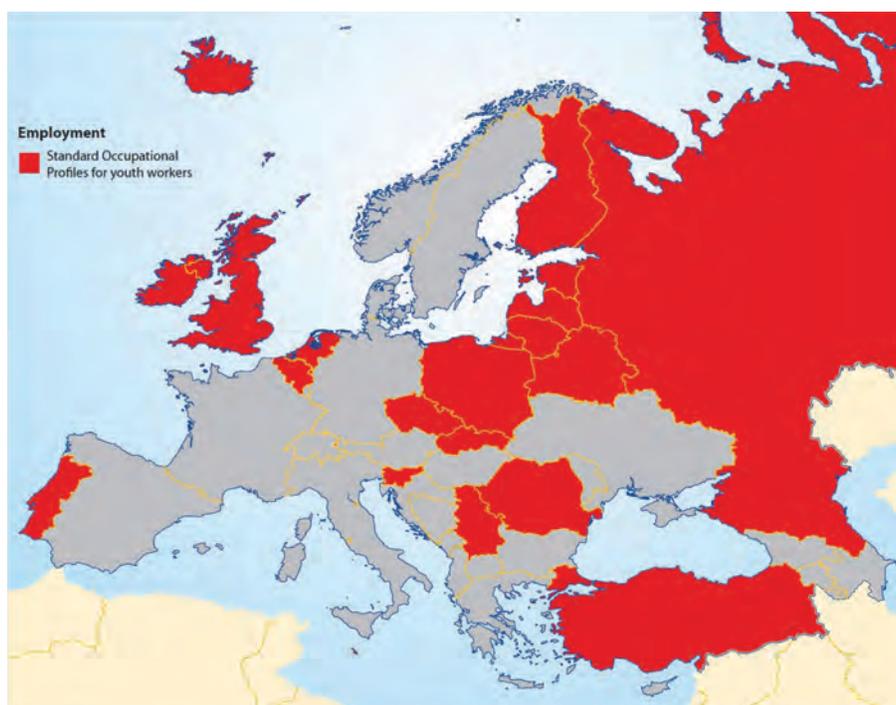
## **2.10 Youth worker employment**

Further questions examined the more specific issue of youth worker employment. The analysis suggests that there is limited documentation due to a lack of recording mechanisms. For example, in only 13 of the national situations reported on

were numbers provided on youth workers employed by the state, public sector or NGOs. These totals nevertheless indicate considerable variation: from 576 310 in Germany and 113 396 in France to 100 in North Macedonia and 25 in Cyprus.<sup>4</sup>

Even taking into account differentials in population size and missing information, this picture suggests a major disparity in the scale of youth worker employment across Europe, with a divide between a small number of core European countries and smaller, perhaps more geographically peripheral, nations. Eleven national correspondents also reported on numbers of youth workers in NGOs/voluntary organisations, again indicating diversity in size of populations, ranging from 170 000 in Austria and 200 000 in France to 80 in North Macedonia and 25 in Cyprus.

**Figure 6. Existence of standard occupational profiles for youth workers**



### 2.10.1. Career paths and employment opportunities

One other issue on this theme relates to career paths and employment opportunities for youth workers. The analysis included main employment opportunities, challenges accessing jobs, identifiable career paths, other occupational fields and

4. The figure for Germany includes all voluntary employees in the pedagogical sector, not just youth workers. The latest report on youth work in Germany shows that there were 29 126 paid youth workers in 2014.

the existence of impact studies. Many of these careers are quite obvious in regard to their engagement with the youth population, for example, working in:

- ▶ youth centres;
- ▶ advice provision;
- ▶ young people's health services;
- ▶ NGOs;
- ▶ the voluntary sector;
- ▶ leisure.

Some of these categories are, we might add, quite broad. For example, NGOs working with young people encompass a wide range of areas, including civic and political participation, and various aspects of social inclusion. The voluntary sector is also diverse, and in some countries (e.g. Ireland) fulfils many of the functions that in others are supported by state-supported agencies.

In terms of identifiable careers, national correspondents identify a large range of employment fields, many of which are self-evident, extending to areas such as after-school support. More novel suggestions relate to issues of particular national significance: for example, tourism in Iceland and the Russian Federation or refugee projects in the United Kingdom (Wales). We do not, however, know from the information provided just how many youth workers are being employed in these areas, the nature of tenure enjoyed, or indeed the means through which jobs are found and career trajectories pursued.

That there may be challenges in accessing jobs is clear and we know what some of the main issues are from the information provided. Particularly outstanding is the question of recognition for youth workers as an occupation. This was in fact cited in some form or other by 20 respondents.

Other prominent barriers related to working conditions include: instability of tenure, lack of funding, low pay, long hours, off-peak work and a lack of career structure. These are all serious issues that have a detrimental impact on the lives of youth workers and no doubt have a considerable bearing on defining the status of the occupation. Societal factors also matter: for instance, austerity in the United Kingdom (Wales) and an aging population in Portugal.

Given what appears to be a negative situation, it was not surprising that few countries were able to identify viable career paths from education and training or out of and into other professions. It does, however, appear to be the case that in a number of countries, youth workers start in the voluntary sector, and then progress towards employment in state agencies or NGOs (this was cited by our Romanian correspondent as an important career path, and may be happening elsewhere). And in considering trajectories, we also need to note the significance of European-level projects in increasing the quality of youth work, with international agencies also offering alternate career paths.

We cannot, however, say that there is no diversity of employment in the youth sector. Important fields identified include health, education and the broad field of civic society organisations. It may therefore be the case that we have to look beyond

the core areas of services specifically tailored for young people and consider other occupational fields that engage with youth as one group among many in order to fully appreciate the range of opportunities open to youth workers.

### **2.10.2. Summary**

The picture of youth work employment painted by this overview cannot realistically be described as encouraging, at least in regard to working in dedicated services for young people. The career paths revealed are on the whole quite precarious, characterised by poor working conditions and perhaps limited prospects for advancement. Most of these pathways are also quite familiar, basically involving working for state agencies, NGOs or even private sector organisations that have young people as their client group. As noted above, this extends to areas such as education and health, and also leisure. In terms of originality, linking youth work with tourism provides a surprise although whether this field can sustain the employment of a substantial number of youth workers is debatable. The current state of youth work employment pathways in most European countries seems to be characterised by limited options and limited quality in working conditions, leaving much room for improvement.

## **2.11. Main findings, emerging trends and conclusions**

This chapter attempts to summarise the main findings and emerging trends resulting from the descriptive data analysis carried out in the preceding chapters. Each of the sections on policy and legislation; formal and non-formal education and training; quality and competences; associations and networking; and employment, career paths and professionalisation are treated sequentially and are preceded by an overarching section on information and data that considers some of the issues resulting from the responses to the questionnaire. Finally, an attempt is made at arriving at some overall conclusions.

### **i. Information and data**

Access to reliable and up-to-date data and information is a prerequisite if education/training and employment/career paths for youth workers are not only to be identified but also actively promoted and supported. The information and data gaps in the responses to the questionnaire, of which there are many, may, at least in part, be a result not of lack of information and data but the time and capacity to organise and collect it.

However, there are other aspects of information and data collection that are no less challenging. Some of the countries surveyed present particular challenges. In some of the larger countries, there is the sheer size and diversity of provision; in others, the decentralised nature of youth work and the “bottom-up” approach adopted poses problems. Where central government plays a defined role in youth work there tends to be a clearer picture of the nature of youth work and the available support. Where, however, the state’s role is at regional, municipal or local level, the picture is less clear and less information is readily available. Accessing information and data on the voluntary youth sector and NGOs and specific areas such as employment

and career options also poses its own challenges. Because of these factors, much of youth work may be under the radar in terms of accessing information and data on a country and Europe-wide basis.

In seeking relevant information and data, responses to the questionnaire tend to suggest that greater clarity is needed not only with respect to the questions asked and of whom, but also with regard to the terms and terminology employed, such as “formal education”, “non-formal education”, informal learning”, “accredited and non-accredited education”, “quality assurance”, “competences” and “professionalisation”.

## **ii. Policy and legislation**

All 41 countries surveyed have some form of structure or framework in place, either at national or regional level, for youth policy and its implementation. Responsibility for youth policy and its implementation usually rests with the relevant ministry. Generally, “youth” tends not to be regarded as a distinct policy field but is conjoined or associated with other related policy fields.

All but seven of the countries surveyed have some form of legislative or strategic policy provision for youth, at either national or regional level. This does not mean that there is no legal or policy framework for youth in these countries but rather that responsibility for youth falls under the remit of a related policy field, such as education. It is also notable that much of this legislation is relatively recent, having been formulated in the last 10 years, and in some cases, the process of establishing legislation is ongoing or yet to be finalised.

There does appear to be a general lack of dedicated structures specifically for youth work policy itself and its implementation. Only a small minority of countries surveyed provide definitions of “youth work” or “youth worker” as embodied in legislation or national policy documents. Common features in defining “youth work” include an emphasis on non-formal learning and voluntary participation and shared concerns with issues such as quality of life and societal and communal development. Youth work is generally situated outside structures of formal education.

Policy initiatives and developments in youth work are also underway in 21 of the countries surveyed, which would indicate that youth work is undergoing a period of transition in many countries, with changes in laws and forms of recognition for youth workers.

## **iii. Formal and non-formal education and training**

Six of the countries surveyed have degree-level courses specifically in youth work, while 11 others offer courses in related fields that are associated with and provide educational paths into youth work. Vocational and further education and training for youth workers are also provided by 18 countries, while nine countries provide both degree and vocational courses.

The relatively small number of courses available in formal education and vocational training in youth work, except in a minority of the countries surveyed, and the relative disconnect between the two, may be an impediment for those seeking employment

or a career in the field. The issue of providing adequate formal and accredited education and training paths for youth workers is not only a “youth work” issue, but a broader educational issue dependent on the policies, provision and priorities of individual countries.

The blurring of lines and overlap between youth work and other related fields is a complicating factor as it also tends to blur education/training and career paths. In this context, if “youth workers” can be identified, regardless of the nomenclature employed in different countries, and what education and training renders them “qualified” as youth workers, it might help to bring greater clarity to understanding the diversity of education and career paths for youth workers across Europe.

In contrast to the formal education sector, in 39 of the countries surveyed there is some level of non-formal education and training for youth workers. In general, the education and training provided can be identified and defined in three contexts: that provided through state-supported bodies or institutions, that provided by the voluntary youth sector, and that provided by European support programmes.

What is perhaps striking about the survey responses is the extent of the role played by the voluntary youth sector in the provision of non-formal education and training. In almost half the countries surveyed, the voluntary youth sector plays a defining role and most of these countries are in either eastern or southern Europe. Another feature is the role that Europe plays in terms of both funding and accreditation of youth work in these countries.

Non-formal education and training across the countries surveyed is wide-ranging, multi-layered, diverse and uneven. Given these factors, overarching structures – provided through state support, the voluntary youth sector or European support programmes – that ensure some level of provision, funding and accreditation and that align methods, themes and competences would appear desirable.

A centre/north/west and south/east divide in Europe as regards the provision of both formal education and non-formal training is also evident from the survey. Countries in central, northern and eastern Europe have, for the most part, identifiable paths for the education and training of youth workers. For most of the countries in southern and eastern Europe, the voluntary youth sector largely bears the burden of provision, while European Union structures largely bear the burden of funding.

#### **iv. Quality and competences**

Of the countries surveyed, 18 have some form of quality assurance framework or system in place. In 13 of these, the framework is at national level while in the remaining five it is at local or organisational level, while two other countries are in the process of developing such frameworks.

The approaches to developing and implementing quality-assurance frameworks, systems or standards varies widely across the countries surveyed, from certification of training providers, through evaluation of youth organisations, to national quality marks or occupational standards and include: certification of providers and youth

workers, evaluation of youth workers, evaluation of youth organisations, national standards, and funding requirements.

Of the countries surveyed, 20 also have competence-based frameworks or competence descriptors for youth workers. These competence-based frameworks are regulated at a national level in most of the countries surveyed, while in others competences are defined through occupational standards, catalogues of professions or educational standards.

The responses to the questionnaire also tended to conflate quality assurance with other processes such as course certification, evaluation of youth workers and youth organisations, and funding requirements. Similarly, with competences there was a tendency in the responses to conflate them with skills, educational standards and occupational standards. Consequently, a clear and definitive picture of both quality and competences did not emerge from the survey.

The wide variety of approaches and methods employed in developing and implementing quality and competence frameworks, systems and standards across the countries surveyed presents a complex mosaic where innovation and experimentation are a defining feature.

## **v. Associations and networking**

In 15 of the countries surveyed, associations of youth workers are in existence that specifically represent youth workers and most of these associations also provide training opportunities for youth workers; 11 of the countries surveyed also identify networks of youth organisations and centres. Besides providing training opportunities, other important features of these associations include creating conditions for developing professional competence, raising the profile of youth work and promoting the professional status of youth workers.

In a number of countries surveyed there are other organisations undertaking the role of youth workers' associations, such as umbrella organisations of youth centres, trade or professional unions, and networks of municipalities.

## **vi. Employment, career paths and professionalisation**

In only 13 of the countries surveyed were numbers provided on youth workers employed by the state, public sector or NGOs. These numbers indicate considerable diversity in terms of scale from country to country. Even taking into account differentials in population size, and lack of detailed information, this picture suggests a major disparity in the scale of youth worker employment across Europe. Eleven countries also reported on numbers of youth workers in NGOs/voluntary organisations, again demonstrating diversity in terms of population size. However, the lack of comprehensive data means that we cannot draw conclusions about numbers of youth workers employed across Europe.

In terms of the professional recognition of youth workers, the countries surveyed present a somewhat mixed picture, with many countries lacking regulatory frameworks, a situation that has consequences for the mapping of career pathways. While

20 of the countries surveyed have some form of legal or regulatory authority for youth work, only 10 appear to comprehensively monitor the numbers of professionally registered youth workers.

Looking at career options, a wide range of employment fields have been identified by the countries surveyed, including youth centres, advice and counselling, health services, NGOs, leisure and after- and out-of-school voluntary activities. We do not know, however, from the information provided just how many youth workers are being employed in these various fields or indeed what the means are through which jobs were accessed and career options pursued.

The lack of identifiable employment and career paths for youth workers can be attributed to a number of factors, most prominently the lack of recognition of the job category of youth worker on the part of governments in some countries, extending to a perceived lack of a visible career path and/or insufficient levels of financial support for those who do enter the profession. It does, however, appear to be the case that in a number of countries, youth workers start in the voluntary sector, then progress towards employment in state agencies or NGOs. European projects in professionalising youth work and international agencies also offer alternate career paths.

There is also an overlap between youth work, social work and other related fields: in some countries, a degree of continuity exists between these, with individuals passing from one to the other and vice versa. This means that there is overlap in terms of issues like certification and career pathways, making it difficult to isolate a distinct youth work career trajectory.

## **vii. Conclusions**

In all the countries surveyed, some form of structure or framework is in place, at either national or regional level, with responsibility for youth policy and its implementation. A large majority of countries also have some form of legislative or strategic provision for youth, at either national or regional level. Almost all the countries surveyed provide some level of non-formal education and training. However, when it comes to the provision of formal education, the existence of some form of quality and/or competence framework or system, and identifiable employment and career paths, less than half of the countries surveyed appear to have some level of capacity.

Some countries appear relatively proactive and strong in some areas, such as policy and legislation, while relatively weak in others, such as provision of formal education. A minority of countries surveyed appear relatively proactive and strong in most categories, while a minority of others appear much less proactive and weak. To what extent the responses to the questionnaire adequately reflect the underlying reality of youth work across Europe is another matter. To what extent do policies, legislation and quality/competence frameworks underpin, promote and support youth workers and youth work practice on the ground? Can youth workers have realistic employment and career prospects without formal qualifications comparable with other occupations and professions? What competences do youth workers need to maximise the social benefits of youth work? Relevant, reliable and regular

information and data on youth work could go some way in attempting to answer these questions.

What emerges from the survey is a variegated, complex, on occasion stark, and at times contradictory picture of youth work across Europe. In a minority of countries, with a history of youth work and where it is embedded, education/training and employment pathways appear reasonably clear – career paths perhaps less so – regardless of how youth work is defined and operates. In other countries surveyed, where youth work is not embedded, education/training and employment paths often appear both limited and sparse.

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## Chapter 3

# Diversity of practice architectures: education and career paths for youth workers

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### **3.1. Introduction**

**T**aj Mahal, a talented blues musician who has spent five decades exploring different musical cultures, from Mali to Hawaii, was asked in 2017 what he had learned from his adventures with musicians from around the globe. He said: “What I’ve learned is that you never stop learning” (Wolman 2017: 63). This answer is highly illuminating, not only because it shows how a musician self-identifies within a web of rich musical cultures, but also because it has a profound insight into the nature of learning itself. He is right. One never stops learning. However, one has to start somewhere.

How do you learn to be a youth worker? What kind of process is it, where does it start and how do social environments in different parts of Europe help youth workers flourish? What type of formal education is available? What is the role of workplace learning, peer learning or more generally learning by doing? What are the available educational paths that produce a competent youth worker who is able to work with and for young people in the network of other professions? There is no single answer in Europe, since the response depends on the national context for formal and non-formal learning in and about youth work.

Asking how one learns to be a competent youth worker, we might begin by noting that in the process of learning any individual youth worker becomes a member of a larger community of youth work, and so absorbs the knowledge, ethos, concepts and methodologies held dear by this community. This concept of learning comes from the ideas of educational psychologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, who believe that the traditional concept of learning through acquisition – learning by internalising knowledge transmitted in the pedagogical process – misses the point. They feel that this conception is too individualistic and too concerned with the cognitive level. Instead, they see learning as essentially a process of participating in a shared social practice. In this process, newcomers and experienced workers interact. They form a tight professional culture, which is an example of those social entities that Lave and Wenger call “communities of practice”. We are all part of several types of communities of practice – some of

them at home and some in professional settings (Lave and Wenger 2011; Wenger 2008). In this view, learning to be a youth worker is about becoming a member of a professional community of practice and consequently being able to access the vibrant tradition which has been developed by youth workers and other members of the youth field “to be able to do their job and have a satisfying experience at work” (Wenger 2008: 47).

This perspective emphasises the practical and the social constitution of practice. For an individual, learning means engaging and contributing to practice; for communities, learning is about refining the practice and making sure that new generations of practitioners will emerge; for organisations, learning is about sustaining an interconnected community through which an organisation knows what it knows and thus becomes effective as an organisation (Wenger 2008: 7-8). By becoming a member of the shared community one learns methods and skills, shares the ethos of youth work, learns how to speak a professional language, engages in social practices and has different connections with young people, their parents perhaps, different citizens, non-governmental organisations, other professional cultures and local politicians – to name but a few.

Seen from this perspective on learning, the educational paths of individual youth workers – important though they are – are dependent on the larger community around them. Different communities around Europe have different resources. This clearly affects how individual youth workers are able to learn. In this publication, the findings of the research group of David Cairns, James O’Donovan, Madalena Sousa and Vesselina Valcheva are taken as a starting point of analysis. Needless to say, I am greatly indebted to them and grateful for the work they have done. I have drawn heavily on their results in analysing and structuring by theme the answers to the questionnaires sent to the national correspondents of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYF) and the relevant ministries, institutions and bodies. Respondents from 41 countries answered. United Kingdom (England) and United Kingdom (Wales) provided separate answers, as did Belgium (Flemish), Belgium (French) and Belgium (German-speaking). Therefore, this chapter examines 44 different “practice architectures” of youth work, which are referred to as countries or regions. I have examined the original questionnaires to identify patterns, trends, commonalities and differences in the countries and regions surveyed on those topics which were hard to interpret. Mostly this has been done when analysing how the public-sector finances non-formal learning, when discovering whether there are identifiable and sustainable career paths in youth work and in looking at the different associations of youth workers. These data are analysed on the basis of the concept of learning through participation: the analysis aims to point out the myriad frameworks of youth work education and learning in different European countries. To do this, I have applied the theory of “practice architectures” as developed by Stephen Kemmis and his colleagues (another rather heavy theoretical construction, I must warn my readers). This analysis probably does not do justice to individual countries or regions, partly due to the quality of data available, partly perhaps due to the choices I have made as a researcher. However, I hope this analysis sheds light on the different youth work models in Europe.

This chapter briefly examines how the variety and complexity of youth work practices in Europe have been handled in research. Next comes a short description of the theoretical framework of practice architectures. This part is followed by a detailed analysis of how the three dimensions of practice architectures – sayings, doings and relating – can be used to analyse data on the educational paths of youth work. As a result, four groups of European practice architecture are identified. This chapter also reflects on the individual learning paths of youth workers.

### 3.1.1. On youth work and training

Anyone researching European youth work will note the diversity and even complexity of youth work. This diversity was one of the starting points of the 1st European Youth Work Convention, held in Ghent in 2010. According to the final declaration of this convention, the nature of youth work is often misunderstood because of its complexity, and the declaration underlined the different practical realities. Youth work was defined as a social practice between young people and the societies in which they live. In dealing with changing cultures, the needs of the young and an ever-transforming society, it has had to accommodate a range of tensions generated by this relationship between youth and society (Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention 2010).

However, the declaration also emphasised that, while there is clearly diversity in youth work practice, there are also common characteristics. First, youth work provides space for association, activity, dialogue and action – characteristics that (using educational language) could be called “being together” and “learning together through peer support”. And second, it provides support, opportunity and experience for young people when they are transitioning from childhood to adulthood. These two perspectives, one emphasising the importance of being together at present and the other focusing on development and growth in the future, need to be guided by the principles of participation and empowerment, the values of human rights and democracy, and attitudes of anti-discrimination and tolerance (Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention 2010).

The declaration also emphasised the diversity in the education of youth workers. It stated that “There may be no need for a homogeneous training system for youth workers” (Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention: 4), but it also underlined the fact that youth work needed common frameworks, such as competence descriptions. The importance of common training was emphasised, especially in the context of human rights (thus anticipating increased immigration of young people to Europe):

Youth workers need more advanced training in, and commitment to universal values in order to face the rapidly changing demands of diverse populations of young people. The training proposed must move beyond understanding the need for tolerance to the acquisition of knowledge and competencies around cultural diversity. (ibid.)

The importance of youth work training and education was emphasised as a condition for good-quality youth work. According to the declaration, training in youth work needs to be both flexible and committed to core humanistic values.

The diversity and complexity acknowledged by the Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention are also seen in the History of Youth Work series, which is based on seminars on the different histories and traditions of youth work in the member states of the Council of Europe. In the fourth History of Youth Work volume, researchers Marti Taru, Filip Coussée and Howard Williamson discuss the differences in youth work in Europe. They begin by noting that “youth work” is an umbrella term used in high-level discussions that cannot capture the diversity of the practices and environments of youth work. They point out that even a first glance at histories of youth work in different countries “quickly reveals that youth work has been strongly framed not only by social policies and internal developments, and in some sense predominantly, by the political system or state” (Taru, Coussée and Williamson 2014: 130). The authors remain confident that youth work can be a tool for democracy, and that it can create an environment where young people learn a democratic and participatory world view, even if youth work is influenced greatly by society and politics.

While “diversity” does describe youth work in Europe, an attempt to highlight what unifies youth work in Europe might be a better option when promoting its recognition. At the 2nd European Youth Work Convention in Brussels in 2015, the goal was to find common ground where all youth work stands. Approaching the question along the same lines as the first declaration, youth work was seen as creating spaces for young people and providing bridges in their lives. The bridge metaphor related to the social integration of young people, especially young people at risk of social exclusion. The final declaration emphasised the relationship of youth work to young people and to the society in which they live, and identified digitisation and cultural diversity as two major challenges.

Once again, the role of training in creating youth work praxis was emphasised. The training needs to combine theoretical perspectives and practical realities: “Training programmes need to demonstrate suitable mechanisms for ensuring the development of reflective practice” (Declaration of the 2nd Youth Work Convention 2015: 5). Training should produce responsiveness to changes in the lives of young people. As with the 1st Youth Work Convention, the need to develop intercultural competences was highlighted, and an “emerging need for cross-sectorial education and training” (ibid.) was identified.

What all of these documents share is the idea of youth work providing spaces for young people to engage in peer activities, and consequently peer learning, while helping young people to find their place in their community, in the labour market and in society generally. Youth work is about today and about the future. Training is needed to ensure that youth work practice is reflective enough and that it is able to adapt to the changes affecting societies. At the same time it is recognised that national contexts vary, and that the recognition of youth work needs to be put on the agenda in European countries and regions which have different strengths and points of development. Recognition is needed to ensure that youth work is able to fulfil its role in providing spaces for peer activities and bridging the gap between the worlds of the young and those of society and the local community.

### **3.2. Theoretical framework: practice architectures**

As is evident from the previous chapter, the diversity of youth work has been seen as a key factor in European youth work. This diversity is explained by different societal and political contexts in different member states of the Council of Europe. Different ideas of youth work, and consequently of the place of youth work within the web of its different theoretical backgrounds and roles within professional networks in public services and civil society, are well understood. In this book, the theory of practice architectures, as developed by Stephen Kemmis and his colleagues, is used as a theoretical framework for the analysis. By using this theory as a starting point, we can hope to gain a more coherent perspective on the position of youth work in different European contexts.

According to this theory, there is a wide range of discourses, social and political practice, material facilities and available resources that together shape what an individual practitioner is able to do, or actually does. From this perspective, learning to be a competent youth worker is not a solitary affair. Instead it is a shared, communal and essentially intersubjective thing. Practice is seen as historically formed and structured: it is influenced by local histories. Practice is structured socially as well, because it is influenced by social relations and interactions. Although there is an emphasis on social background in this theory, in the end the question is about “what particular people do, in a particular place and time”; social practice “contributes to the formation of their identities as people of a particular kind, and their agency and sense of agency” (Kemmis 2009: 23). By analysing how different practices are structured, one is able to pinpoint what learning paths are available for a given individual in a local setting. In this way, a theory of practice architectures can offer useful perspectives on the learning paths and processes in different countries and regions.

The educational path of any youth worker, anywhere in Europe, is shaped by the conditions which also shape youth work practice. Practice as a concept is distinct from mere activities, since it is constituted of shared social and material conditions. There are multiple links between the theoretical, practical and relational elements of practice. There is also an inherent moral element in any practice: it is always value-laden; it aims for the good of individuals and hopefully of humankind in general. Practice produces actions that have moral, social and political consequences. “Good” practice forms and transforms both the individuals involved in the practice and the worlds in which practice occurs (Kemmis 2009; Kemmis *et al.* 2014; Salamon *et al.* 2016). Practice has the power to shape how individual practitioners do their work, how they think about it and what types of relation they form with other professions.

Usually the most visible form of any practice is what the practitioners do. In the case of youth work, one can easily describe, for example, how young people enjoy the company of their peers, participate and hang out in youth clubs; how counselling is offered on the internet; how outreach youth workers seek out and proceed to empower young people in sensitive conditions; or how youth workers work with gangs. However, practice is not about actions or activities alone. According to the

practice architecture theory, there are three categories or three sets of conditions that mediate and enable the conduct of practice.

- ▶ Cultural-discourse arrangements, or “sayings”, make possible the language in and about these practices. These shared understandings (often taken for granted) that practitioners draw upon are used to describe, interpret and justify their practice (Kemmis 2009; Kemmis *et al.* 2014). This dimension is about professional vocabulary, professional recognition and theories of how good practice is organised.
- ▶ Material-economic arrangements, or “doings”, refer to physical and economic realities which shape practice. These resources make possible the activities undertaken in the course of practice. They also enable the “doings” that are characteristic of the practice (for example, the design of youth centres or other arenas of youth work, the wages of youth workers, the economic status of youth work organisations, the sustainable career paths available or not available in a country or a region).
- ▶ Social-political arrangements, or “relatings”, concern social relationships and power. These resources make possible the relationships between non-human objects, people and professional cultures. In the case of youth work, it relates differently to children, social work, different professional cultures and colleagues in the field.

These different sets of practices are interrelated and even interwoven. According to a rather technical but highly illuminating definition by Stephen Kemmis and his colleagues:

A practice is a form of socially established cooperative human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and when the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings), and when this complex of sayings, doings and relatings “hangs together” in a distinctive project. This quality of “hanging together” in a project is crucial for identifying what makes particular kinds of practices distinctive. (Kemmis *et al.* 2014: 31)

According to this way of thinking, it is important to be able to spell out how different conditions “hang together” in any given situation in any given practice. How conditions work together is always dependent on the particular history and socio-economic conditions. Practices are always located in particular sites and are influenced by the specific character of these sites (Hardy, Rönnerman and Edwards-Groves 2017: 6). Analysing how different European countries or regions enable the educational pathways of youth workers is dependent on how different dimensions of the practice architectures actually interact.

When commenting on the outline of this project, Howard Williamson advised a reformulation of this rather heavy theoretical framework into simpler and more accessible terms. Following his sage advice, the research questions can be formulated as follows:

- ▶ Sayings/cultural-discourse dimension: how youth work is recognised, formulated, talked about and debated.

- ▶ Doings/structural-occupational dimension: how youth work education is supported and how youth work can be a sustainable career.
- ▶ Relatings/social-political dimension: how youth work is recognised, supported and organised so that it can relate to young people, the general public and other professional cultures.

These categories can be seen as prerequisites of successful, high-quality youth work (Agdur 2017) – there have to be ways of talking about the methods and goals of youth work, the material and economic conditions for doing this type of work, and professional ways of getting organised and relating to young people, the general public, civil society and other professions.

### 3.2.1. The practice architectures of youth work education

When analysing the first two conferences on the history of youth work, the research group concluded that:

The social (thus youth work) is always “under construction” and it is impossible to reflect on youth work without linking youth work practice, policy and research to the social (pedagogical and political) context. (Coussée *et al.* 2010: 130)

This impossibility highlights the fact that the practice architecture of youth work is related to larger social settings, and also to concepts, thoughts and ideas about what should be done with the young in society – and also what should be done with society. According to the theory of practice architectures, one needs to add to this list the economic and material conditions of youth work.

The perspective of practice architectures underlines the fact that anything that youth workers are doing is always closely connected to “sayings” and “relatings”, that is, to the broader social, material, economic and discourse context surrounding youth work. Consequently, learning to be a youth worker is influenced by the social context as a whole and is dependent on existing practice. Youth work, like any other practice, cannot be considered outside the social context which shapes it – and this social context is in turn, to some extent, shaped by youth work practice as well. Looking at the educational pathways of youth workers through the perspective of practice architectures theory is one way of meeting the challenge of avoiding a narrow vision of youth work as methodisation, a vision that describes youth work only through the activities and ways of working with and for young people (Coussée *et al.* 2010). This is one theoretical but systematic approach to looking at the youth work context as a whole.

The following section examines the educational paths of youth workers by using the three categories described in the previous section, namely sayings, doings and relatings. It analyses, first, how youth work is talked and thought about; second, how youth work is done on a professional basis; and third, how youth workers relate to each other through associations. This analysis is of course in no way conclusive: it is based on the data currently available, and at best it offers a rough sketch of various European frameworks. Nevertheless, it points out the considerable differences in practice architectures of youth work in Europe.

### 3.2.1.1. Cultural-discourse arrangements: how youth work is talked about

The first class of analysis consists of those forms of thought and language that make youth work recognised, understandable, interpretable and communicable, both inside and outside the youth work profession. This requires looking at the different ways of recognising youth work at the national policy level, and also in professional discourse. The aim is to find out “what people say the practice is, as well as what they say while they are doing it and what they say about what they do” (Kemmis 2009: 25).

If youth work is to exist as a distinct social practice there needs to be a way of communicating what the practice is about and how a competent (or, to use Aristotelian language and emphasise professional ethics, a virtuous) youth worker does his or her job. This is based on a shared tradition of youth work:

Each particular and each local form of a particular practice presupposes distinctive arrangements of words, ideas and utterances – distinctive discourses – which are characteristic of this or that particular kind of practice. (Kemmis 2009: 25)

The analysis uses three sub-categories: is there legislation explaining what youth work is? Is there any method for assuring quality? Is there a description of youth work competences?

First, an analysis of legal recognition is offered. Some sort of law governing youth work obviously provides formal legal recognition, but it may also offer a theoretical grounding as well (Komonen, Suurpää and Söderlund 2012). According to the analysis of educational pathways, not all the countries or regions examined provided legal recognition of youth work.

The second dimension concerns ways of evaluating quality in youth work. Setting quality criteria for youth work is based on the broader definitions of what youth work is and what types of outcome it may produce in the lives of young people. As has been stressed, the most important thing is to point out what is distinctive about youth work, and how it differs from other related fields, such as formal education (Agdur 2017; Taru 2017). It is outside the scope of this analysis to evaluate whether the set quality criteria in different European countries and regions actually reflect their youth work practices. Rather, the starting point is that there is a way of evaluating the quality and thus communicating, in some way, about the value of youth work.

I have adopted a positive interpretation of quality systems as a way of explaining what youth work is about. However, there has been criticism of quality systems as a new form of governmentality, relying on the instrumental rationality that meets the demands of the neo-liberal era. This is indeed an important point. There may be other ways of meeting these goals but, for the purposes of this chapter, it is assumed that quality-assurance systems and competence frameworks are indicators of the discourse basis available for youth work. To contextualise this, I quote Jon Ord (2016: 176):

More importantly ... the transformative and life changing outcomes of youth work, such as genuinely building confidence, encouraging aspirations or facilitating changes in people’s beliefs about both themselves and the world around them, do not lend

themselves to techne or “product” approach. ... As a practice, youth work rooted in phronesis would be concerned with providing opportunities which necessarily contain a degree of uncertainty, fluidity and unpredictability.

Ord’s perspective emphasises that youth work should be empathically understood from inside, rather than explaining youth work as “a clear business idea” (Agdur 2017: 346). Without taking sides in this debate, it should be noted that the analysis in this paper does not provide an insight into how different national discourses enable youth workers to talk about their processes using a language perhaps based more on phronesis, as a lived and emergent practice. This limitation of the analysis begs further investigation.

The third dimension concerns descriptions of competences deemed necessary for carrying out youth work. The term competence refers to the ability of the individual to perform a task at hand. It is a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that affect performance at a job, can be evaluated using pre-set standards and of course can be improved through training and education (Hsieh *et al.* 2012). A competence description is one way of describing what youth work is about and how youth workers should do their job. In this way it can be counted as one of the discourse and cultural resources available for a youth worker. The Declaration of the 2nd Youth Work Convention noted that in order to sustain the quality of youth work there needs to be a competence model for youth workers.

In Table 4, all of these three dimensions are combined together to analyse the scope of the available discourse-cultural forms of youth work. If the country or region has youth work legislation, value 1 is given and if no such legislation exists, value 0 is given. The same applies for quality-assurance and/or a competence framework for youth work. The three sub-categories are combined into one by summarising the individual values. The lowest theoretically possible total point score equals 0 and this means that none of the three features is present; the highest possible score equals three and this means that all three features are present. I accessed the original answers to check the information in cases that I found hard to categorise. Some of the data clearly are not on the same level and need a bit of interpretation. This means that country-by-country comparisons probably do not offer an adequate picture.

**Table 4. The discourse-cultural arrangements of youth work (second half of 2017)**

Country or region	National/regional legislation	Quality assurance	Competence framework	Total points
Albania	0	0	0	0
Armenia	Concept of State Youth Policy of the Republic of Armenia (2014) Regulations of the Youth Workers' Institution (2009) Youth Workers' Training Programme (2015)	0	0	1
Austria	Federal Youth Promotion Act (2000)	aufZAQ certification (since 2003)	aufZAQ certification (since 2003)	3
Azerbaijan	Youth Policy of Azerbaijan Republic (2002, amended 2005 and 2007) Azerbaijani Youth 2017-21 State Programme	0 (planned for the end of 2018)	0	1
Belarus	On the Foundations of State Youth Policy (2009)	Employment agreements and local job regulation documents	Educational Standard of the Republic of Belarus No. 1-09 01 74-2012	3
Belgium (Flemish)	Flemish Parliament Act (2012)	Specific funding conditions for national level (Flemish) organisations	0	2

Country or region	National/regional legislation	Quality assurance	Competence framework	Total points
Belgium (French)	Decree on the Conditions of Approval and Funding for Youth Organisations (2009) Decree on the Conditions of Approval and Funding for Youth Houses, Meeting and Accommodation Centres, Information Centres for Young People and their Federations (2000) Decree establishing the Youth Council in French Community (2008)	Training organisations need to have accreditation from the Youth Service	A profile for the job (socio-cultural group leader) and the content of training courses, defined by the French-speaking Service for Professions and Training Courses	3
Belgium (German)	Youth Decree (2011)	Evaluation of youth workers – monitoring their youth work twice per year, creating analysis of their achievements every five years and delivering a concept for the next five years	No (planned in 2018)	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	0	0
Bulgaria	Youth Law (2012) National Youth Strategy (2012-20)	0	Suggested skill set of youth worker, in "Position of the Bulgarian National Youth Forum on Youth Work and Youth Worker" <sup>5</sup>	2
Croatia	National Youth Programme 2014-17	0	0	1

5. This is not an official legislative document

Country or region	National/regional legislation	Quality assurance	Competence framework	Total points
Cyprus	National Youth Strategy 2017-22	0	0	1
Czech Republic	National Youth Strategy 2014-20	The "NGO recognised by the Ministry for providing quality youth work" award	National project Keys for Life – Developing Key Competences in Leisure-Time-Based and Non-Formal Education National competence-based framework for youth workers in youth information centres (produced by Youth Department; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in 2008)	3
Estonia	Youth Work Act (2010)	Youth Work Quality Assessment Tool for local municipalities	Occupational standard of youth workers developed by the Estonian Youth Work Centre (2012)	3
Finland	Youth Act (2016) Decree on Youth Work and Youth Policy (2017)	Internal frameworks developed by the organisations themselves; peer quality-assessment method	0	2
France	Priority to Youth 2012-17	Compulsory registration of all vocational training organisations with the Ministry in charge of Vocational Training and the Ministry in charge of Youth and Sports	Professional training is included in the National Register of Professional Qualifications (RNCP)	3

Country or region	National/regional legislation	Quality assurance	Competence framework	Total points
Georgia	National Youth Policy of Georgia (2014)	(Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs is working on it)	0 (Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs is working on it)	1
Germany	Child and Youth Services Act (1991)	Various quality-assurance catalogues for different areas, e.g., Youth information; Eurodesk Germany Quality Catalogue; National Quality Standards to qualify for JULEICA	0	2
Greece	0	0	0	0
Iceland	National Law on Youth Affairs (2007)	Municipality of Reykjavik provides guidelines for quality youth work in after-school programmes for children and in youth clubs for teenagers	0	2
Ireland	Youth Work Act (2001) National Youth Work Development Plan (2009)	National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work	The National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work (NQSF) National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups	3
Italy	0	0	Competence-based frameworks are defined in regional repertories of professions	1

Country or region	National/regional legislation	Quality assurance	Competence framework	Total points
Latvia	Youth Law (2009) Youth Policy Implementation Plan 2016-20	0	0	1
Liechtenstein	Child and Youth Act (2008) Ordinance on the Contributions to the Child and Youth Promotion (2009)	Supervision of the work of the Youth Work Foundation by the board of trustees and by the municipalities	Agreements between the municipalities and the Youth Work Foundation	3
Lithuania	Law on Youth Policy Framework (2003) National Youth Policy Development Programme (2011-19)	0	Competence development programme: five modules for the Youth Worker Certificate	2
Luxembourg	Law on Youth (2008) Youth Pack (2012)	Quality Framework for Institutions providing Non-formal Learning Opportunities (2016) introduced by the Youth Law	0	2
Malta	Youth Work Profession Act (2014)	0	Competence descriptors for youth workers are included in the Code of Ethics under the Youth Work Profession Act (2014)	2
Moldova	National Strategy of Youth Sector Development 2020 (2014) Law on Youth (2016)	0	0	1

Country or region	National/regional legislation	Quality assurance	Competence framework	Total points
Montenegro	National Youth Strategy 2017-21 Law on Youth	0	0	1
The Netherlands	Youth Act (2015) Social Support Act	0	Competence profile for youth work (2008)	2
North Macedonia	National Youth Strategy 2016-25	0	0 (Initiatives include recommendations for basic competences/ responsibilities)	1
Norway	0	0	0	0
Poland	0	0	The 2011 Law on supporting family and the foster care system	1
Portugal	Organic Law 123/2014 Organic Law 98/2011 Statutes – Ordinance no. 231/2015 Statutes – Ordinance no. 11/2012 National Catalogue of Qualifications – Qualification No. 761337	0	The National Qualification Catalogue	2
Romania	Youth Law (2006) National Youth Policy Strategy 2015-20	0	The Occupational Standards	2

Country or region	National/regional legislation	Quality assurance	Competence framework	Total points
Russian Federation	<p>Decision of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation "On the Main Directions of the State Youth Policy of the Russian Federation" (1993)</p> <p>Federal Law on governmental support of youth and children's associations (1995)</p> <p>Fundamentals of the State Youth Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025 (2014)</p> <p>A plan of activities for implementation of the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025 (2015)</p>	<p>National educational standards for the bachelor and masters' degree programmes in Organisation of Youth Work</p> <p>A draft version of the National professional standard for youth workers</p>	<p>A draft version of the National professional standard for youth workers</p>	3
Serbia	<p>Law on Youth (2011)</p> <p>National Youth Strategy 2015-25</p> <p>Action Plan for its Implementation 2015-17</p>	<p>National quality-assurance framework</p>	<p>Passport of Competences developed by NAPOR</p>	3
Slovak Republic	<p>Act No. 282/2008</p> <p>Youth Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2014-20</p> <p>The Concept of Youth Work for 2016-20</p> <p>National Action Plan for Children</p>	<p>Requirements in the National Youth programmes 2014-20</p> <p>Standards of volunteer management and recommendations for work with youth in the field of volunteering</p>	<p>National system of professions</p> <p>National project KomPrax</p>	3

Country or region	National/regional legislation	Quality assurance	Competence framework	Total points
Slovenia	Act on Public Interest in Youth Sector (2010)	0	National vocational qualification certificate for youth workers (2017)	2
Sweden	0	Common training plan/curriculum The network "Quality and competence in cooperation, KEKS" Directives on Procedures and Principles for Youth Leaders' and Sports Experts' Training, Development and Working	0	1
Turkey	Decree Law on the Organisation and Duties of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (2011)		0	2
Ukraine	Concept State Target Social Programme Youth of Ukraine for 2016-20	0	0	1
UK (England)	0	National Youth Agency's Quality Mark Organisations have developed own methods	Covered under the frameworks mentioned earlier	2
UK (Wales)	National Strategy for Youth Work in Wales 2014-18	Quality Standards for Youth Work Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales	The Youth Work National Occupational Standards (NOS)	3

Of the 44 countries or regions, 12 have legislation, quality-assurance systems and competence frameworks. Another 15 countries or regions score two points. These countries or regions – except the UK (England), which has both quality assurance and a competence framework – have legislation and either a quality-assurance system or a competence framework. For some of those countries or regions, this seems to be a deliberate choice. For this reason I would be tempted to categorise points 2 and 3 in the same group. Of the countries or regions examined, 13 have one point. The most typical model is a country with legislation but no quality-assurance or competence framework. However, the case of Sweden, for example, demonstrates that a country or a region can have a well-developed and impressive quality-assurance system but no national legislation. Some four countries or regions examined do not have any of the discourse-cultural resources examined here. It is clear that different countries and regions vary considerably in their resources for how to speak about youth work, how to think about it and how to recognise it. This affects the learning paths of individual youth workers as well.

In any scientific study, thinking about the limitations of the analysis is required. Therefore the following obvious limitations of this analysis should be pointed out. Important cultural and discourse resources are lacking. We do not know if there is a theoretical debate on youth work in a specific country or a region and whether the professional discourse on what youth work is about informs practice. Also, empirical research on youth work provides not only data, but also theories and concepts on how to approach youth work practice. Therefore, having youth work research that is accessible to youth workers would be an important part of the cultural-discourse resources. The question is also about the scope and richness of the professional vocabulary for youth work – it is in no way insignificant how youth workers are able to describe and discuss their professional ideas and ideals (Forkby and Kiilakoski 2014). Therefore, analysis based on the data available in this survey will probably give only a partial picture of the youth work resources in any country or region. This mapping is in no way conclusive, nor is it likely to do justice to individual countries and regions and their traditions and current practices of youth work.

### **3.2.1.2. Material-economic resources of youth work education and employment**

Different resources make the activities undertaken in any practice possible (or not). These physical, material and economic conditions affect the characteristics of youth work practice (Kemmis *et al.* 2014). The most obvious example of this is that in some countries and regions youth work can be a long-term professional career with possibilities for career advancement, and in others it is mostly done on a voluntary basis.

The need to pay attention to material-economic arrangements has been emphasised by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation to member states on youth work (Committee of Ministers 2017). The recommendation emphasises the need to provide sustainable structures and resources, particularly at the local level. The need to provide youth work education is also underlined.

In the following analysis, the emphasis is on questions of employability, training and education. The countries and regions are evaluated according to their educational

possibilities. Education is divided into two categories, initial vocational education<sup>6</sup> and tertiary/higher education, but attention is also given to non-formal learning opportunities. Within these three areas the data provided are quite diverse. Most of the background information is available only in the national languages, which means that as a researcher I am mostly forced to rely on the data provided by national correspondents. As shown in Chapter 2, most of the countries and regions provide for some sort of non-formal learning. However, evaluating plausibly its scope, quality or accessibility is not possible on the basis of this material. Therefore I have chosen to include the factor that is easiest to analyse, namely whether or not a state takes part in providing for non-formal learning. I have not taken into account any money allocated by national agencies. The data on career opportunities also varied. I chose to integrate two sets of questions, the number of youth workers employed in a country or a region and identifiable career patterns. If the number of employed youth workers was low, I chose to interpret that as showing that there are no sustainable career paths (for example, the 120 youth workers employed in Malta). This question required analysing the questionnaires. The rest of the table is based on the work done by the research group.

**Table 5. Economic-material arrangements for youth work**

Country or region	Vocational education	Tertiary/higher education for youth workers	Non-formal learning opportunities provided by public authorities	Sustainable/identifiable work career	Total points
Albania	0	0	0	0	0
Armenia	0	0	1	1	2
Austria	0	0	1	1	2
Azerbaijan	0	0	1	0	1
Belarus	1	0	1	1	3
Belgium (Flemish)	0	1	1	0	2
Belgium (French)	1	0	1	1	3
Belgium (German)	0	0	1	1	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	0	1	1
Bulgaria	0	1	1	0	2
Croatia	0	0	1	0	1
Cyprus	0	0	0	0	0

6. Vocational education in the countries or regions examined is usually found in secondary education, but some countries in Europe have dual-sector education, where tertiary education institutions combine an academic approach with vocational education. In the countries examined, Estonia, Germany, Finland and the Netherlands have universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) offering youth work education.

Country or region	Vocational education	Tertiary/ higher education for youth workers	Non-formal learning opportunities provided by public authorities	Sustainable/ identifiable work career	Total points
Czech Republic	0	1	1	0	2
Estonia	1	1	1	1	4
Finland	1	1	1	1	4
France	1	1	1	1	4
Georgia	0	0	0	0	0
Germany	1	1	1	1	4
Greece	0	1	0	0	1
Iceland	0	1	0	1	2
Ireland	1	1	1	1	4
Italy	0	0	0	0	0
Latvia	0	1	0	1	2
Liechtenstein	0	0	1	0	1
Lithuania	0	0	1	0	1
Luxembourg	1	1	1	1	4
North Macedonia	1	0	0	0	1
Malta	0	1	1	0	2
Moldova, Republic of	0	0	1	0	1
Montenegro	0	0	1	0	1
The Netherlands	1	1	1	0	3
Norway	1	0	1	1	3
Poland	0	0	0	0	0
Portugal	1	0	1	0	2
Romania	0	0	0	0	0
Russian Federation	0	1	1	1	3
Serbia	1	0	1	0	2
Slovak Republic	1	0	1	1	3
Slovenia	0	0	1	0	1
Sweden	1	0	1	1	3
Turkey	0	0	1	1	2
Ukraine	0	0	1	0	1
UK (England)	1	1	1	1	4
UK (Wales)	1	1	1	1	4

Eight states or regions – Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, UK (England) and UK (Wales) – scored four points, because they have both vocational and tertiary education as well as public money for non-formal learning and sustainable and/or identifiable working careers. In these countries youth workers have access to formal qualifications, take part in non-formal learning opportunities provided by the state as well as other sources and have identifiable career paths. This means that there are possibilities for long-term on-the-job learning. Six countries or regions scored three points. All the countries and regions belonging to this group have viable working careers and non-formal learning opportunities for youth workers provided by the state. They also have youth work education, either on a vocational or a university level.

Thirteen of the countries or regions scored two points. The most common feature is that these countries or regions do not have sustainable career opportunities for youth workers, but have a formal education programme for youth work and provide non-formal learning opportunities. Eleven countries or regions scored one point. For the majority of them, this means they provide non-formal courses funded by the public authorities. Another six countries or regions scored zero points.

There are limitations in this analysis as well. An important part of any economic-material arrangements is the physical facilities for youth work. Current analysis completely ignores this dimension. Also, the question of non-formal opportunities is analysed in a very approximate manner, even though there is ample evidence that this dimension is very important in the professional growth of youth workers (Fusco 2012). Mentoring, coaching and networking through different courses, programmes and projects obviously affect learning paths (McGuire and Gubbins 2010). However, having access to education on youth work, public funding for professional development and career opportunities is obviously a factor that significantly influences the practice of youth work.

### **3.2.1.3. Social-political arrangements: the organisation of youth work**

The third dimension of practice architectures is “relating”, which is interpreted very broadly. This dimension affects how youth workers relate to children and young people, parents and the wider public, but also to other professionals and youth work colleagues. These arrangements influence what type of relations there are. They also create social solidarity. The themes of power and solidarity affect how youth workers relate to other fields (Kemmis *et al.* 2014; Salamon *et al.* 2016).

This dimension cannot be studied thoroughly using the data available. One way of analysing it would be to examine how existing legislation and policy programmes enable multi-professional co-operation, and which professional cultures are seen as related to youth work. After some investigation, I fear that this task cannot be achieved using the data available. Therefore, only one dimension is analysed: based on the questionnaires, is there an association for youth workers? This aspect clearly provides only a thin perspective of the overall social-political arrangements affecting youth work (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Associations for youth work**

Country or region	Association for youth workers/ youth work communities
Albania	0
Armenia	0
Austria	0
Azerbaijan	0
Belarus	1
Belgium (Flemish)	1
Belgium (French)	1
Belgium (German)	1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0
Bulgaria	0
Croatia	0
Cyprus	1
Czech Republic	1
Estonia	1
Finland	1
France	1
Georgia	1
Germany	1
Greece	1
Iceland	1
Ireland	1
Italy	0
Latvia	0
Liechtenstein	1
Lithuania	1
Luxembourg	1
Malta	1
Moldova (Republic of)	0
Montenegro	0
The Netherlands	1
North Macedonia	1
Norway	0
Poland	0

Country or region	Association for youth workers/ youth work communities
Portugal	1
Romania	0
Russian Federation	0
Serbia	1
Slovak Republic	1
Slovenia	1
Sweden	1
Turkey	0
Ukraine	0
UK (England)	1
UK (Wales)	1

In the analysis, I have adopted a different strategy than that of the research group. I have chosen to include all the organisations mentioned by the national correspondents. Their reports include both organisations of youth workers and organisations that promote co-operation between different youth institutes – for example, Cyprus Youth Clubs Organisation (KOKEN) which offers training for volunteers at youth clubs. Of the countries or regions examined, 27 responded that they have some sort of organisation. I assume that having an association is an indication that there is communication within the youth field of the country or the region and consequently that the communities of practice within youth work engage in peer learning, in developing shared practice and helping to increase the flow of ideas, experiments, practices and learning experiences. Therefore this can be counted as one feature of practice architectures that contributes to learning paths.

### **3.3. An analysis of European practice architectures supporting youth work**

As has been noted above, there is considerable variation across different European countries and regions in how youth work is talked about and recognised, how it is supported through formal education, how resources are allocated to non-formal learning and career paths and how youth workers relate to each other through associations. These features form a picture of social and institutional conditions that affect the learning paths of youth workers.

In Table 7, these findings are combined using the three categories analysed in the preceding chapters. The column at the far right represents a sum dependent on the strength of the practice architectures supporting youth work, and on the educational paths available.

**Table 7. Summary of the findings**

Country or region	Recognition of youth work; categories of youth work	Formal learning, economic support for non-formal learning and career paths	An association for youth workers/ youth work communities	Total points
Albania	0	0	0	0
Armenia	1	2	0	3
Austria	3	2	0	5
Azerbaijan	1	1	0	2
Belarus	3	3	1	7
Belgium (Flemish)	2	2	1	5
Belgium (French)	3	3	1	7
Belgium (German)	2	2	1	5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	1	0	1
Bulgaria	2	2	0	4
Croatia	1	1	0	2
Cyprus	1	0	1	2
Czech Republic	3	2	1	6
Estonia	3	4	1	8
Finland	2	4	1	7
France	3	4	1	8
Georgia	1	0	1	2
Germany	2	4	1	7
Greece	0	1	1	2
Iceland	2	2	1	5
Ireland	3	4	1	8
Italy	1	0	0	1
Latvia	1	2	0	3
Liechtenstein	3	1	1	5
Lithuania	2	1	1	4
Luxembourg	2	4	1	7
Malta	2	2	1	5
Moldova (Republic of)	1	1	0	2
Montenegro	1	1	0	2
The Netherlands	2	3	1	6
North Macedonia	1	1	1	3
Norway	0	3	0	3
Poland	1	0	0	1
Portugal	2	2	1	5
Romania	2	0	0	2

Country or region	Recognition of youth work; categories of youth work	Formal learning, economic support for non-formal learning and career paths	An association for youth workers/ youth work communities	Total points
Russian Federation	3	3	0	6
Serbia	3	2	1	6
Slovak Republic	3	3	1	7
Slovenia	2	1	1	4
Sweden	1	3	1	5
Turkey	2	2	0	4
Ukraine	1	1	0	2
UK (England)	2	4	1	7
UK (Wales)	3	4	1	8

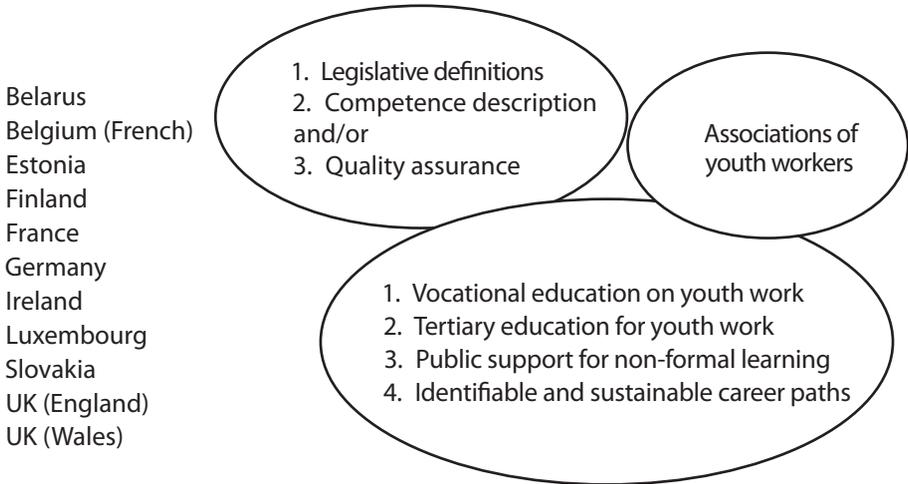
Table 7 shows the variation in the practice architectures of youth work. Some countries or regions have plenty of supporting structures that most likely produce strong practice, which helps youth work to blossom. Some countries or regions lack even the basic infrastructure for promoting professional youth work. Educational pathways available in different parts of Europe vary accordingly.

Any categorisation of data is always somewhat arbitrary. The nature of the data available affects how the structures of youth work can be examined in this book. It is also likely that some respondents understood some categories differently. For this reason, some countries or regions could be lower in this ranking than might be expected. Therefore, the categorisation based on this analysis should be approached with caution. Bearing this in mind, I suggest the following interpretation. Countries or regions that have results of 7 or 8 have strong practice architectures supporting youth work education and probably youth work in general. Of the countries and regions examined here, 11 belong to this category. Most of them are located in the northern part of Europe. Countries or regions ranking from 5 to 6 have strong practice architectures as well, but they may be lacking some important elements which should be established in the future. There are 12 such countries or regions. Countries or regions with results of 3 to 4 have developed some parts of the practice architectures, but would most likely benefit from creating stronger structures for youth work. There are eight countries or regions that belong to this category. Countries or regions with results from 0 to 2 are only starting to develop their youth work structures and will probably benefit from learning from other European countries or regions. There are 13 such countries or regions. While the analysis is most likely not going to do justice to individual countries or regions, and there might be misunderstandings in interpreting the data, the overall analysis in categorising these European countries or regions in four categories could be helpful in analysing how strong practice architectures are in various corners of Europe.

The first group (strong practice architectures), shown in Figure 7, comprises 11 countries or regions that all have legislative definitions and also have a competence description and/or quality assurance. They all have public support for non-formal

learning, associations for youth work and identifiable career paths. There is formal learning on youth work, and half of them have both vocational and tertiary education for youth work.

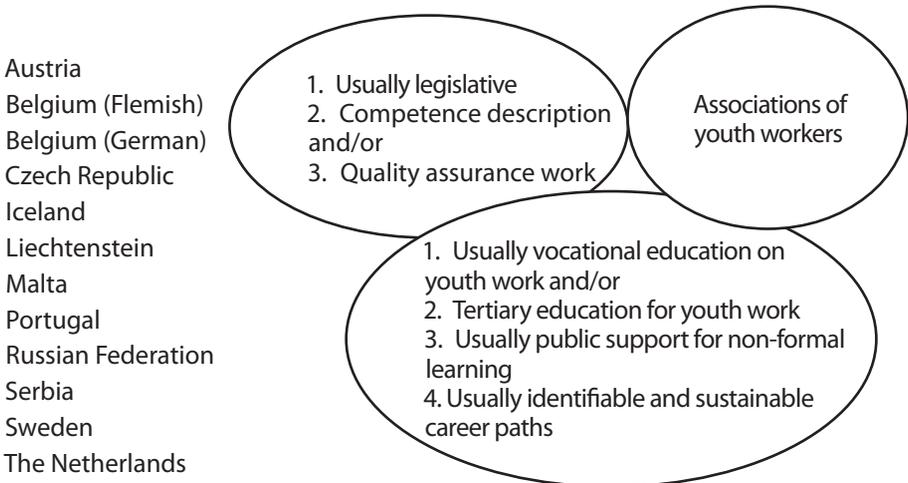
**Figure 7. Strong practice architectures, group 1: well developed**



*Source:* The author created the groups based on information provided by member state representatives in EKCYF and verified by CDEJ representatives.

*Note:* The listing in each group is in alphabetical order.

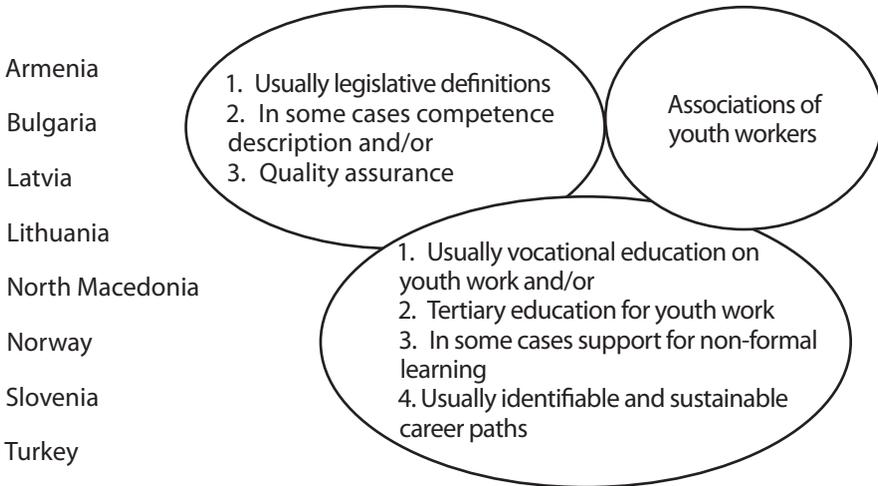
**Figure 8. Strong practice architectures, group 2: with room for development**



The second group (strong practice architectures, with room for development), shown in Figure 8, consists of 12 countries and regions, all of which, except Sweden, have legislative definitions. They also have a quality-assurance system or competence description, if not both. These countries or regions usually have either vocational or higher education for youth work. They also usually have public

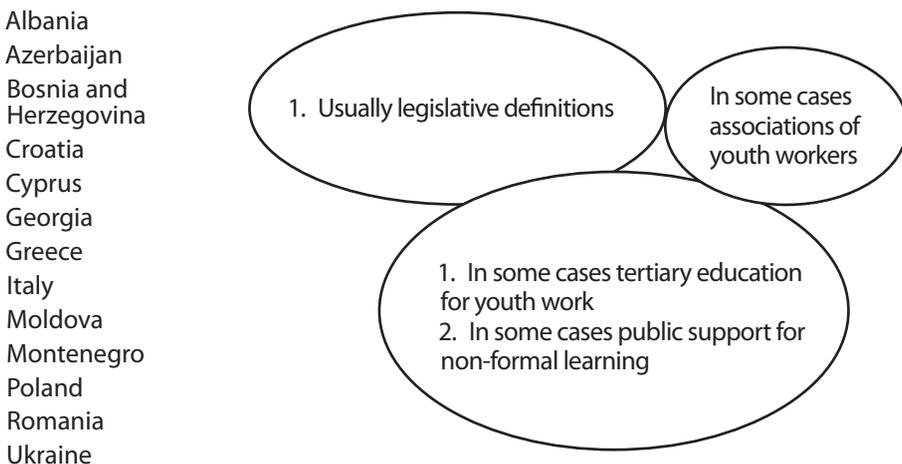
support for non-formal learning and usually have sustainable career paths. They all have associations of youth workers.

**Figure 9. Practice architectures, group 3: partly developed**



The third group (where some parts of their practice architectures have been developed) is the smallest, and consists of eight countries, shown in Figure 9. They usually have legislative definitions. In some cases, they have either a competence description or quality assurance. They usually offer formal education for youth work. In some cases, they have public support for non-formal learning. Usually there are no sustainable career paths. In some cases, there are associations of youth workers. Of all the countries belonging to this group, Norway is different from the others in that it has formal education, public support for non-formal learning and identifiable career paths, but scores zero points in other dimensions.

**Figure 10. Practice architectures, group 4: in need of development**



The fourth group (practice architectures in need of development), shown in Figure 10, consists of 13 countries that most likely have legislative definitions, but no competence descriptions or quality assurance. There is higher-level education in some cases, and public support for non-formal learning in some cases. There are no identifiable career paths. In some cases there are associations of youth work.

The countries and regions in the four groups described above all provide different opportunities to learn how to become a youth worker and develop in the profession. The higher the number of structures available, the more opportunities there are for youth work. Also, it has to be emphasised that important dimensions are lacking and the picture provided by the analysis is far from complete. Perhaps the best way to interpret these results is to think of them as different models of how European states promote youth work. Interpreted this way, they show that the possibilities, available resources and opportunities to function as a recognised profession vary considerably.

### **3.3.1. An individual learner's perspective: meaning, practice, community, identity**

The analysis preceding this section has been carried out by closely following the national reports, written mostly by correspondents to EKCYP, and has been based on the work done by the research group, who also wrote Chapter 2. In this section, I offer some theoretically informed interpretations of what the different practice architectures could mean for learning at the individual level.

The first point concerns the nature of education itself. Since the 19th century there has been the criticism that learning is narrowly equated with formal schooling. In the 1970s, thinkers such as Ivan Illich and Carl Bereiter emphasised that learning is a human activity that is continuous and is in no way restricted to schooling. Ivan Illich wrote that most learning is not the result of instruction, but rather a result of unhampered participation in meaningful settings (Illich 1981). This perspective emphasises the social and communal aspects of learning. Learning is about taking part in an activity. While one does not need to share the scepticism of these writers about the impact or even the necessity of formal learning, their perspectives are still valid in pointing out that much of our learning happens outside schools. Educational paths are about schooling and formal learning, but not exclusively. In a larger sense we need to take into account the wide variety of educational contexts and educational settings. This perspective is embedded in the theory of practice architectures.

We believe the term “education” in English is corrupted, because today, in anglophone usage, it is too often used to mean “schooling” (the activities that routinely go on in different kinds of “educational” institutions that may or may not be educational). Common usage obscures and threatens to erase the important distinction between education and schooling, with the consequence that the philosophical and pedagogical origins and competing intellectual traditions of education as a discipline, field and profession begin to become invisible. (Kemmis *et al.* 2014: 26)

As is clear from the above quotation, the educational paths of youth workers are shaped by processes inside and outside educational institutions. Educational paths inside formal education help one to access the information, concepts, methods, ideas

and values already held by the professional community. For this reason, formal learning is an integral part of the practice architectures that support youth work. Of course, it is not enough to produce competent workers. According to Dana Fusco (2012: 225-6), one important aspect of learning the craft of youth work comes through the lived and applied experiences that teach us the fluidity of human growth. Adopting a perspective of learning through participation will shed light on how youth workers learn. According to the analysis there are considerable differences in the practice architectures for youth work, even where there are formal learning paths available.

The above analysis offers a general view of the practice architectures of youth work. According to a social theory of learning, as developed by Etienne Wenger, learning through participation is the way people learn how to be competent workers. In this theory, individuals are seen as active participants in the practices of social communities, and their professional identity is constructed in these communities. People continuously create their shared identity through engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities. According to Jon Ord, the totality of youth work can be seen as a community of practice because youth work has shared practices, meanings and identities (Ord 2016: 220). A community of practice in youth work supports learning if:

1. there is a social recognition for youth work;
2. there is a possibility of lifelong learning in formal, non-formal and informal environments;
3. there are professional associations and networks, which in turn shape professional learning paths.

Wenger describes learning as having four dimensions. First, there is a dimension of meaning, which is defined as an individual and collective ability to experience life and the world as meaningful (Wenger 2008: 5). In the context of the educational paths of youth workers, this ability means having discourse resources to talk about youth work, to understand it and to find it important to oneself and to society. The collective dimension in this article has been examined from the perspective of legal definitions, quality-assurance mechanisms and competence descriptions. It would be too mechanistic, however, to suppose that having these would be enough to help individuals learn. These available resources need to be experienced as meaningful by youth work communities and by individual youth workers. There is a clear need to research further how well these resources support the learning of individual youth workers.

The second dimension of learning is practice. People learn by doing, and this happens when they engage in activities. This is due to shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action (Wenger 2008: 5). By doing something together, people can learn a craft. In the educational paths of youth workers, this dimension requires that something is recognised as youth work and that there are arenas of doing youth work together. If youth work is about being responsive to youth (Fusco 2012), one clearly has to have opportunities to learn about these ways of working for and with young people in different settings. The richer the practice architectures, the more they provide opportunities to engage in different ways of doing youth work.

The third dimension of social learning is community, which is characterised by learning as belonging. This dimension is about “social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognisable competence” (Wenger 2008: 5). When taking part in a community one learns to appreciate youth work, justify it, defend it and point out its benefits in cross-sectoral co-operation. Youth work communities come into being if youth work is recognised as something that has a recognisable form and ethos. In the educational paths of youth workers this means that individuals must be able to attach themselves to a larger youth work community. This larger community too can be supported by having recognition, common definitions, material resources, organisations and possibilities of learning both inside and outside the formal education system. While the data of this survey do not permit me to draw conclusions about individual countries or regions, I think it is fair to say that the differences in practice architectures certainly must mean that the opportunities for joining youth work communities are vastly different in various parts of Europe.

The fourth dimension of learning is identity – learning as becoming. Learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities (Wenger 2008: 5). In this dimension of learning, the educational path of a youth worker produces the feeling that they can say to themselves: “I am a youth worker, in the community of other youth workers.” What youth workers are able to do and to be is framed by the practice architectures of the specific country or region. Sometimes they can view youth work as a lifetime opportunity, sometimes as something that needs to be fought for or something that may not be economically sustainable. To become a youth worker is to be able to join a community of youth workers, and in this process, develop an identity as a youth worker.

The four dimensions of learning – meaning, practice, community and identity – all demonstrate how educational paths are at the same time individual and communal. These processes are shaped by the existing practice architectures within European countries or regions. The purpose of this chapter was to look at these practice architectures inside the boundaries of countries and regions. Luckily there are many ways of co-operating with other youth workers all around Europe, becoming members of larger European communities of youth workers and finding meaning and identity in joint projects. Therefore, European or global educational paths should be examined as well. They are outside the scope of this work, but the fact needs to be stated: shared frameworks of meaning can be created by working together as a European community of youth work practice.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has provided an analysis of patterns, commonalities and differences in the educational paths of youth workers in Europe. The theoretical framework was based on theories of social learning, in particular the theory of practice architectures as developed by Stephen Kemmis. The analysis was based on the “Mapping the educational paths of youth workers and gathering knowledge on youth work” study, the results of which were further analysed to compare different countries or regions in three dimensions: discourse, material-economic and social. These three

categories were combined to create different groups of European youth work pathways. Results of the analysis show that there are considerable differences across European countries and regions.

According to the analysis, the 44 countries or regions examined can be classified in four different groups. Some 11 countries or regions have strong practice architectures supporting youth work education and probably youth work in general. Another 12 countries or regions also have strong practice architectures, but they may lack important elements which could be developed in the future. Eight countries or regions have created some parts of the practice architectures but would most likely benefit from establishing stronger structures for youth work. Finally, 13 countries or regions are only starting to set up their youth work structures and would probably benefit from learning from other European countries.

Different dimensions of practice architectures are examined separately. However, they are dynamic mechanisms. The constituents of practice architectures – laws, regulation, competence descriptions, availability of education, sustainable career paths, availability of non-formal learning and other important aspects such as physical settings or professional literature that are not examined in this study – “hang together” (Kemmis *et al.* 2014) and form a totality. Evaluating the interlinked totality in a local context is probably necessary to better understand the realities in a specific country or region.<sup>7</sup> To cite only one example, sustainable and identifiable career paths are examined in this study from the viewpoint of economic and material arrangements. In reality, they also influence “sayings” by making it possible to talk about youth work as a profession and they influence “relatings” by giving access to different cross-sectoral networks, for example school-based youth work. Therefore the lack of certain elements in the practice architectures might actually mean that the dynamic effects are lost.

Some countries or regions have developed strong structures which can support the learning of individual youth workers and youth work communities; the situation in some European countries or regions is more challenging. This chapter concludes that there is a need for sharing good practices in youth work and learning from them.

The analysis in this chapter gives only a partial picture of the practice architectures of youth work. As illuminating as comparing countries and regions in this way can be, there are dimensions that are important for learning paths but which cannot be examined based on the approach chosen for this study. Further research is recommended to cover the following topics.

- ▶ The actual career paths of youth workers are only touched upon in this study. On-the-job learning is vital to one’s professional development. Understanding what types of career path (sustainable, cumulative/short-term, precarious) the different practice architectures make possible is likely to shed light on how youth workers learn and develop as individuals and communities.
- ▶ Studying the quality, scope and availability of non-formal learning in specific countries and regions cannot be done reliably using the data of this study.

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7. I am grateful to Hannu Heikkinen and Kathleen Mahon for pointing this out.

A different methodology might be needed. In a context of lifelong learning, opportunities for sharing ideas and learning new things based on one's own motivation are important. Understanding the possibilities that youth workers have for non-formal learning makes the picture of educational paths more complete.

- ▶ The relations dimension could not be covered properly in this study. One aspect of this is the relation of youth work to other professional cultures. How is youth work recognised as a partner? What types of professional networks are formed and what is the role of youth work in these networks? Do youth workers work in isolation or together with other professionals?
- ▶ The links between different topics covered in the analysis should be analysed further. Of particular importance is the connection between formal youth work education and the structures of youth work practice. What are the possibilities for learning in versatile environments (on the job, at the institution, virtual platforms, peer learning)? How is on-the-job learning integrated into the curricula of youth work education?
- ▶ Some aspects of studying the educational paths are likely to require qualitative interviews with youth workers from different backgrounds. In this way the meaningful learning experiences and contexts, as experienced and lived by youth workers, could be explored.
- ▶ An important aspect of the practice architectures of youth work is knowledge about the living conditions of the young. If young people are engaged as the primary clients in their social contexts (Sercombe 2010: 27) in the process of youth work, then youth work requires knowledge about young people. Different methods of producing research about the young and their connection to youth work should be studied to gain a better understanding of how youth work relates to young people and their social networks.

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## Chapter 4

# What do you see? A look at youth work through the prism of sociology of occupations

*Marti Taru*

### **4.1. Introduction**

**T**his chapter seeks to situate our current understandings of the youth work status and developments in the framework of sociology of work and occupations. By doing this, it intends to shed some light on the status of youth work among other occupations.

What is youth work? There is no short answer to that question. To get a glimpse of how complex a topic youth work is, one might start with the chapter on defining youth work in the report on the value of youth work (Dunne *et al.* 2014a). The report maintains that youth work offers young people meaningful activities based on young persons' needs and interests. Through these activities, youth work aims at supporting young persons' personal development. Individual-level personal developments, in turn, are expected to effectuate changes at societal level. Importantly, the report acknowledges the significance of choosing a conceptual framework that is used for describing and defining youth work and which describes a range of theoretical models (Dunne *et al.* 2014a: 53-87a). Youth work in European countries is believed to have a long history, going back at least to the 19th century. It has developed from different origins and contexts, in connection with different target groups and for different purposes, it has been seen as valuable per se and it has been supporting other organisations' work. The history of youth work includes examples of addressing poverty as well as nurturing the development of occupational skills, addressing physical health and social development; it includes faith-related as well as paramilitary organisations; it has focused on cultural development and also on nation building; the list is endless. The majority of adults and young people involved in offering youth work opportunities have been acting on a voluntary basis.<sup>8</sup> The history of youth work adds its share to the complexities of youth work, since the past is embedded in local and social realities, which have varied from country to country and changed over time. Hence, to some degree the complexities with defining youth work arise from

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8. See the "History of youth work. Relevance for youth work policy today" series: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/knowledge-books>.

historical backgrounds. To some degree, complexities associated with identifying exactly what youth work is emerge from the role of the welfare state and European institutions. And, to some extent, a comprehensive wording of what youth work is depends on the conceptual frameworks used for doing so. The next section takes a brief look at three definitions of youth work used by European institutions.

In the European Union, youth work appeared on the policy makers' radars some 30 to 40 years ago, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In its first decade, it had only a vague idea about youth and work experience, but since the beginning of the 1990s, a more articulated idea about how to provide young people with a developmental environment started to develop. The ideas have continually developed into clearer formulations and by the mid-2010s there was a range of European-level (policy-relevant) frameworks to describe quality youth work (Zentner and Ord 2018: 17-31). Youth work has also made its way into core policy documents addressing young people in the European Union. The new EU Youth Strategy for the period 2019-2027 views youth work as "civic and socio-educational activities that give young people life skills and act as a bridge to society, especially for disadvantaged youth" (EC 2018).

Hence, youth work has been given a role in the development of society. Youth work experts have defined youth work in policy contexts as "actions directed towards young people regarding activities where they take part voluntarily, designed for supporting their personal and social development through non-formal and informal learning", and youth workers as "people working in direct contact with young people, carrying out activities designed for supporting their personal and social development through non-formal and informal learning" (EC 2015).

The above definitions apply to all different forms of youth work and also draw a line between youth work and other actions directed towards young people, such as sport and cultural activities (EC 2017). The Council of Europe too has adopted a rather wide view of youth work, though it keeps its focus slightly more on young people. Though it recognises the social nature of youth work, it puts less emphasis on the social functions of the practice:

Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making. (Committee of Ministers 2017)

Side by side with the two large international organisations mentioned above, the co-operation programme between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, known also as the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, needs be highlighted too because this structure has played a significant role in supporting the development of youth work in Europe. The promotion of youth work in Europe has been one of the two central themes of the partnership, with the other one being "better knowledge". The partnership maintains a rather broad understanding of youth work:

Youth work is a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people. Increasingly, such activities also include sport and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the area of “out-of-school” education, as well as specific leisure-time activities managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and is based on non-formal learning processes and on voluntary participation. (Youth Partnership n. d.)

This definition builds on five features of youth work:

- ▶ voluntary participation of young people;
- ▶ listening to the voice of young people;
- ▶ bringing young people together;
- ▶ connecting to young people’s life world;
- ▶ broadening young people’s lifeworld (ibid.).

Today, European public policy expects youth work to make significant, notable contributions to society, life and the well-being of different groups. The new EU Youth Strategy expresses this idea perhaps more clearly than the two other definitions introduced above. Though the ideas of hedonist aspects of well-being and being young together might be present, youth work nowadays is seen to have a role in supporting participation in the formal education system and in learning in non-formal environments, in the transition to the labour market, in addressing social exclusion, in supporting civic activism and participation, and in helping young people to obtain healthy habits (Dunne *et al.* 2014a). Also, violent radicalisation (Youth Partnership 2017a) and the social integration of refugees (Youth Partnership 2016; Youth Partnership 2017b) appear among social issues youth work has chosen to address.

The shift can be associated with the development of the social investment state. While after the Second World War, most European nations enjoyed economic welfare secured by the state, the degree and nature of welfare provision started to change in the final quarter of the 20th century. At that time, new risks to welfare started to become more significant. The list of new risks included the obsolescence of skills and a higher probability of job loss for many parts of society and different age cohorts, uncertain returns from higher education, loss of earnings because of demographic reproduction, changes in the size and composition of families and a reduction of the capacity to provide “in-house” care. State capacity to address the risks was limited due to financial constraints, which in turn were a corollary to liberalisation and globalisation (Hemerijk *et al.* 2013). The new risks to be addressed required new approaches from society, including changes in social protection systems. The new beliefs of what is a good and just society are outlined in the social investment state paradigm (Holmwood 2000; King and Ross 2010). In this paradigm, the balance has shifted from securing well-being through the automatic provision of benefits to a range of measures focusing on activating people to take more responsibility for their well-being. The state is seen to provide directly or assure the provision of services that support the development of skills that were deemed necessary in labour-market participation as well as for civic activism (Soysal 2012). That means more spending on education (especially early childhood education), family policy (parental leave, family services like universal day care and preschool attendance), new measures

focused on helping people find jobs (training, counselling and job placements) and preventive health measures. Youth work is believed to have a significant non-formal learning component and, hence, supports development of a range of skills that contribute to social inclusion. As such, it fits well into the new social investment state paradigm and there are good reasons to include it in public policy measures.

## **4.2. Volunteering based and paid youth work**

During most of its history, youth work has been carried out predominantly by volunteers in youth organisations and other organisations, which have (also) addressed young people. Together with the expansion of the role of the state at national level and the strengthening of the European Union at supra-national level, the significance of paid youth workers has been growing. To date, the distinction between paid and volunteer youth work has remained one of the most visible watersheds in the field of youth policy and youth work. While the new youth strategy by the European Commission makes no distinction between paid and volunteer youth workers, the Council of Europe definition mentions paid and voluntary youth workers separately and so does the definition used by the Youth Partnership.

The distinction between paid and volunteer youth workers is an appropriate one to make. Volunteering is a rather common practice in youth work today; the number of volunteers greatly outweighs the number of paid youth workers in the EU (Dunne *et al.* 2014b: 13). The situation, however, is not similar in all countries. On the contrary, the share of volunteer youth workers and their role varies significantly across European countries. In Ireland, the number of youth work volunteers in 2012 was 40 145 while the number of paid employment was 1 397, constituting thus only 3.3% of all youth workers (Indecon 2012). In Scotland in 2017, the youth work sector had a workforce in excess of 80 000 and more than 70 000 of them were volunteers. Hence, only 10% or less of youth workers were paid youth workers (Green 2018). In the Netherlands, the number of volunteer youth workers seems to greatly exceed the number of paid youth workers; exact numbers are not available because there is no count of volunteers (Dunne *et al.* 2014b). In Estonia, the situation seems to be the opposite. According to an online survey carried out in 2017 among youth workers, only 8% of youth workers were involved on a voluntary basis, 79% identified themselves as being employed full-time and 13% on a part-time or seasonal basis. The total number of youth workers in the country was not known, but was estimated to be approximately 7 000 (Käger *et al.* 2018; Rasmussen 2018).

The sheer numbers of voluntary youth work practitioners is one reason to make the distinction between paid and volunteer practitioners. Yet there is another reason too – this is the difference in tasks. In the public policy contexts, this difference is perhaps more challenging than the numbers alone. Using volunteers to perform certain activities and carry out certain tasks is a rather widespread and long-standing practice in society. It is also a very significant part of youth work as the history of youth work shows. In general, the tasks that volunteers usually perform are not the core tasks of an organisation but helping and supporting activities that help to carry out core functions and tasks. According to McAllum, paid practitioners and volunteers differ on three dimensions. They differ on the degree of the requirements

on and control of prior knowledge. In general, volunteers' level of knowledge is not controlled and checked prior to engaging in a practice while paid employment positions usually include control and prior knowledge. In professional posts, complex knowledge and specialist skills are assumed and this is controlled both before assuming a post as well as during practice. Second, in general there is a lack of regulation and control of volunteers' practice while paid professionals' practice is regulated and controlled by professional associations. The third differentiating factor between volunteers and paid practitioners in general is that volunteers are motivated by their wish to be involved in a certain activity while professionals are perhaps more task- and career-oriented. Volunteers are often moved by the heart and personally invested in what they do while paid professionals are not or are to a notably lesser degree. The difference between volunteers and paid professionals may be less significant in the case of volunteers who engage in complex activities like, for instance, volunteers dedicated to firefighting, victim support services, or youth outreach programmes. Under these circumstances, the differences in knowledge, skills and control over practices between volunteers and paid practitioners are not significant (McAllum 2018).

Indeed, voluntary youth work may have some extras for participating children and young people, simply because they ascribe volunteers different motivation from paid practitioners (Hoogervorst *et al.* 2014). Nevertheless, the topic of task differentiation between volunteer and paid youth workers is more complex than how young people understand youth workers' motivation. Complexities start growing from the fact that young people differ by their background and, hence, have different needs. The question about voluntary and paid youth work becomes a question of whether paid and volunteer youth workers are equally capable of carrying out different tasks and functions that are required in public policy frameworks. In the Netherlands for instance, the needs of young people are addressed by three different kinds of service providers who carry out different tasks. Professional, paid youth workers target mainly young people at risk (10% of the youth population) and marginalised young people (1%); youth care specialists address young people with special needs (4%); and volunteer youth workers focus on the rest of the youth population. Professional youth workers involved volunteers in their activities; volunteers are not independent but work under supervision of professional youth workers (Dunne *et al.* 2014b). In Estonia it is expected that all youth workers, acting either on a paid or volunteer basis, act in accordance with the youth worker professional standard. To support achieving this goal, a youth worker certification system has been introduced by the Estonian Youth Work Centre, which is a state organisation responsible for organising youth work. However, only a small fraction of youth workers have passed the certification exam – in June 2018, only 158 youth workers owned the youth worker professional qualification certificate (approximately 2.3%) and 2 213 owned a partial professional qualification certificate (approximately 32%) (Rasmussen 2018).

The issues of workload and work complexity were also brought out in the focus groups interviews with youth workers. A youth worker often has to perform like a one-man band: he or she must be able to navigate successfully the issues of traditional youth work (making contact with young people, organising their leisure time), social work (recognising and addressing young people from vulnerable backgrounds,

designing interventions for them), project management (applying for funding, managing and reporting on projects) and general management (building alliances, writing development plans) (FGI\_3; FGI\_4). This is rather challenging. In general, to perform all tasks and activities and comply with all requirements, a full- or part-time position is more appropriate than a volunteering role. At the same time, volunteers constitute the larger part of youth workers in Europe. Also, they have the personal skills and motivation to work with young people. Making effective use of both paid and volunteer youth workers requires an appropriate division of tasks and workload between both groups. Currently, the division of tasks between volunteers and paid practitioners in the youth work field is not clear and well described. It is a question that is awaiting serious attention from all stakeholder groups. The question about volunteer and paid youth workers is about what tasks both types of youth workers are expected to carry out. The case of the Netherlands makes the point – while volunteer youth workers have what it takes to support the development of the majority of young people, there are also categories of young people that require more skills, different motivation and more resources from people working with young people. These kinds of groups and associated tasks might be more effectively addressed by professional, paid youth workers.

### **4.3. Views on youth work development and professionalisation**

The vocabulary of analysing occupations and professions has been used by quite a number of researchers for the analysis of youth work situations and developments (Balzerman and VeLure Roholt 2016; MacNeil *et al.* 2016; Panagides *et al.* n.d.; Starr and Gannett 2016) In general, there seems to be little doubt that the notions of profession, professionalism and professionalisation have some appeal for youth work. This suggests that concepts embodying the core of the sociology of professions are seen as an appropriate “language” or analytical tools to be used when discussing the situation of youth work in society.

The struggle for youth work professionalisation has quite a long history. It is perhaps Finland where youth work professionalisation took off first, immediately after the Second World War. By the mid-1980s youth work had reached semi-professional status but was not on the same level as professions like doctors, lawyers, teachers, psychologists or even social workers (Nieminen 2014). Arguably, youth workers in Australia and the USA have been seeking professionalism since the beginning of the 1990s in the former and since the beginning of 1970s in the latter (Emslie 2013). On that road, youth work certainly has made notable progress, so much so that by 2004 Sercombe had expressed the opinion that “the fact is of course that youth work is already a professional practice.” However, he mentioned only very few countries where youth work was professional. Among European countries, only the UK, Malta, Finland and Ireland were mentioned (Sercombe 2004).

However, there is little if any evidence at all that youth work professionalisation would improve youth work practice. Johnston-Goodstar and VeLure Roholt (2013), having looked into the professionalisation of social work and teaching, reach the conclusion that “the pursuit of professionalisation will not guarantee desired outcomes” and “what we can say with confidence is that the professionalisation of youth

work does not necessarily ensure quality practice". For them, increasing the quality of practice is paramount, leading them to ask: "what sort of processes can we create that identify quality and hone in on quality practice?". A similar line of thinking and similar concerns have been expressed by Maurice Devlin. He too is concerned mainly with the quality of services offered by youth work to society and less by the formal status of youth work. Judging youth work by the standards of service quality, he is convinced that youth work already is a profession because it is a useful practice in society. However, the question youth workers should answer is whether they want youth work to be a profession, which is clearly demarcated from other professions, or do they want youth work to stay as it is now, only partly legally defined and protected (Devlin 2012). That the two goals – improving practice and impact and being more visible and recognised in society – need not be contradicting is seen in the case of Finland, where professionalisation improved both the quality of and access to youth work (Nieminen 2014).

#### **4.4. Professionalisms**

In sociological research on the division and organisation of work, four concepts have been used extensively in the development of explanations: occupation, profession, professionalisation and professionalism. Occupation means every activity, work, function or job that is the main source of someone's income. Occupational family or occupational group is a grouping of several similar occupations, or jobs, into more general categories. Profession has been seen as a specific type of occupation and it is common to speak about professional occupations. What sets a profession apart from an occupation? With a profession, the interrelated concepts of professional autonomy and social closure are associated. Professional autonomy denotes a high control of practitioners over the work they are doing. It is professionals themselves who decide about values, goals, quality criteria, methods, ethics, organisation of work, nuances of the body of knowledge and the transfer of knowledge in the education system; the rest of society has relatively little influence on that. Professional autonomy and control over practice rests on an assumption that only practitioners of a profession have access to this specialised body of skills and knowledge, and that no other is capable of assessing the quality of their professional performance. Social closure means that entrance to an occupation in the status of the profession is restricted, often by imposing education and/or licensing requirements which set conditions that must be present before one is allowed to start practice. Professionals or practitioners of a profession enjoy a high status in society together with high remuneration for their job. Medical doctors are often seen as an archetypical profession. Professionalisation in this framework refers to the process of an occupation evolving towards a profession.

Professions – professionalised occupations – have not always existed; on the contrary, very few clearly distinct professions existed before the 19th century, even if people competent and skilled in a particular discipline have been valued in all societies. The first professional occupations were members of the clergy, physicians and legal professionals (see Larson 1977). Contemporary thinking on occupations is even younger and its beginnings can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s. Hence, both occupations, and thinking about them, have been in a state of change. It is only

natural that also nowadays, both the world of work as well as analytical frameworks used for analysing work are changing. Work and occupations are subsumed in a range of changes in society: the increasing influence of external forms of regulation, which occur within a nation state (welfare state) as well as between different tiers of public administration (e.g. at the EU, nation state, ministry and municipality level), the increasing importance of audit and measurement, targets and performance indicators, the standardisation of work and exerting financial control over jobs, individualisation and competition, and increased co-operation between societal sectors. These factors have helped to shift the control over work from occupational organisations and collegial relationships to organisations where work flows, values, priorities and the organisation of work is controlled by managers and sponsors (Evetts 2014). Amid these societal changes existing professions change, new professions emerge and develop, and established professions lose their autonomy and degree of social closure. For instance, one of the most established professions – medical doctors – has been losing its autonomy gradually. At the same time, adult educators in Europe are struggling for professionalisation (Berhardsson and Lattke 2011). These societal changes also constitute the context and development environment for youth work as an occupation.

Not only is the world of work ever changing, but thinking about work and occupations is in a permanent state of evolution. It is as a result of this process that it has been argued that drawing a solid line between occupation and profession is not justified and that the distinction between an occupation and a profession is not of a kind but of a degree. The concepts of profession as a (desired) endpoint in the development of an(y) occupation and of professionalisation as a process leading towards that endpoint have been considered outdated (Evetts 2014). In contemporary thinking on work, the notions of professions and professionalisation have been complemented by the notion of professionalism, more concretely by three variants of it:

- ▶ professionalism as a (normative) value;
- ▶ professionalism as a discourse;
- ▶ professionalism as a professional project.

Professionalism here is understood as a way to describe the degree and quality of practice, and the creation of a culture of quality. The three different variants of it point to different aspects and different social mechanisms that define how specific features of professionalism come about. By introducing the notion of professionalism, we complement the idea that profession as a special kind of occupation is the desirable (endpoint) of development/evolution of an occupation with the three concepts/variants of professionalism. This is an improvement in analytical thinking as it offers better opportunities to focus on specific features of practice and on social mechanisms that demonstrate how the features come about, and how social and administrative environments influence those aspects. All three variants assume that occupations differ and are organised into hierarchical systems, maintaining that being “on top” of the pyramid is more desirable than being “at the base” of the pyramid. However, the three-variant approach differs in how the emergence of the hierarchy is explained and what nuances and details are highlighted. The earlier professionalisation model should not be abandoned entirely (Saks 2012).

## **4.5. Professionalism as a normative value**

Professionalism as a normative value maintains that the value of occupations emerges from the specialist knowledge and skills that practitioners command and exercise for the good of other people, following professional ethics. Different occupations are valued differently in society; some are more valuable than others. Because professional practitioners command unparalleled expertise in providing certain services to society, then only practitioners have the competence to evaluate their performance, the quality of the service they offer and other work-related aspects. Therefore, the control over practice, the evaluation of outcomes, identifying malpractice and dealing with underperformers is the task and privilege of the practitioners' community only. This leads to autonomous communities of practice, which exercise control over practitioners through professional organisations. They also may liaise with the state to establish legal restrictions for entering the profession. A specialist body of (scientific) knowledge – its creation, updating and development and transfer through the education system – is one of the central tenets of this version of professionalism. The formal education system has other functions besides just the transfer of specialist knowledge and skills – in addition to this, formal education is seen as a method for socialising practitioners into professional ethics and integrating them into the body of practitioners (see also Chapter 1). Though the specialist body of knowledge and skills and the transfer mechanisms play an important role in all concepts of professionalism, their role is most significant in this understanding of professionalism.

## **4.6. Youth work relevance**

This view of professionalism emphasises the importance of a specialist body of knowledge and skills. This specialised body of knowledge and skills involves different aspects like building the knowledge base using scientific methods (or other methods, which seems to be quite a vital idea among some youth workers), communicating the knowledge to others in society and transferring the knowledge to entrants into the profession through the formal education system and training.

Earlier research has established that, subject-wise, the background to youth workers' formal education (or degree education) in European countries is diverse and, in addition to non-specialist training, comes mainly from six areas:

- ▶ social pedagogy;
- ▶ social sciences;
- ▶ social work/social care;
- ▶ educational sciences;
- ▶ another area of education (e.g. nursing, finance, engineering);
- ▶ youth work.

Youth work degree-level education is the dominant field of education for youth workers in a minority of European countries: Malta, France, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In the majority of countries, most youth workers have education from some of the other four areas. Non-specialist

training is predominant in four countries: Portugal, Greece, Romania, Slovenia (Dunne *et al* 2014a: 118-21). In Germany, university-level youth work studies are connected to social work and social pedagogy. At the level of vocational education, youth work specialists have often completed a programme for educators and child-care workers. Christian youth workers are trained in the theological education institutes and their programmes include hands-on practice of Christian youth work. In Croatia there are no university programmes on youth work but there are different university programmes for specialists who work with young people. The programmes are built around social work, social pedagogy, pedagogy and primary education. In Scotland, there are BA degrees, a postgraduate diploma, an MA degree and PhD programmes in Community Learning and Development/Community Education (Kiilakoski 2018).

According to a survey carried out among international youth workers in the second half of 2018 (Survey\_1), almost half of youth workers have obtained either post-secondary or tertiary-level youth work degrees from a formal education system (48%). Another quarter had passed accredited or validated course(s) that did not lead to a degree and only 27% had not passed any of the courses. When we take a look at the education obtained outside youth work, we see that altogether more than 90% have obtained either a post-secondary or tertiary degree and only 4% have no specialist education (Table 8).

**Table 8. Highest level of education of youth workers (n=215; weighted data)**

	In general, including education outside youth work	Specifically in the area of youth work
<b>Higher education</b>	84%	42%
<b>Vocational education</b>	8%	6%
<b>Accredited or validated course</b>	5%	26%
<b>None of the above</b>	4%	27%

As the survey shows, though the largest group of youth workers obtained their formal education degree outside youth work, the field of specialisation of approximately half of youth workers is either youth work or fairly close to youth work (Table 9). Knowledge and skills obtained in informal and/or non-formal learning, psychology, social work, education and teaching degree programmes can be used either directly when in contact with young people in youth work settings work or indirectly, for example when developing, implementing or managing youth work organisations, projects and programmes. The group of other subject areas (52%) was composed of different subjects ranging from social research to philosophy and agriculture. People with this educational background will need to go through a more thorough training in youth work in order to become youth workers.

**Table 9. Educational backgrounds of youth workers (n=215; weighted data)**

Youth work	13%
Psychology	8%
Education, teaching, pedagogics	6%
Non-formal/informal learning, leisure, sports and management	12%
Social work	6%
Arts	3%
Other areas	52%

A focus group with youth workers from nine different countries conducted in Cascais in June 2018 showed that the overall level of education of youth workers was high: all group participants had acquired a BA or MA-level education, one even had finished two MA programmes. None of the group participants had studied the youth worker curriculum and none had a youth worker diploma or degree from a formal education system (vocational school or university). Instead they had studied different subjects, some of which were related in some way to youth work while others were evidently less relevant (FGI\_4). In the focus group conducted in June in Strasbourg, most of the participants held a university degree in youth work-related social sciences (psychology or pedagogy, for example). Some of the participants held a degree in subjects that were further away from youth work. Some of them had acquired specialist education in youth work from training courses (FGI\_6). The focus group with employers and youth work organisers emphasised the significance of training courses outside degree programmes (FGI\_5). Another focus group brought the importance of peer learning to the fore, and the dominant view expressed in the focus group held by representatives of youth organisations was that non-formal education and learning should be preferred over formal education when it comes to acquiring youth work skills. Participants not only saw non-formal education and training as preferential, but also saw formal qualifications as an adjunct rather than a necessity for youth workers (FGI\_2). Among seven FGI\_3 participants, one had a secondary degree, four had a BA and two had an MA degree. Subject-wise, three of the participants, or 43%, had a youth work degree while two had teacher education and three had graduated from other fields. Every participant had engaged in youth field training courses. For most people, the number of training courses participated in was up from 20 and to more than 30, although there were also people who had only attended up to 10 training courses. From the number of participations in courses per year, participants could be divided into two groups: those participating in one to three courses per year and those participating in four to six per year. In the focus group FGI\_7, only a few participants out of the 18 had gained the “official youth work certificate” through non-formal training programmes or university courses, but they had plenty of courses under their belts. Among youth organisation activists, many talked about their formal learning or training and emphasised the importance of peer learning and networks (FGI\_1). Table 10 below summarises in a qualitative manner the findings of the survey and focus groups on the educational and learning background of youth workers, youth work trainers and managers active in the international arena.

**Table 10. Formal education and non-formal learning backgrounds of youth workers**

	Level/amount	Study subject/Subject area
<b>Formal education</b>	High	Mainly not youth work-specific, partly from “neighbouring” occupations, partly from other subject areas
<b>Training, non-formal learning</b>	A lot	Youth work-specific

The survey and focus groups show that youth workers themselves and youth work organisers consider youth work education highly important. This is clearly seen in the youth workers’ educational backgrounds as well as in opinions expressed during interviews. Despite the absence of formal requirements for acquiring specialist youth work education before starting out as a youth worker and despite limited opportunities to acquire such education, the vast majority has acquired some form of higher education qualification. Many have acquired this in areas closely related to youth work but some in areas that are further removed from youth work practice. As the chapter by O’Donovan *et al.* shows, youth work degrees from colleges and universities are available in relatively few European countries: out of the 41 Council of Europe<sup>9</sup> countries, which were surveyed, six have formal education degree courses in youth work, and 11 other countries offer programmes in youth work-related fields. Vocational and further education and training for youth workers are also provided by 17 countries, while eight countries provide both degree and vocational courses. Non-formal education and training courses for youth workers are available in 39 of the countries surveyed (see Chapter 2).

Taken together, it can be said that a high percentage of youth workers have not acquired specialist youth work education. At the same time, the findings from the focus groups and survey suggest that youth workers would be eager to learn, if there were more opportunities to do so. The results indicate the very high importance attached to non-formal learning and training courses outside the formal education system for the occupational preparation of youth workers. In fact, the results suggest that youth workers may perceive this to be more important for transferring specialist knowledge and skills than formal education. Against these survey results, the virtues of formal education also need to be kept in mind. In formal education, youth workers will acquire a solid base of knowledge necessary for successful youth work practice. And it needs to be kept in mind that in contemporary societies formal education is one of the central attributes of a profession or a highly professionalised occupation. Also, the existence of research centres and knowledge hubs is characteristic of well-established and recognised occupations and professions. There are institutes, schools and research centres involved in producing high-quality knowledge about social work and education, two of the social policy fields which are close to youth work. There are hardly any such research centres in the youth work field. Indeed, youth work itself is often taught by scholars who were educated and are working mainly in other areas like social work, education or community studies. Yet specialist research centres for youth work could play a unique role in society because their expertise

9. The Council of Europe has 47 member states, but six of them did not respond.

would be the production and communication of high-quality knowledge about the different aspects of youth work practice. Youth work research centres would contribute to the improvement of youth work practice quality and would increase the impact of youth work. They could become sites of innovative knowledge production. For instance, their research methods could include more participatory elements like in the project Evaluation and Communication of Youth Work in Europe (Ord *et al.* 2018). Their capabilities could include also producing evidence that is recognised by others in society, including public administrators and policy makers. Such research would be particularly beneficial for the development of voluntary youth work, since this field has received minimal research attention compared to the significance of volunteers in youth work. The research could support the development of knowledge-based models about the division of tasks between paid and voluntary youth workers.

#### **4.7. Professionalism as a discourse**

Professionalism as a discourse is an understanding that professionalism can be constructed and imposed on an occupation and on practitioners “from above”. In the contemporary welfare state, many welfare services are financed from a common budget, not provided on the basis of voluntary activities or market interactions. There are different arrangements for providing services paid for from the public purse – services may be provided by public-sector organisations, but it is also quite common that not-for-profit organisations (NPOs) or business organisations are contracted to provide such services. Of course, concrete arrangements differ across countries because they depend on the institutional set-up as well as on the history of the country. However, requirements of accountability, trust and transparency are inevitable, leading to increased regulation, audit and assessment.

Occupational groups often welcome this access to public resources. For practitioners this may mean an opportunity to continue their practice. Access to these resources comes together with increased control over practice because the provider of financial means expects to receive a certain type and quality of service, not just any service. In the case of youth work in Europe, financial and organisational support comes most often from the public sector. As practitioners may need to follow certain rules in order to be able to receive the support, their everyday realities may be different from the ideals contained in the concept of occupational professionalism, which entails autonomy of the expert and includes control over goals, values, processes and the organisation of work in general. Practitioners who are employed by large organisations or who are controlled through financing conditions actually may have very little autonomy. This managerial control constructs and imposes a certain version of practice on an occupation or occupational group, which they themselves, as experts in the practice and occupation, would not have chosen. Another concept is organisational professionalism – this highlights the fact that many practitioners work in large organisations, under the control of managers. Hence, their practices are constructed and controlled by their line managers. With reason, there is a term that refers to such practice – managerialism. The influence of organisations on occupations is significant, to the degree that some professions have been created by large organisations, not only transformed. Such professions include the emergent expert occupations, such as management consultancy, information management,

advertising and PR (Ackroyd 2016; Reed 2018). It could also be argued that youth work is influenced by such practices.

#### **4.8. Youth work relevance**

These understandings of professionalism – professionalism as a discourse constructed from above by policy makers and organisational professionalism; that is, practice significantly influenced by managers and financiers and which reduces the control of the pool of practitioners – turns the spotlight on to youth work’s struggle against instrumentalisation. The instrumental aspects of the role of youth work are evident, for example, in the new European Youth Strategy, which sees youth work as a method for informal and non-formal learning that is to support achieving policy goals. The strategy also emphasises the need to adapt youth work to a changing social and technological environment (EC 2018).

From the history of youth work we know that many large and powerful organisations have developed their own youth chapters where youth work is carried out on their terms, that is, in accordance with organisational values and practices. Churches, political parties, paramilitary organisations, professional organisations and hobby clubs are perhaps the most well-known types of organisations to have established youth chapters and/or youth organisations where work with young people is carried out in accordance with the values of the parent organisations. The list of such organisations is long and its history goes back to the very beginnings of youth work in Europe; recent decades have neither created nor reinvented this pattern. The increasing significance of the European Union may have placed certain accents here through supporting implementation of the ideas of the social investment state, which complement the ideas of the social welfare state, also in youth work. Increasing youth labour-market readiness and supporting their transition to the world of work certainly have moved up the ladder of youth work priorities. This might hold increasing support for, as well as controls over, youth work practice.

Some youth workers may perceive the tendency to increasingly define youth work through its social utility function and to some degree as diverging from the ideals and values of youth work’s occupational professionalism. These disconcerting ideas arise from the currents of different understandings of the nature of youth work and its role in society. Contemporary public administration systems, which increasingly value management by numbers, use target indicators and expect that effects and impacts can be demonstrated by figures, also impose similar practices on youth work. However, although there is a variant of youth work which is relatively well compatible with youth work’s organisational professionalism and youth work as a discourse, there are also other understandings of youth work. The compatible youth work paradigm starts out from the needs of society. Within this paradigm, it is important to achieve the socialisation of a young person into a functioning social order; they not only need to respect the values that are deemed important but also must actively support them. Hence, it is only natural to expect that nowadays – in the late 2010s – youth work contributes to tackling social issues such as reducing youth unemployment and school dropout rates, and aiding the social inclusion of young immigrants and refugees. However, it is important to note too that the history

of youth work also includes the teaching of other values that were once cherished or expected in, for instance, authoritarian states, like patriotism and obedience. The theory of positive youth development (Benson *et al.* 2007; Snyder and Flay 2012) and the Five Cs are examples of youth work concepts that are commensurable with this youth work paradigm (Geldhof *et al.* 2015; Ramey and Rose-Krasnor 2012). Concrete goals depend on time and place and are determined by policy needs, and therefore by issues and challenges a society is perceived as facing at a particular time. The list may include patriotism and ethnic identity, entrepreneurship and employability skills, socio-political activism, adherence to school rules, and/or other goals. An important takeaway point from here is that goals, values and the organisation of youth work practice is to a significant extent imposed on youth work “from above”, by managers and policy officers who finance youth work activities, and not decided collegially by youth work practitioners.

However, other youth workers find using the methods of youth work for addressing social problems inappropriate. The “In Defence of Youth Work” movement is a good example of these views (In Defence of Youth Work n.d.). An alternative, process-based paradigm of youth work maintains that youth work is about providing young people with a developmental and supportive environment on their own terms, starting from the needs and individual situations of each young person. Youth work has to support the development of this young person. What exactly the outcomes of such youth work are is impossible to know and predict in advance because young humans and the youth work process is too complex to be predictable. Proponents of this approach maintain that, in fact, there is no need to know this (Belton 2014; Ord 2016). In this paradigm, the young person is given centre stage and treated on an equal footing as adults (Sapin 2009). While it is hard if not impossible to predict youth work outcomes, it is still an organised and planned activity (Kiilakoski 2015). This standpoint does not necessarily tally with the concept of profession as a discourse; because the starting point is different, discrepancies between youth workers and policy makers’ perceived needs and wants arise.

The increasing package of interventions in the lives of young people, in their socialisation and transition from childhood dependencies to independent and contributing members of societies, comes together with resources for implementing those interventions. A variety of resources are increasingly being allocated to the youth field and youth work, ranging from organisational and local-level budgets to national or European programmes like Erasmus+ and structural funds. These resources are available for both paid and volunteer youth workers. The emergence and development of cross-sectoral youth policy may bring along another shift that will shape youth work – a shift towards the increased integration of services that address young people. By definition, collaboration is central to the youth field (Nico 2017). This trend is emerging and developing because of increasing support from the public sector and the public sector’s general shift towards co-operation (Taru 2017). Current public policy developments and priorities certainly encourage collaboration in the youth field further, as the new European Youth Strategy puts co-operation, both cross-sectoral and vertical, at the heart of the youth field:

Cross-sectoral cooperation should be reinforced at all levels of decision-making searching synergies, complementarity between actions, and including greater youth involvement.

Member States should encourage youth and other stakeholders to set up joint initiatives, for example in education, employment, digital, sport, sustainability and international cooperation, using the full potential of EU funding. (EC 2018: 9)

At the level of addressing the needs of a young person through youth work, co-operation often means collaboration between specialists, opening one-stop shops where youth workers make the first contact with young people, making youth work necessary and useful for other organisations and specialists. There are good examples of public-sector-supported collaboration formats where youth workers work together with specialists of other occupations. Ohjaamo in Finland is an example of a “one-stop shop” where youth workers together with other specialists work in low threshold youth guidance centres (Ohjaamo n.d.). Another example of youth workers working together with other specialists is the Youth Prop Up programme in Estonia (Youth Prop Up). In these two collaboration formats, paid youth workers participate. Whether such collaboration would work equally well for paid and volunteer youth workers is a question which has no definitive answer for now. Since both of the examples target a category of young people which includes those who are not the easiest to help, this may require specific skills and resources that may be unavailable to volunteers. However, this does not necessarily mean that volunteer youth workers cannot participate – rather it is a question about the division of roles and tasks.

Analysis of reports from focus groups FGI\_1 to FGI\_7 did not reveal youth workers’ critical attitudes or opinions towards youth work funders or youth work organisers that could be based on contradictions between youth workers and youth work funders’ or organisers’ different understandings of the role of youth work. These debates could have easily emerged in groups where youth workers, youth work organisers and funders were present (FGI\_1, FGI\_2, FGI\_5, FGI\_7). However, such contradictions did not emerge – a research finding that can be interpreted as absence of significant contradictions between these groups. In none of the focus groups, the two paradigms of youth work – youth centred and society centred – were discussed. This is a sign that this is not a significant issue; had it been, it would have surfaced during discussion, as we see in the next paragraph. The need for and a high value of collaboration skills for youth workers surfaced in one of the focus groups (FGI\_3). There participants emphasised the need to offer organisations, who are willing to partner with youth work organisations, something in return, and not only to expect to gain something from them.

In some focus groups, all participants did not identify themselves as youth workers in the first place. Among participants in the group held in Ljubljana, some did not see themselves as youth workers because of lack of recognition of youth work in their home country (FGI\_7). For them, identifying as a youth worker bore a negative meaning. In another group, even the majority of participants did not identify themselves as youth workers, primarily because of lack of recognition of youth work in the countries where they worked. Another reason brought to the fore was lack of experience (FGI\_6). Since it emerged spontaneously, it is a sign that the issue was actually scratching their minds. These countries, where lack of recognition did influence youth worker identity significantly, were located in the south of Europe and in the Western Balkans region.

## **4.9. Professionalism as a professional project**

The concept of profession as a professional project emphasises the agency of professions in achieving market power and social standing (Muzio *et al.* 2013). The concept grew out of developments in the liberal societies of the United States and the United Kingdom where the role of the state was relatively weak compared to that of continental Europe. Hence, there was more “space” for and a higher need to take more responsibility for well-being by professional associations. This variant of professionalism maintains that professional groups’ development is motivated by professionals seeking to establish a monopoly for their service in a society to put them in a better position to influence control over work, including professional autonomy and remuneration. Moreover, a professional group in a monopolistic position may have the power to influence and even “captivate” the state so that its monopolistic position in society and control over the conditions of service provision becomes more undisputed. As such, the notion of a “professional project” has somewhat negative connotations and meanings as it is associated with a struggle for the power and well-being of a professional group rather than for the good of the whole of society. It is maintained that practitioners’ intentions and activities are motivated by the wish to gain a monopolistic position in society and at the same time to secure access to resources and high social status. In terms of social closure, this variant of professionalism comes close to professionalism as an ideology and value variant. However, instead of providing more value through better services, here we see a focus on establishing organisational power. The concept maintains that the development of specialist practices is significantly influenced by these motivations.

## **4.10. Youth work relevance**

This concept of professionalism highlights the importance of a unification of practitioners – “united we stand strong”, or even “United we stand, divided we fall”. Youth work is a field of practice consisting of a multitude of methods, which address different social challenges, target different groups of young people and are expected to contribute to a range of social policy goals. Many activities are divided further by the voluntary/paid youth worker divide. While methodological variety can be seen as a strength of youth work, it also has been seen as a challenge in itself and the desire for increasing unity and reducing variety within the youth work field is clearly present in the Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention:

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. 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. (European Youth Work Convention 2015)

The development of a common framework for youth work quality (EC 2015) and a charter on youth work (Europe Goes Local n.d.) testify to the attempts to increase (methodological) unanimity in the youth work field. It is a top-down initiative. The

concept of practice architectures deems important three aspects of a practice – sayings, doings and relations, and maintains that these three aspects are historically and institutionally embedded in society. Applying the concept to youth work, Tomi Kiilakoski classifies 44 Council of Europe countries and regions into four categories according to the level of “practice architectures” (see Chapter 3). He concludes that approximately 25% of the countries belong to the category where there are “Strong practice architectures” and another 25% of countries belong to the category that features “Strong practice architectures, room for development on a certain level”. This leaves the remaining 50% in the categories “Practice architectures where some parts have been developed” and “Practice architectures in need of development”. Roughly similar findings are presented in Chapter 9 which describes youth worker networks and organisations in Council of Europe countries: youth worker organisations are functioning in 24 countries and absent in 17. In addition, youth worker networks, NGOs and youth organisations’ networks are present in 10 countries. The main function of the networks and organisations as presented in the chapter is to support youth work practice in the countries. And there are also three pan-European networks. All in all, the chapter leaves an impression that countries differ notably in terms of how (well) the organisations fulfil this function. While in some countries youth worker organisations seem to be strong and serve their members’ interests well, youth workers in other countries probably cannot enjoy a similar level of support. In addition, the chapter gives the impression that the level of youth worker organisations is relatively low at national and European level. After all, only 10 countries with developed youth worker networks and organisations is not many. This conclusion is corroborated by the fact that there are only three European-level organisations that unite youth workers.

Compared to teaching occupations and also to social work, the degree of development of youth worker organisations in many if not most European countries is relatively low. One of the reasons is probably the relatively wide variety of youth work methodologies. When organisations are based on a concrete youth work method or historical heritage, then this necessarily leads to a relatively high number of organisations, which means increased fragmentation in the field. Another reason might be associated with the fact that not all youth work is performed by youth workers, but also by those in other occupations. These people might have joined their own professional organisations and have weaker motivation to join youth work organisations.

#### **4.11. Conclusions**

Youth work as a practice has been and is in the process of development and change, like other occupations. This is only normal. Changes within and around youth work occur in and are caused by changes in the organisational, administrative and social environments where youth work operates. The ideas of the social investment state, where investment in young people occupies an important position, are influencing the policy environment where youth work operates. Within this perspective, youth work gains a more significant function in society as policy makers expect youth work to contribute to youth socialisation and the transition from dependence on parents to independence, to becoming active and contributing members of society. Policies

of social inclusion and, in this context, measures addressing vulnerable young people from less advantaged backgrounds play a special role.

One of the features that influences the development of youth work is a high share of voluntary youth workers. The question that is waiting to be seriously addressed is: “What should the division of work between volunteer and paid youth work practitioners be so that it has a positive influence on young people and on society at large?” This issue has been given notice but, to date, there is no consensus on what the way forward should be.

The chapter introduced three concepts from the sociology of occupations – professionalism as a normative value, as a discourse and as a professional project – and employed them to describe youth work. Each of the three perspectives highlights different aspects and also points out different opportunities for youth work.

The occupation as a value perspective highlights the significance of specialist knowledge. Indeed, specialist knowledge is indispensable when it comes to providing high-quality services. Knowledge is not static; on the contrary, it is constructed by different actors in the context of evolving circumstances. Also, the knowledge base of youth work needs permanent development, renewal and updating. For knowledge creation, specialist youth work research institutions would be appropriate. For transferring the specialist knowledge, study programmes within formal education and non-formal learning environments are inescapable. The distinction between degree programmes and short training courses helps also to meet the different needs of volunteer and paid youth workers. From the sociology of occupations perspective, the institutions responsible for creating and transmitting high-quality knowledge are at the heart of highly professionalised and recognised occupations.

Looking through the occupation-as-a-discourse lens shows us that youth work could benefit from an increased investment of public funds in youth-related social challenges and issues. By its very nature, youth work commands expert knowledge on how young people think and behave. Youth workers also possess skills to support young people. Increasing investments in young people create a window of opportunity for youth work, which can use its expertise to contribute to achieving various policy goals. Supporting youth participation in education and finding employment are perhaps the most common ones, but there are more. Through providing this support, its role in society will also be better recognised. As this perspective suggests, this comes at some “cost” – youth work, which has its own ethos as well as goals and standards, must adapt to the needs of other policy areas. However, there are no signs that this is significantly problematic now. A very important aspect here is the differentiation between voluntary and paid youth workers – public policy programmes need to be used in a way that will support the development of integrated youth work communities of volunteer and paid youth workers.

The concept of occupation as a professional project emphasises the agency of professions in achieving social standing. It also highlights social closure aspects, despite not having been deemed important by researchers who have addressed youth work professionalisation before. Nevertheless, this variant of professionalism also involves professional autonomy and self-management. For a higher internal control, a way ahead could be the increased collaboration between youth worker

organisations. Co-ordinated actions would also increase the negotiating power with stakeholders and partners. Youth work is internally a rather heterogeneous family of occupations consisting of different methodologies, addressing different target groups and supporting the achievement of different policy goals. Establishing a single strong umbrella organisation has been, and still is, a challenge. However, building alliances would be an imperative for a family of occupations, which aims to gain a more recognised social standing. Establishing professional codes of conduct, ethical standards and educational requirements also lead to an increased distinction from other occupations and a clearer definition of youth work as a distinct, highly professionalised occupation. Naturally, both paid and voluntary youth workers must be motivated to support and contribute to these processes.

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## Chapter 5

# Ethical standards in youth work and how they support the development of education and career pathways of youth workers

*Sladjana Petkovic and Ondřej Bárta*

### **5.1. Introduction**

**A** postmodern world, where the claims of external authorities of all kinds have collapsed (Bauman 1992, in Sercombe 2010), represents an environment where it is evermore important to be clear about the principles under which we dare to intervene in the lives of young people and to act on their behalf. A major driver in the formulation of ethics has been the struggle to achieve clarity about what youth work is and what youth work does.

The development of an ethical framework for youth work is linked to an “ethics boom” (Davis 1999, in Banks 2010) – by “ethics” we mean standards of conduct in public and professional life. Although youth work has been slower than other occupational groups to engage with the trend (in terms of “codifying correct, good or expected standards of behaviour or practice”; Banks and Imam 2000: 67), an interest has rapidly developed, fuelled by many of the same trends that have influenced other professions (Banks 1999). This is reflected in raising pressure on youth work to identify its distinctiveness, to promote its effectiveness and to develop sound ethical practices which are considered to be helpful in explaining how it interprets and carries out its role. Acknowledging that at the heart of youth work practice is the ability of youth workers to make appropriate, justifiable ethical judgments, it is important to underline that youth work requires ethical understanding and a distinctive commitment to ethical behaviour from the youth workers involved. This is expressed in the requirements for the initial education of youth workers, in introducing different occupational standards, benchmarking statements and codes of expected conduct.

The need for exploration of the ethical context of youth work has been identified during the implementation of the research project on “Mapping education and career pathways for youth workers”, co-ordinated by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership. Created in the follow-up phase of the project, this chapter builds on the results of a first mapping exercise which have been further analysed through the lens of practice architectures (Kiilakoski 2018a), helping youth sector stakeholders

to understand the diversity of support systems for education and development of career pathways of youth workers in Europe.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the ethical nature of youth work and to analyse content and limitations of ethical standards, identifying what they require and offer as support to youth workers in terms of educational and on-the-job/professional support. The chapter aims to articulate main considerations for the implementation of ethical standards in supporting better quality youth work practice and policy and to identify open questions for the future empirical research (through, for example, in-depth interviews and/or case studies).

Methodologically, the chapter is based on a literature review and secondary analysis of data gathered through two online surveys and reports of eight focus groups conducted by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership within the “Mapping of education and career pathways for youth workers” project.

The desk review comprises analysis of the literature taking into account geographical, linguistic and other constraints. Because of the restricted access to literature and data, the authors provide an overview of the documents available online and in English (which therefore often overlap with western European countries) or in formats accessible to translation programmes. Although the secondary data from the above-mentioned surveys and focus groups represent an auxiliary material, due to their design and form (none of them was designed to directly explore this topic), they were useful in framing the study and analysed for the purpose of shedding some light onto the values and ethical backgrounds of youth workers and youth work organisers and policy makers.

The requirements for development of quality ethical youth work practice have been analysed in line with the “framework for ethical youth work” created by Sarah Banks (2000), describing the ethical nature and context of youth work through the set of ethical “standards” encompassing ethical principles and values, specific rules and policies, and moral qualities, dispositions and competences.

Identification of the ethical codes is based on a relatively limited set of criteria (e.g. availability online and in English, and covering mainly national level) due to the explanatory and pioneering nature of this quest. The sample of countries and documents included in the analysis is linked with the previously mentioned framework of practice architectures (Kiilakoski 2018a). The first group of states with strong practice architectures in this context comprises 4 out of 11 states in which the ethical codes for youth work have been identified (i.e. Estonia, France, Ireland and the United Kingdom (England and Wales)). These countries have legislative definitions and have either competence descriptions or quality-assurance systems for youth work, if not both. They all have public support for non-formal learning and identifiable career paths for youth workers. Formal learning on youth work is available in these countries (half of it vocational or tertiary education) and they also have associations for youth work. The second group of states with strong practice architectures – with room for development on a certain level – comprises 6 out of 12 countries in which the ethical codes have been identified (the Czech Republic, Austria, Iceland, Malta, the Netherlands and Serbia). These countries have legislative definitions of youth work and a quality-assurance system or competence description (if not both) and usually provide either vocational or higher education for youth work. The ethical codes were not identified in the countries belonging to the third and fourth groups of practice architectures, referring to the countries where some policy and legal practices have been developed and those where

practice architectures are in need of development. However, we cannot assume that they do not exist but rather that the additional research effort is needed (based on a wider set of criteria and documents available at the local level and in local languages etc.) in order to provide a more comprehensive insight.

The literature review additionally covered the ethical codes identified outside Europe (e.g. in Australia and some international organisations) in order to explore comparative practices (Table 7). We will refer throughout the chapter to the Table 11 in relation to the ethical codes examples.

## **5.2. Understanding the ethical nature of youth work**

The literature review resulted in valuable insights into the ethical nature of youth work which is commonly understood as a tool for personal development and the social integration and active citizenship of young people (Council of Europe 2015: 7). The primary function of youth work is to motivate and support young people to find and pursue constructive pathways in life, thus contributing to their personal and social development and to society at large (Council of Europe 2017: 4). However, acknowledging a variety of definitions of the concept across Europe, a common understanding of the term has been accepted in this context in line with the Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work:

Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making. (Committee of Ministers 2017)

Serving the higher purposes of inclusion and social cohesion, youth work has inherent moral elements representing a value-driven social practice which produces actions that have moral, social and political consequences (Council of Europe 2015). Ethical issues are therefore endemic in youth work.

As an activity or social practice, youth work involves working with participants who have fewer rights than adults, are often vulnerable, lack power and may be suggestible – hence giving scope for their exploitation, harm or manipulation. Insofar as it is an occupation concerned with providing a service, youth work shares with a broad group of occupations, commonly classed as professions, concerns about the professional integrity, trustworthiness and honesty of its practitioners. As an occupation working within the welfare system, youth work shares with social work, nursing and medicine the classic tensions between respecting individual choice and promoting the public good, and between empowering and controlling its service users (Banks and Imam 2000).

As with any other practice, youth work is based on a community of people engaging in actions whose meanings they negotiate with each other (Wenger 2008: 73, in Kiilakoski 2018b). [AQ] Analysis of the focus group interviews (FGI\_1 to FGI\_7), however, shows that the initial motivation to join the community for many youth workers seems to stem from their personal histories and experiences rather than shared social values about the significance of youth work. On the other hand, the answers of a vast majority

of respondents to the survey and focus group participants commonly fall under the umbrella aim of “changing the world for the better”, to “give back to society”, to “develop one’s potential” and to “support young people in achieving their goals”. This suggests that, even though the study participants come from various educational backgrounds, they also share a certain common framework of ethical principles and values. This hypothesis is supported by respondents’ answers when directly asked whether their decision to engage in youth work has been value-based: a rather large majority of the them answered in such a fashion that a wider sense of purpose (“the common good”, “it was the right thing to do”, etc.) can be seen in their individual answers. Overall, it can be concluded that the respondents are rather conscious about their youth work practice being value-based and going beyond a narrow educational dimension into a wider context of youth work.

Another characteristic of youth work considered in the ethical context refers to its relational nature, reflected in the fact that youth work seeks authentic communication with young people and contributes to sustaining viable communities (Council of Europe 2015). As a “good” practice, youth work has the potential to form and transform the individuals involved in the practice and the worlds in which practices occur (Kemmis 2009; Kemmis *et al.* 2014; Salamon *et al.* 2016, all in Kiilakoski 2018).

Both characteristics of youth work (i.e. its relational and value-based nature) have been taken into account in articulating core attributes which differentiate youth work from other disciplines dealing with young people, as illustrated in the following definitions:

Youth work is a professional relationship in which the young person is engaged as the primary client in their social context (Sercombe 2010: 27);

Youth work is a practice that places young people and their interests first. Youth work is a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their context. Youth work is an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person’s independence, participation in society, connectedness and realisation of their rights. (AYAC 2013)

Although this relatively general approach tracks only a small proportion of the existing youth work practices, both definitions describe youth work as a particular kind of ethical practice emphasising a specific type of relationship between youth workers and young people, described as a “covenantal relation of trust” (Davies 2016) which is primarily concerned with the quality of the relationship and social characteristics of youth and their communities.

The empirical data analysis (FGI\_1 to FGI\_7) suggests that the majority of the respondents are aware of a profound relational and transforming nature of youth work practice, reflected in answers like “empowering young people” or “to be a positive influence in young people’s lives”. Still, it is important to emphasise that these characteristics include not only the dimension of building relationships with young people, but also an important aspect of setting boundaries, as participants of the aforementioned focus groups noted.

This finding is in line with the literature review revealing that respecting the limits of the professional role and the reach of power relationships helps to avoid an ethical conflict in practice. While the relationship between a youth worker and a young person is often an important source of personal support for the young, the

relationship should be a professional one, intentionally limited to protect both parties. Youth workers should maintain the integrity of these limits, recognising the tensions between developing supportive and caring relationships with young people and the need to preserve the boundaries of professional relationships (YACVic 2007, 2008).

### 5.3. Exploring the ethical codes and standards for youth work

Ethical youth work practice is often defined through a set of ethical “standards” encompassing ethical principles and values, specific rules and policies, and moral qualities, dispositions and competences of practitioners. The “standards” of ethically good practice tend to be used to cover a variety of measures of “good practice”, as a criterion for judging how well something or somebody fits with the accepted norm, as well as procedures for ensuring good practice (Banks and Imam 2000). Development of ethical standards provides a conceptual framework for recognition, reflection and discussion on ethical issues in youth work, and identifies ethical principles and values, offering guidelines for improvement of youth work practice. It is important to understand that awareness, debate, guidance and the pursuit of clarity about the standards of “good practice” are essential for the safety and integrity of both youth workers and young people (Sercombe 2010).

Several different types of documents referring to the ethical nature of youth work have been identified through the literature review, including Codes of Ethics, Codes of Ethical Practice, Codes of Conduct of Associations of Youth Workers, National Qualification Standards for Youth Work, statements of values and principles, etc. These documents address and define the ethical standards of youth work from several perspectives, e.g. a) how youth workers treat service users (with respect, without discrimination); b) the nature of the relationship (based on trust, confidentiality); and c) how the outcomes affect the welfare of the service users (promote self-confidence, do no harm, challenge discrimination and oppressive behaviour).

**Table 11. The list of reviewed documents**

Country/region/organisation	Author and document	Quotation reference used in the text
Australia	Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) and Western Australian Association of Youth Workers (WAAYW) (2003), Code of Ethics for Youth workers, revised 2014.	YACWA, WAAYW 2014a
	Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) and Western Australian Association of Youth Workers (WAAYW) (2014), Supporting Ethical Youth Work – A guide for using the Code of Ethics for Youth Workers in WA as a tool for ensuring quality youth work.	YACWA, WAAYW 2014b
	Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) (2007, 2008), Code of Ethical Practice – A First Step for the Victorian Youth Sector.	YACVic 2007, 2008

Country/region/organisation	Author and document	Quotation reference used in the text
Austria	YouthWiki (2017), Youth Policies in Austria.	Youth Policies in Austria 2017
Czech Republic	Česka asociace streetwork (2017), Etický kodex České asociace streetwork sdružující nízkoprahové sociální služby.	CAS 2017
	Dům dětí a mládeže Blansko (2011), Etický kodex DDM Blansko.	DDM Blansko 2011
Estonia	Estonian Youth Work Centre (2018) Youth Worker Occupational Standard: Occupational Ethics, appendix 4.	EYWC 2018
Ireland	Minister for Health and Children, Ireland (2010), National Quality Standards Framework (NQS) for Youth Work.	Minister for Health and Children, Ireland 2010
Iceland	Félags fagfólks í frítímaþjónustu (2018), Code of Conduct of Association of Youth Workers, Iceland.	FFF 2018
Malta	National Youth Agency of Malta (2014), Malta Youth Work Profession Code of Ethics.	NYA Malta 2014
Serbia	NAPOR (2017), Ethical Code of Youth Work.	NAPOR 2017
The Netherlands	Beroepscode kinder- en jongerenwerk (2014), Beroepscode KINDER-EN JONGERENWERK.	BVjong 2014
France	La Jeunesse au Plein Air (2018), Values statement.	JPA 2018
Singapore	Youth Work Association Singapore (2017), Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers, Youth Work Association, Singapore.	YWAS 2017
Council of Europe	The European Confederation of Youth Clubs (2018), The European Confederation of Youth Clubs Values Statement.	ECYC 2018
The Commonwealth of Australia	Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers Associations (2018), Guidelines for establishing a Code of Ethical Practice.	CAYWA 2018
The Commonwealth of Australia	The Commonwealth Secretariat (2014), The Commonwealth Draft Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers.	CS 2014
United Kingdom	National Youth Agency (2004), Ethical Conduct in Youth Work – A statement of values and principles from The National Youth Agency.	NYA 2004
	The Institute for Youth Work, The Institute for Youth Work's Code of ethics.	IYW

The review of the ethical codes identified reveals that these documents are seen as valuable tools for supporting quality youth work policy and practice from the perspective of youth work practitioners and policy makers. Among others, they are helping to clarify what youth work is about – both for youth workers themselves, and for those who come into contact with youth workers, such as young people, parents, community members and other professionals. Most of these documents equally refer to all qualified youth workers and to others working with young people without a youth work qualification, although some of them are more focused on professional quality standards for ethical youth work (for example, NYA 2004; NYA Malta 2014; YACWA, WAAYW 2014b; NAPOR 2017, etc.)<sup>10</sup> than others.

The literature review furthermore confirms the different roles that ethical codes can have in supporting development of quality youth work. They include:

- a) to protect the youth work relationship and young people in the relationship; b) to identify and report unethical or suspect practice; c) to guide us in new or difficult situations; d) to keep ourselves (and each other) accountable; e) to provide the basis for organisation; f) to provide a core for more detailed policy development at the agency level; g) to improve the status of the profession in the public sphere; h) to clarify our identity as youth workers and to identify non-youth workers; i) to defend ourselves against being co-opted into obsessive practices. (Sercombe 2010: 58).

The development of the majority of the documents listed in Table 11 was initiated by youth work associations or relevant governmental authorities and implemented through an extensive consultation process involving youth workers, youth service organisations, youth work educators, employers of youth workers and young people themselves, aiming to develop the sense of ownership among the relevant actors in the youth sector. This participatory approach is supposed to ensure that the code becomes a “living” document supporting the professionalism and ongoing development of the youth sector.

Yet, it is argued that codes of ethics are not a guarantee of ethical practice but rather documents open to interpretation (Quixley and Doostkhah 2007, in Sercombe 2010). They generally do not provide a straightforward answer about what to do since they are not able to cover the wide range of contexts, cultural groups and issues that youth workers face on a daily basis. Instead, they need to encourage youth workers to think ethically in whatever situations they face, to talk together about them and to give them the tools to do so.

The analysis of these documents furthermore tells us that the need to produce supporting documents to assist the quality implementation of ethical codes in an organisational setting has been articulated only in a few cases. It naturally rises the question of what kind of supporting mechanisms and quality-assurance criteria are there to support the implementation of ethical standards and the development of ethical youth work practice and policy. Other questions identified through analysis of the codes refer to the power relations among the different actors in the youth sector when it comes to the development, implementation and ownership of the ethical standards in youth work policy and practice. Additional questions for further

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10. These in-text references relate to entries in Table 11.

research can include: How does a youth organisation evolve in terms of constructing and establishing its own ethical framework (and most importantly, what influences such a process)? Do associations and umbrella organisations come into play, and if so, how? Do national and international youth policies and their priorities, including the value-related areas, come into play?

## **5.4. Ethical principles and values**

The lists of ethical principles and underpinning values, as commonly accepted ethical standards, are found in mission statements, statements of purpose and codes of ethics of most youth work groups and agencies. However, it is important to bear in mind that the challenges may arise in their implementation due to the interpretation of the general principles and values which can vary widely, both within and between people of different historical and cultural origins (Imam 1999).<sup>11</sup>

The values provide an ethical foundation that informs professional principles and practice. The significance of a close relationship between values and practice is that youth workers need to be involved in continuous professional reflection and development to ensure that personal experiences and perspectives are used appropriately and that any boundaries and barriers to their role are clarified and addressed.

One example of a set of values underpinning the development and implementation of the National Qualification Standards Framework for Youth Work (Minister for Health and Children, Ireland 2010, see Table 11) refers to:

- ▶ a clear understanding of youth work’s educational purpose, methodology and context;
- ▶ commitment to continual improvement and best practice;
- ▶ transparency of governance and operation;
- ▶ equality and inclusiveness embedded in policy and practice for staff, volunteers and young people;
- ▶ promotion of the young person’s well-being by ensuring safe learning environments.

The list of values identified in the majority of the documents reviewed includes:

- ▶ a voluntary relationship with young people, who are free to choose whether or not to be involved;
- ▶ personal, social and political development based on informal or non-formal educational processes encouraging youth to be outward-looking, critical and creative in their responses to their experiences and the world around them;
- ▶ partnership and association with young people and others, which involves young people working together in groups, fostering supportive relationships and sharing a common life;

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11. For example, the French association “La Jeunesse au Plein Air”, JPA (2018), in their values statement, also includes “secularism” as one of the primary values, since it is a “republican principle”.

- ▶ participation and active involvement of young people in making decisions about issues that affect them in youth work contexts and in life generally (ECYC 2018; DDM Blansko 2011; NAPOR 2017, see Table 11);
- ▶ human rights<sup>12</sup> (CS 2014), reflected in areas such as equity, diversity and inclusion (EYWC 2018; Minister for Health and Children, Ireland 2010; FFF 2018; CAYWA 2018; NYA 2004; NYA Malta 2014, see Table 11).

Clarity about the purpose of youth work and the relationship of values and principles can help youth workers to develop and carry out professional youth work practice (Sapin 2012). The principles apply the general values more directly to youth work practice and define the essential activities of enabling young people's voluntary participation and actively seeking accountability to them and their communities. In this sense, some ethical codes (England NYA 2004; NYA Malta 2014; DDM Blansko 2011; CAS 2017, see Table 11) differentiate between:

- ▶ “ethical principles”, which include the way that youth workers should treat young people (with respect for their right to make choices, without discrimination, for example) and the kinds of values that youth workers are working towards (such as a just society); and
- ▶ “professional principles”, suggesting how youth workers should act in the role of a practitioner with certain types of responsibility and accountability in order to apply the broader ethical and professional principles.

Other codes (YACVic 2007, 2008) describe “the practice responsibilities” of youth workers that ensure the highest level of professionalism, referring to “key elements of what youth workers do when guided by the youth work principles”, which are the essence of youth work practice and are important in youth workers fulfilling their responsibilities (Minister for Health and Children, Ireland 2010).

Two particular principles – “Primary client” and “Context” (YACWA, WAAYW 2014a, 2014b; cf. YWAS 2017) – differentiate youth work from other professions/occupations by emphasising that many professionals who work with young people do not consider the young person as their primary client, but instead see them as one of many stakeholders. The “primary client” principle therefore states that young people need to know that there is at least one professional role that they can rely on to always put their interests first – referring to the space that youth workers fill. Similar definitions of young people as “the primary consideration” and key responsibility of the youth worker (CS 2014) refer to the young people with whom youth workers closely work with but does not exclude a range of people relating to them (such as family or guardians, teachers, workers with other services and friends) in order to achieve positive outcomes for the young.

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12. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has particular relevance to youth work practice. Its four core principles are non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child. Article 3.1 of the convention prescribes that “in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”

Youth workers work alongside young people in their “context” (YACWA, WAAYW 2014a, 2014b; cf. YWAS 2017), including place, culture, family, peer group, community and society, recognising the impact of social and structural forces on the young, and responding to young people’s experiences and needs and breaking down barriers that restrict young people’s life opportunities.

The work of a youth worker is not limited to facilitating change within the individual young person but extends to the “social context” (CS 2014) in which the young person lives. While youth workers are often seen as agents of change (at individual and societal level), youth work needs to ensure that youth workers play a facilitation role, empowering and enabling young people rather than seeing young people as passive recipients of services (CS 2014).

The majority of the ethical codes reviewed generally agree that youth workers should commit to the following ethical and professional principles (EYWC 2018; Minister for Health and Children, Ireland 2010; ECYC 2018; FFF 2018; BVjong 2014; NYA 2004; IYW; YACWA, WAAYW 2014a, 2014b; YACVic 2007, 2008; NYA Malta 2014; NAPOR 2017):

- ▶ To treat young people with respect, recognising and valuing each young person’s identity, emotions and capabilities and avoiding adult-imposed labels and negative discrimination.
- ▶ To contribute towards the promotion of equality and social justice for young people and in society generally, through encouraging respect for difference and diversity, recognising the influences of class, gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, ability and challenging discrimination.
- ▶ To work towards the empowerment of young people to have a voice and to influence the environment in which they live, respect and promote young people’s rights to make their own decisions and choices, unless the welfare or legitimate interests of themselves or others are seriously threatened. The ethical dimension of empowerment focuses the attention of youth workers on being accountable to young people but also refers to young people’s ethical and responsible action. This principle clarifies that: “Youth workers presume that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests. The youth worker advocates and empowers young people by making power relations open and clear; by holding accountable those in a position of power over the young person; by avoiding dependency; and by supporting the young person in the pursuit of their legitimate goals, interests and rights” (CS 2014; YACWA, WAAYW 2014a: 6; cf. YWAS 2017; IYW; YACVic 2007, 2008).
- ▶ To promote and ensure the welfare and safety of young people, while permitting them to learn through undertaking challenging educational activities. The “duty of care” principle recognises that sometimes youth workers can do more harm than good by intervening in a situation. Therefore, both risk assessment and risk management need to be thorough (i.e. equipment needs to be well maintained, and staff need to be suitably trained and supported). Duty of care also involves youth workers being aware of the safety of themselves and others. However, both legally and ethically, duty of care is a shared responsibility between the youth worker and the agency.

- ▶ Co-operation and collaboration: youth workers seek to co-operate and collaborate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people. They seek opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and professionals from other agencies and sectors and will mobilise young people and others to work together collectively on issues of common concern. Ethical youth work practice involves a commitment to co-operative partnerships with relevant service providers and across sectors in order to collectively achieve positive outcomes for young people. Inter-agency and cross-sectoral collaborative approaches enable a young person to have a greater range of choices in terms of support networks and access to a range of information, skills and resources to meet all their needs (YACVic 2007, 2008; Minister for Health and Children, Ireland 2010; EYWC 2018).
- ▶ To practise with integrity, compassion, courage, competence, self-awareness and self-care, which includes: being loyal to the practice of youth work (not bringing it into disrepute); recognising boundaries between personal and professional life; being aware of the limits of confidentiality; managing multiple professional accountabilities; maintaining competence required for the job (being responsible for keeping up to date with the information, resources, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people) but also preserving the health and well-being of youth workers; fostering ethical debate; seeking to co-operate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes with and for young people; being conscious of one's own values and interests and being prepared to challenge colleagues and employers in breach of these values.

## **5.5. Rules, policies and procedures**

The development of more specific rules, policies and procedures is an important way of demonstrating how relatively abstract and general principles are interpreted and put into practice. Such rules and procedures can be an important way of overcoming the problem of different interpretations of the abstract principles. They can be very useful for youth workers, who are often exposed and isolated when handling sensitive and challenging issues in a context which has traditionally been more informal and less rule-bound than many other professions in the welfare field.

One model of integrating ethics into policy formation at the agency level includes diversification of the wider principles from day-to-day practical questions through separating "Codes of ethics" from "Codes of practice" and "Codes of behaviour" (Sinclair 1996 in Sercombe 2010):

- ▶ *Codes of ethics*, at the agency level, represent the standard professional codes for youth work; or they could be specific to the agency, composed of usually general clauses.
- ▶ *Codes of practice* (or "practice principles"; Banks 2003 in Sercombe 2010) refer to the way that ethical clauses play out in a particular context – still at the level of principle but firmly applied to a particular situation.
- ▶ *Codes of behaviour* refer to actual actions and activities of youth workers.

Some codes of ethics contain rather specific rules, as well as lists of general ethical principles; for example, the code of ethics produced by the Community and Youth Workers Union and recommended for use by agencies includes the following statement: “Refuse to use illegal drugs or alcohol prior to and during work” (The UK CYWU 1999: 23, cited in Banks and Imam 2000). JPA, the network of youth workers in France, stresses secularism, solidarity and citizenship as core values in their values statement (JPA n.d.). The link between professional ethical principles/policies – such as “Recognition of the boundaries between personal and professional life” – and youth work practice is illustrated through the following “practice principles”, transferring the general principles into the guidelines for quality youth work practice (Minister for Health and Children, Ireland 2010; NYA 2004: 9, cf. FFF 2018):

- ▶ Recognising the tensions between developing supportive and caring relationships with young people and the need to maintain an appropriate professional distance.
- ▶ Taking care not to develop close personal, particularly sexual, relationships with the young people they are working with as this may be against the law, exploitative or result in preferential treatment (if such a relationship does develop, the youth worker concerned should report this to the line manager to decide on appropriate action).
- ▶ Not engaging in work-related activities for personal gain, or accepting gifts or favours from young people or local people that may compromise the professional integrity of the work.
- ▶ Taking care that behaviour outside work does not undermine the confidence of young people and the public in youth work.

Another “Preventing corruption” principle (CS 2014; YACWA, WAAYW 2014a; cf. YWAS 2017) furthermore encourages youth workers to keep themselves honest in terms of their motivation and rewards. This may involve financial gain, but also includes other things such as power, profile, emotional security, personal identity, agency reputation and so on.

Many agencies have specific policies and procedures which give guidance to practitioners about how to act in situations with ethical dimensions, ranging from how and when to preserve confidentiality to how to handle cases of suspected child abuse. For example, the following statement is found in a local authority quality manual: “Where a child or young person begins to disclose [abuse] to you, you must inform them of the procedures that you must follow to allow them to make an informed decision as to whether to continue the conversation” (City of Newcastle 1996, in Banks and Imam 2000: 73). Similarly, the draft national occupational standards for youth work in England include a variety of different types of statements, some of which are quite specific rules with an ethical content, such as: “Report possible abuse” (NYA 1999a: 20, in Banks 2010).

In some cases, ethical rules can be part of the legal framework, as is the case in Austria (Youth Policies in Austria 2017), Malta (2014) and partially also in the Czech Republic, where youth work and social work operate in a partially overlapping niche and can relate to the National Quality Standards in Social Work (2006).

## **5.6. Development of competences of ethical youth work practitioner**

Youth workers undertake a range of tasks and duties, including face-to-face work, linking with other organisations, taking responsibility for managing other staff or volunteers and looking after venues, budgets and resources. The rules and procedures listed above cannot always help in cases where the youth worker faces a difficult moral choice in practice. It is therefore vital to stress that codification of ethical rules, policies and procedures does not provide a ready-to-use answer to ethical dilemmas, but merely a framework and guide to outline potential solutions.

Identifying youth work values and practice, as well as applying values and principles to practice, are considered to be some of the essential skills for understanding youth work roles and responsibilities (Sapin 2012: 20). An important part of any “ethical framework” for youth work is therefore the development of youth workers’ competences and skills through education, supervision and debate with colleagues. The skills particularly required are those of “moral reasoning”. This might include the ability to see the ethical issues in a given situation, to identify ethical principles and rules involved, to prioritise and weigh them against each other, to consider the possible courses of action and their consequences and to justify a decision taken. Moral reasoning, dependent both on the internal values, and ideally also based on the ethical code of conduct, is therefore the ultimate tool of any professional in a dilemma, including youth workers (Banks and Imam 2000).

The empirical data analysis (FGI\_1 to FGI\_7) shows that the development of competences is essential in the induction phase of the professional career of a youth worker, when different mechanisms should be in place to support new practitioners. Mentoring in the home organisation – as a professional relationship which provides advice, guidance, support and role modelling – is seen as extremely important. This has been particularly emphasised in the countries where the existing practice architectures need further development, for example:

“[The] mentor was there to give me perspective and [a] framework [to help] me to create a self-development plan and become aware of my goals and power to influence and take responsibility for my career development.” (FGI\_7)

or

“at the beginning a mentor taught me how to implement theory, how to deal with failure in reality, how to include all [different] groups of youth.” (FGI\_7)

The literature underlines that appropriate support may be provided within the organisation from a manager or colleagues, and may also be available from experienced individuals and groups external to the organisation who can provide advice or guidance from diverse perspectives in order to ensure that professional values and principles are upheld in practice (Sapin 2012). Importantly, support and supervision are recognised as the forms of support being mostly relevant in the later phases of professional development of youth workers from the perspective of the focus group participants. The centrality of fieldwork experience and supervision during all levels of education and training, and the continuing access

to “non-managerial supervision and support” after starting to work “properly” as a youth worker, should be further emphasised, representing key elements for shaping the “reflective practitioner”.<sup>13</sup>

The ethical codes reviewed furthermore articulate the requirements related to the professional development of youth workers, commonly accepting professional principles such as “Develop and maintain the required skills and competence to do the job” (BVjong 2014; NYA 2004: 10). In some cases, this principle is referred to as “Knowledge” (YACWA, WAAYW 2014a, 2014b; cf. YWAS 2017, cf. CS 2014), meaning that it is essential for youth workers to maintain a high level of competence through an ongoing commitment to training and professional development, and to being informed and skilled in relation to “best practice” in youth work. In practical terms, this principle means that youth workers should:

- ▶ undertake work or take on responsibilities for which they have the necessary skills, knowledge and support;
- ▶ seek feedback from service users and colleagues on the quality of their work and constantly update skills and knowledge;
- ▶ recognise when new skills and knowledge are required and seek relevant education and training.

Building “Self-awareness” – through self-examination and critical reflection, regular supervision and taking part in training and professional development opportunities – is another commonly recognised component of the professional development of youth workers, as well as “Self-care of a youth worker”, understood as a shared responsibility between the youth worker themselves and the organisation they are employed/engaged by (often involving raising relevant issues in supervision, team meetings, etc.). Youth workers who participated in the survey (Survey\_1) have been asked if they consider their formal education (comprising a wide range of areas including accounting, PR, engineering, IT, education, natural sciences, history, law, social work and youth work) to be important for their youth work engagement, and rather large numbers of them stated that they consider their formal education, even though in a different area from youth work, to be important to them in their everyday practice. This, in combination with the previous finding of very diverse educational backgrounds, leads to a hypothesis that values, skills and qualities gained throughout the formal educational system may play an important role in the professional conduct of youth workers, and that this basis of values and ethics potentially also comes from different viewpoints. When asked about further education in the youth work field, various scenarios were given which included one-on-one educational techniques (such as shadowing or mentoring) as well as non-formal education courses and training, and internships in other organisations. Contact with multiple environments that include values and ethical dimensions, and which have the potential to contribute to the moral development of respondents, is in place, with each respondent following their own unique learning path.

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13. This remark is based on the feedback from Professor Howard Williamson.

A survey conducted in connection with the mapping of youth worker competences with employers and managers of youth workers (Survey\_2, see also Chapter 8) has been analysed by authors of this text, focusing only on the two open-ended questions containing information on ethics. The analysis of the open-ended questions shows the presence of a framework for the development of competences also connected to moral qualities of the responding youth workers, namely: various formal education backgrounds; non-formal and informal learning as part of their further education; some support from a wider community of practice (in the form of one-on-one techniques and internships); and, in some cases, also support by professionals from other areas. Some youth workers have attended ethics courses as part of their higher education (BA studies, MA studies); in some cases, online Moodle courses were organised at national level as well as specific non-formal learning courses conducted at local level. Exceptionally, courses on critical and moral reasoning for youth workers are mentioned by the respondents. In some cases, moral reasoning and connected areas are considered to be transversal topics which are covered in various non-formal learning courses implicitly.

With regard to the aforementioned findings, it would be important to further discover the link between the values and ethics formation and different areas of formal education, namely how different values and morals<sup>14</sup> are conveyed in different areas of the formal educational system (for example, in the IT area of study compared to that in natural sciences or humanities). It is also vital to engage in research focusing on the area of ethics and morals in youth work studies, discovering to what extent (and using what methods) ethical frameworks are debated and embedded in different curricula, and how competences/moral qualities in students are created. It would be important, in the future, to look into these connected, yet to some extent separate, worlds: the value systems of youth workers and ethical frameworks of the youth organisations/associations. How do youth workers develop their value bases and moral reasoning capacities? How does that relate to their very diverse formal education background and to their frequent youth work experience from their own youth?

## **5.7. Ethical issues identified in youth work policy and practice**

The literature review (Banks and Imam 2000; Sercombe 2010) provides insights into the various ethical issues and conflicts that raise ethical difficulties for youth work policy makers and practitioners. In more general terms, they are centred around the welfare or well-being of a young person or youth group and linked to central youth work values of equity, equality, empowerment and working ethically across differences and diversity. In specific, ethical issues and conflicts may relate to the following categories:

- ▶ the context in which youth work is taking place (ethics and agency policy or youth work and the state, for example);
- ▶ identity and the professional development of youth workers (self-determination and negotiation of personal and professional values, interests and commitments;

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14. In line with Fransson (2016), we understand ethics as external norms of community or society; whereas morals are internal values and principles of the individual.

- ▶ professional development and self-care);
- ▶ the relationship with young people (the ethics of power; professional boundaries and dual relationships; empowerment and dependency in the youth work relationship; taking care and managing risk; confidentiality); and
- ▶ relationship with other professions (referral and working across professional disciplines).

One example of the ethical issue is identified in the country where practice architectures need additional development (like Serbia, for instance), where the code of ethics for youth work and The Council for Ethical Issues are established by the National Association of Youth work Practitioners (NAPOR), as an independent body ensuring that the code of ethics in youth work is respected and promoted. It seems that due to the weak legal and policy support to education and career pathways of youth workers this represents an important pillar for quality assurance of youth work policy and practice in the country. The Council for Ethical Issues provides support to youth workers in relation to ethical issues, provides advice and consultations to authorities and members of NAPOR, makes decisions on ethical issues in youth work and promotes good practice in respecting ethical principles in youth work. Nevertheless, further empirical analysis and exploration of the similar mechanisms and challenges they are facing in practice would be highly recommended.

## **5.8. Supporting development of ethical youth work policy and practice**

In the light of the review of the identified ethical codes, we would like to provide an example of guidelines supporting youth work practitioners and policy makers in applying ethical codes as tools for ensuring quality youth work. The guide presented (YACWA, WAAYW 2014b: 5, 6; YWAS 2017) provides practical tips and resources in order to help organisations that employ youth workers to put the ideas given in the ethical code into practice. In order to make the most of the ethical code, the guide highlights that it should be used in as many different ways as possible, including the following.

### **5.8.1. Building awareness of the code of ethics**

In order to get the greatest benefit from the code, it is important to build an awareness that the document (and the principles within) exists. It is important to inform not only youth workers (as part of their induction process) but also the other stakeholders who have an interest in youth work – including young people, parents, community members, community organisations, relevant government departments and other professionals. Creation and distribution of the youth-friendly version of the code is also recommended.

### **5.8.2. Using the code in policies and procedures**

The guide recommends that the code should be referred to when developing organisational policies and procedures and incorporating specific principles from

the code. Specifically, it is important to include references to the code in the organisation's policies and procedures manual, as well as in documents like a code of conduct. This will help to ensure that the work of a particular organisation, and the expected behaviour and actions of the staff, are grounded in ethical principles (see an example below).

In addition, the code should be referred to when working with professionals from other disciplines, when developing memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between organisations, and when introducing the role and purpose of youth work or discussing expectations.

**An example of how the code has been applied to an organisational policy**  
(CS 2014; YACWA, WAAYW 2014b; YWAS 2017):

**Drug use:**

The agency aims to help young people to control their drug use, to eliminate high-risk drug use, and to minimise the harm of their drug use. As such, it is important that our own drug use is consistent with these aims.

**Code of ethics:**

Duty of care: The youth worker avoids exposing young people to the likelihood of further harm or injury, and is aware of the safety of others.

**Code of practice:**

- ▶ We will not purchase, use or supply any restricted psychotropic drug in the company of young people. This includes alcohol and tobacco as well as illegal drugs. Caffeine is unrestricted.
- ▶ We will not appear in public in an intoxicated state, whether on duty or not.
- ▶ We will not turn up to work in any way impaired by any restricted psychotropic drug.

### 5.8.3. Employing ethical youth workers

The code is useful in helping to attract and recruit a high calibre of youth work staff to the organisation through the following activities.

- ▶ advertising youth worker positions;
- ▶ demonstrating knowledge of the code in job applications;
- ▶ using the code in youth worker job descriptions;
- ▶ using the code in job interviews.

Each of these gives potential applicants a clear message that the organisation recognises and values the code, and helps to ensure that youth workers share this commitment. Publicly endorsing the code also makes clear that the role of youth workers is taken seriously in the organisation, and that youth workers employed in it will be supported to do the best job they can for themselves, the organisation, the young people they work with and for the profession of youth work as a whole.

## 5.8.4. Supporting ethical youth workers

Once the youth workers have been chosen for the job through the recruitment process, it is important to reinforce the importance of ethical practice as soon as they begin their role (in the inception phase), and to continue to support and reinforce this message throughout their engagement with the organisation (through on-the-job supporting mechanisms). A guide recommends that this can be done in a number of ways, such as:

- ▶ including the code as part of the staff induction process;
- ▶ using the code as a tool for ongoing individual and group supervision sessions;
- ▶ using the code for staff development during team meetings and events;
- ▶ offering opportunities for staff to attend training in the code and in issues of ethical practice;
- ▶ providing access to other resources such as self-assessment tools.

## 5.9. Conclusions

Overall, it is reasonable to conclude that youth work can never be approached as a value-free area. Almost every definition and description of youth work is influenced by moral, ethical, social, cultural or political values. Youth work is equally embedded in policy and practice and deemed to require ethical understanding and a distinctive commitment to ethical behaviour from the youth workers involved. These features of youth work suggest that there is plenty of scope for examining and debating the ethical issues, problems and dilemmas that arise in practice.

The examples of reviewed ethical codes consist of either fairly general statements of principles with a primarily educational aim (encouraging reflection and debate and developing ethical awareness) or longer statements containing more detailed rules with the aim of being prescriptive. Each of the different approaches to (professional) ethics seems to have something to offer, but none offers a complete account.

There is no doubt that principles and rules play an important role in professional ethics and that one of the important features of professional practitioners is that they should act impartially, without favouritism, treating people in similar circumstances in similar ways and giving a reasoned account of why they acted as they did. Yet it seems equally important that professionals (and volunteers) are educated to develop attitudes and dispositions which make them honest, trustworthy, caring, sensitive and discerning and that they pay attention to the context of each situation and the special relationships they have with people. While lists of values and ethical principles do not provide direct guidance to workers about how to act in particular cases, they do serve as a reminder of the kinds of values and principles upon which youth work is based and serve to encourage youth workers to think through, discuss and reflect on the implications of their decisions and actions. It is important to acknowledge that ethical principles and rules are only one aspect of what is involved in decision making. The development of the faculty of good judgment is required as well as the development of skilled, critical and reflective practitioners with a sound value basis and moral reasoning capacity.

Recognising an extensive list of requirements for ethical youth work practice defined in the reviewed ethical codes, and a lack of supporting mechanisms for their development and implementation, helps us to articulate the remaining open questions which can potentially inform future research endeavours in this area: What is the interplay between the ethical framework, youth work quality and youth work recognition? How is the youth work ethical framework influencing co-operation with other sectors? Does it create additional tensions or hurdles? Does having an ethical framework always help and what is the potential of the ethical code to create barriers and to become exclusive?<sup>15</sup> Does the ethical code create a common language and help to build bridges with professionals from other areas? All of these questions are vital and deserve dedicating future research endeavours to finding answers.

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15. This question is formulated based on feedback received from Professor Howard Williamson.

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## Chapter 6

# Mapping youth studies curricula: what is formal education in the field of youth studies saying about young people?

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### **6.1. Introductory and methodological remarks**

Studying the education pathways of youth workers has become even more relevant in the field of youth policy. There is now a general understanding among youth work practitioners, researchers and decision makers that qualified and competent youth workers are a prerequisite for good quality in youth work. Indeed, the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 to member states on youth work (Committee of Ministers 2017) stipulates the importance of youth work education by pointing out the need for “establishing a coherent and flexible competency-based framework for the education and training of paid and volunteer youth workers”. To assure such a framework and achieve the best possible results, a synergy between formal and non-formal education and informal learning is required. The authors of this chapter believe that the first step towards this goal is to start from the existing research into practices in youth work education. For this reason the intention of this chapter is to contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of youth work education and to provide a stepping stone for further research and/or policy initiatives.

More specifically, this chapter focuses solely on formal education in order to offer an overview of youth studies education. It is important to emphasise that this chapter focuses on youth studies rather than merely on youth work programmes. Youth studies are seen as a broader concept than youth work education, because youth studies include various aspects, such as youth research, youth policy and finally youth work. Most youth studies programmes are not exclusively focused on youth work, but they have certain segments (streams or individual courses) that deal with this topic. Despite the fact that youth work as such is not the direct focus of the chapter, we believe that our data can be an asset for a better understanding of how formal education sees young people and how it prepares those who have an interest in them. Furthermore, focusing on youth studies might expand our understanding of youth workers’ formal educational background. For all those reasons, the authors

believe it is worthwhile examining youth studies programmes in the context of youth work education to help the cause.

Without prioritising formal over non-formal education and informal learning, we believe that formal education is an indicator of the level of consolidation of a specific field (Kovačić and Ćulum 2015) and that studying the topics, methodologies and approaches within formal education gives valuable insights into realities on the ground and practice domains. Hence, one of justifications for studying formal education curricula with the purpose of understanding the reality of the field can be found in Beane's understanding of the relationship between young people and a curriculum. He states that:

creating a curriculum for and with young people begins with an examination of the problems, issues, and concerns of life as it is being lived in a real world. (Beane 1995)

Moreover, Beane adds that,

while curriculum integration by itself cannot resolve this issue, the use of real-life themes demands a wider range of content, while the placement of that content in thematic contexts is likely to make it more accessible for young people. (ibid.)

In other words, according to him, reality and the content of teaching are inseparably interconnected and studying one without the other is imprecise. This claim is supported by Kysilka (1998), who claims that:

Knowledge is examined as it exists in the real world. The content to be learned is determined by the theme and the expressed interests and needs of the students, rather than predetermined by some curriculum framework or set of curriculum objectives.

The main research objective behind this chapter was to map the content of various youth studies programmes, by examining the topics that they cover in order to understand their position in relation to youth workers' education. Thus the research questions were: which topics relevant to youth policy does university-level education cover? And, how does university-level education intersect with youth work reality?

In order to map the content of youth studies programmes, researchers formulated pre-set coding schemes based on three criteria: topics within the sociology of youth emerging in journal papers in the field of youth studies; policy relevance; and professional experience. More specifically, we wanted to learn how the concepts of sociology are presented in journal papers in the first criterion. Based on the literature, five relevant topics were selected, namely:

1. young people as a resource/potential;
2. young people as a problem (Benard 1990);
3. youth transition (Coleman 1974);
4. social justice/community (Ginwright and Cammarota 2002; Ginwright and James 2003); and
5. ethics (Banks 1999).

For policy relevance, we wanted to see how themes from policy are mirrored in curricula. The fields of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-18 were used as codes to be applied

to the material: employment and entrepreneurship, social inclusion, participation, education and training, health and well-being, voluntary activities, youth and the world, and creativity and culture. The last criterion chosen to analyse the material was professional experience. Hence, within this category, and based on discussion with relevant scholars from the field of youth work and higher education the following codes were selected:

1. learning outcomes;
2. motivation: reasons to study/enrol;
3. practice/fieldwork presence in a programme;
4. project management as a topic; and
5. the presence and structure of the content – research methodology.

The reason these clusters have been chosen is because they, from the point of view of the authors, illustrate the structure, patterns and accents of the programmes in an adequate way. Using these clusters one can get a comprehensive insight into formal education that is related to the study of young people.

Concerning the material for analysis, a two-step process of sampling was conducted. Firstly, all universities across Europe were identified, their web addresses were collected and all of their BA and MA programmes focused on youth were screened, using the following key words: youth, youth work, youth studies, leisure time, animation. Once the initial database was created, researchers approached the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYC) national correspondents to double check in case any programmes were not listed. After the correspondents' input, a final database of programmes was compiled and the coding process began.

Even though this database might not contain the complete list of tertiary-level programmes thematising young people in Europe, it is certainly an adequate tool for understanding the prevalence of topics relevant for youth studies because it contains 100 programmes in total (65 BA and 35 MA) from 16 countries: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The majority of programmes were available in English, though some programmes were available only in national languages. In those cases, EKCYC correspondents were asked to provide translations or online translation tools were used.

The researchers chose performance plans and curricula as the units of analysis, depending on availability of information on websites. Although allowing two different types of document as units of analysis decreases the methodological rigour to some extent, nevertheless this methodological decision allows a precise answer to the research question. Therefore the researchers believe it to be an adequate choice to undertake the analysis successfully.

As a result of the sampling, 100 programmes were analysed and the data were placed in 18 preselected categories. Data gathering was conducted in the period June to September 2018, and coding and analysis was done between November 2018 and February 2019. National correspondents sent certain documents to the authors after September 2018, and these documents were included in the analysis upon receipt.

The next section presents the main research results and points out the most relevant tendencies from the analysis.

## **6.2. Results of the analysis**

In this section, we discuss certain similarities but also interesting differences when it comes to tertiary education with the study of young people as its topic.

### **6.2.1. Policy topics in youth studies curricula**

Policy-based codes were extrapolated from the EU Youth Strategy and they include eight fields of youth policy. Even though the nature of this research is qualitative, it is interesting to see which codes are prevalent, based on the number of programmes containing them. The education and training code is apparent in most programmes, followed by social inclusion, and then health and well-being. This means that programmes in general offer content in these three fields more often than in some other policy subfields. It is particularly interesting that volunteering and participation were the least represented codes in all the programmes we researched. Even though these two policy fields do exist in some of the studied educational programmes, this result does show an interesting pattern. While participation is seen as a central concept in youth policy (Ilišin 2003), and is even pointed out in the Erasmus+ programme guide as one of the markers of EU youth policy (Beerkens and Vossensteyn 2011), it is only modestly present in academic programmes dedicated to the study of youth in Europe. There are study programmes where participation is explicitly mentioned along with a specific aspect – online participation, participation in civil society, citizenship and representation – as an inseparable concept that goes with it.

When it comes to education and training there are some interesting findings. For instance, the researched programmes recognise the difference between formal and non-formal education, often elaborating on the relevance of non-formal education when studying young people and consequently in youth work, as this topic is relevant within this area. Furthermore, the analysis shows the importance of leisure-time organisation in observed curricula. Therefore, numerous programmes teach various ways to develop the competences of youth workers for well-organised and structured leisure time for young people, emphasising the importance of such aspects as games, planning activities, socio-cultural activation and facilitating informal learning. In the observed curricula there is also a great prevalence of content dedicated to outdoor and sport-related activities and their management, planning, evaluation and usage for developing the competences of young people.

Another big cluster of topics is related to inclusive education and pedagogy. Programmes provide classes, courses and practical engagements aiming to educate students about the mechanisms of how to include young people with fewer opportunities in society and/or in youth programmes. BA and MA programmes in youth studies also cover a policy dimension of social inclusion by offering students insights in different social service systems, social policies and social work settings.

By understanding the institutional arena of social policies, these curricula argue, students will be able to realise the potential for co-operation between professionals in these fields and be more competent in designing their own curricula or studies by understanding the position of young people in these settings. Health and well-being is certainly an important topic, at the European youth policy level just as in the analysed curricula. Without a doubt, academic programmes focus on the prevention of risky behaviour – more specifically various addictions, violent behaviour and sexual misconduct. Related topics, such as promoting a healthy diet and particularly the emotional aspect of youth work, are also present in curricula. This means that some of the analysed programmes concentrate on developing strategies to deal with, facilitate and/or help solve different emotionally charged situations among youth and to use emotions to achieve well-being. Given the fact that this research is exploratory and qualitative in its nature, these findings should be treated more as a mapping of the content rather than an exact measure of the prevalence of the topics. Nevertheless, based on the frequency of codes one can draw conclusions about the importance attributed to certain topics.

After analysing 100 youth studies programmes, one can say that most curricula focus more on the preventive aspect of youth work (Catalano *et al.* 2002) rather than on developing competences for active citizenship. In other words, academic programmes are focusing on developing numerous competences in the field of social inclusion and achieving well-being of young people, but offer their students little of the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to active citizenship. Even in syllabi that cover the topic of active participation, most of the content is knowledge-based. Although contemporary studies point out the necessity of balanced cognitive, behavioural and affective domains in effective learning (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001), it seems this is not the case in most of the observed programmes. This is especially surprising given the nature of youth studies and youth work which, in theory, should strive to develop emancipated and critical individuals with skills to act in their community. In contrast to this, when teaching other subjects – creativity and culture, employment and entrepreneurship – there is a plethora of practical assignments and creative techniques for students to explore, so they can try to apply knowledge and turn it into experience (for instance painting, business plan development, CV writing or drama).

Another thought-provoking finding is the variety in the elaboration of programmes depending on the geography or culture of an institution. When it comes to policy, most programmes cover the practical or institutional context of a certain policy subfield; but, in Finnish or UK study programmes, there is an emphasis on combining research and practice. The academic programmes in these two countries do not offer only information and/or practical aspects of a certain policy domain but also provide a research point of view on these domains. For instance, in one of the UK universities students are expected not only to understand how to create inclusive curricula but also to become acquainted with methods of studying such a curriculum and conducting needs assessments in order to create one. Unlike students on programmes in the UK and Finland, students in other countries mostly learn ways of developing curricula and various taxonomies of youth with fewer opportunities.

## 6.2.2. Concepts from sociology in youth studies curricula

When studying young people there are certain frameworks used by most researchers. After reviewing the literature, we selected five of these concepts, namely ethics, young people as a resource/potential, young people as a problem, youth transition and social justice/community. We believe that this selection, while by no means all-inclusive, because it depends on the cultural and epistemic orientation of the researcher, still gives an adequate overview of trends in academic studies on young people.

It seems that almost every higher education programme focused on young people offers some content in terms of social justice and equitable community development. Academic programmes are therefore strongly oriented towards community development and they offer different sets of skills in how to organise a community. It is argued that only by understanding community (local, regional, national, international) can a professional working with young people really understand them and help them understand their reality. Topics often mentioned are: solidarity, social cohesion, empowerment of communities and human rights. When it comes to social justice, programmes emphasise equality of chances and point to various enabling and disabling contexts in which this (in)equality occurs. Moreover, topics such as discrimination, oppression and exclusion are common in curricula and performance plans. As a general rule, it can be said the analysed programmes teach students how to work in and with communities.

We also examined the concept of ethics. Approximately one third of programmes mention the importance of the ethical component when studying and/or working with young people. Some programmes focus on the philosophical genesis of the ethics, while others offer more practical strategies for developing ethical competence in the students. Ethics is often linked with professionalism and responsibility, and most of the programmes which offer content in ethics examine various ethical dilemmas. Also, in some curricula and performance plans, ethics is connected with values, a connection which clearly demonstrates the predictable value-oriented character of youth work/studies.

The other three concepts (young people as a resource/potential, young people as a problem, youth transition), even though popular in the typical sociology of youth, seem to be relatively absent from the higher education curricula and performance plans analysed. In the 20th century the theory of transitions in youth studies was almost unavoidable when studying young people (Helve and Evans 2013), yet in the study programmes that we examined the only segment of this theory which was remotely present was the psychological aspect of transition from youth to adulthood. This lack of sociological perspective and other aspects of transition theory (for example, from school life to job market) is quite compelling. Unfortunately, from this research we could not tell why this is so. Thus, it would be prudent to take a look at curricula and performance plans more thoroughly, and perhaps even engage in interviews with programme creators, to discover reasons for not including transition (in its comprehensive form) in youth studies programmes. Concepts of “youth as a problem” and “youth as a resource”, often used in youth studies texts, seem to be absent from the observed curricula. Hence, very few programmes point to these two concepts or cover the underlying logic behind them.

### 6.2.3. Professional experience

After discussions with youth professionals, academics in the field of youth studies and youth workers, the third cluster of codes was created, containing codes for learning outcomes, reasons to study/enrol, practice/fieldwork, project management and methodology. This eclectic cluster consists of two aspects – substantial topics (fieldwork, methodology and project management) and some generally relevant information when analysing higher education curricula (learning outcomes and reasons to study). This cluster of codes is important because it tells us how higher education institutions present their programmes, how they see their graduates and what careers they foresee for them. In the context of this chapter, this cluster links study programmes to youth workers' education because we wanted to see whether universities recognise youth work as a viable career path.

The majority of programmes offer the topics of research methodology and fieldwork to their students. Most of the universities therefore understand the need to integrate methodological skills in youth studies programmes, because they want to equip students with the ability to comprehend and use research in their work. Some programmes put greater emphasis on the conduct of research by students, while others cover the competences needed to understand the logic of doing research. Programmes' focus on communities is also reflected in the methodology. Thus, methodological topics and descriptions are mostly oriented towards the exploration of communities and appropriate tools/techniques. In addition, there are three topics which are generally prevalent within this code: research principles, qualitative research methods and applied research projects. Although some programmes do offer training in quantitative methodology, this content is more the exception than the rule.

In regard to field work, the situation is similar to research methodology, in that substantial variations have been found. Programmes in general offer various possibilities of gaining professional experience during studies (camp practice, work placement abroad, experimental learning, etc.), but the scope and elaboration of their role in the programme can vary. In some programmes, it is evident that youth organisations and youth centres are important institutional partners in practice provision, whereas other programmes expect students to find a place to do their fieldwork. Although most placements are intended for skills development, in some programmes the fieldwork serves as a space for conducting action research. To sum up, the general goal of having practical work or fieldwork is the integration of theory and practice, a goal which is in general reflected in both the design and delivery of assessment strategies of the academic programme.

When it comes to project management skills, the analysed curricula and performance plans offer classes in project design and implementation, but this part of the analysed documents is the least detailed so it is impossible to see what kind of competences students can acquire.

### 6.2.4. Reasons to study and learning outcomes

The last part of this analysis focuses on learning outcomes and reasons to study youth studies. Firstly, we found that most learning outcomes explicitly name youth work,

meaning that performance plans use the term “youth work” to justify elements of the study programme. In study programmes that actually are youth work programmes, the section on learning outcomes points out the relevance of the programme for youth work development, whereas other parts of the programme just mention youth work (for instance, in the description of the course). In other words, it is often claimed that the programme contributes to youth work quality or that it helps to produce better youth workers.

Secondly, most of the programmes list general and specific competences that students will develop. However, when analysed, there is no rule on what are general and what are specific competences. For instance, while some programmes include “understanding reality of young people” under specific competences, in others this expression can be found under general competences. This demonstrates incoherence in identifying and distinguishing between general and specific competences. In addition, almost all programmes claim that they develop all three functional components of a competence (knowledge, skills and attitudes) while most of them particularly emphasise communication skills. Finally, not surprisingly, in countries where youth work is more professionalised, better structured and/or regulated, and there is a competence standard for youth workers, study programmes link their learning outcomes with it. Hence, these national competence standards are used as a justification for specific competences listed in the performance plans.

Academic programmes in youth studies state, in their performance plans and curricula, that those interested in understanding young people and wishing to develop competences for working with them should enrol in these programmes. Segments or topics such as social change, co-ordination of different activities, youth policy and professional development are most often mentioned. Academic programmes describe various career options and further academic work perspectives as reasons to enrol in their youth studies courses. It can be said that there are two main clusters of reasons why people enrol on youth studies programmes. The first reason relates to intrinsic motivations, stressing the professional and personal development of a student into a professional who understands and/or helps young people in fulfilling their potential. The second cluster of reasons focuses on external motivations, where programme creators argue how this specific programme will help in achieving professional goals and/or enable the student to pursue steps in their career more easily. Here, the youth work profession is often mentioned although our findings show that no detailed elaboration of this specific profession is offered.

Lastly, within the segments “reasons for study and learning outcomes” most of the sentences in programme documents are relatively vague and without any support for the claims made in descriptions. In other words, these segments answer the question “what will the student potentially get from the programme?” but they do not provide a link with the content, nor do they explain how this exact programme is causally linked with the desired outcomes.

### **6.3. Conclusions**

Understanding young people as actors in contemporary society is a prerequisite for understanding today's social dynamics. Acknowledging that youth is more than

just a demographic category implies being able to show a set of codified, structured and detailed knowledge and skills about youth which will enable professionals to create an enabling environment for their active participation in society. In order to truly empower young people it is necessary to understand their realities and offer them support, so academic programmes on young people are important because they should offer techniques leading to the most adequate, effective, efficient and useful approach to young people.

This chapter has explored such academic programmes by using relevant concepts from the youth policy world, contributions from the sociology of youth and evidence from the professional experience of relevant authors and scholars contacted for the purpose of this research. After identifying youth studies programmes across Europe and complementing this sample by insights from national youth correspondents, a content and thematic analysis on 100 such programmes was conducted.

Policy-wise, academic programmes in youth studies cover various youth policy subfields, among which social inclusion, education and training, and health and well-being dominate. The data also undoubtedly show that most such programmes have a caritative and/or preventive nature, rather than an emancipatory one. When it comes to their theoretical grounds, the analysis demonstrates that most youth studies programmes put great emphasis on social justice and community. Thus, students are offered a variety of content on community development. This research has shown the prevalence of the topic of ethics within youth studies. By contrast, some common theoretical concepts from the 20th-century literature on youth (such as transition theory, youth as a problem/resource) are not so well represented in curricula. Data also show that performance plans and curricula mostly cover topics related to methodology, project management and observational study programmes, which have fieldwork incorporated in their coursework. In terms of reasons for study and learning outcomes, there are two clusters of reasons identified: one appealing to professional and personal development and the other focusing on career perspectives. Even though personal development and career perspectives go hand in hand, the language used in study programmes distinguishes them. Personal development is pictured as a way of promoting the emotional and social growth of students, because the programme develops skills which help them to be a functional and contented member of society. On the other hand, career perspective arguments focus more on bettering one's position in the labour market and individual employability.

This analysis, even though exploratory, is a pioneer work in this field. Although this chapter has not analysed each of the identified phenomena in detail, it provides valuable insights into youth studies. It shows that academic reality in the field of youth studies to a great extent corresponds to reality in the youth sector by offering relevant and up-to-date understanding. It also suggests topics that could be used for analysing youth studies curricula and potentially might serve for further exploration of certain aspects of youth policy.

Moreover, these results could shed light on youth work as a profession and on the educational pathways of youth workers. Even though this chapter has not focused exclusively on youth work education, it is relevant. Programmes focusing on youth work per se are more the exception than the rule, so most youth workers across

Europe who pursue higher education choose similar study programmes, youth studies being one of them. We believe that by analysing programmes related to youth work one can get relevant insight into the competences of youth workers. Moreover, this analysis can serve as guidelines for creating youth work curricula. The patterns of prevalence and absence of topics presented in this chapter can give important suggestions to youth work curriculum creators. This research could also be of value for non-formal education providers as they can design programmes focusing on elements uncovered in the analysed study programmes.

Since this analysis displayed some interesting points, further research is still needed. Even with the information provided in this chapter, we still do not know why transition theory is rather rare (if present at all) in the literature; we have no data to understand why social inclusion is more relevant for programme creators than youth participation; we do not know why there is emphasis on qualitative rather than quantitative methods; and nor do we know how most programmes effectively balance knowledge and skills. These and similar questions still seek answers which might help not only academics but also policy creators and youth workers as such. Until someone answers them, we can only speculate on even better ways to link theory and practice.

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## Chapter 7

# Early career perspectives on the educational pathways of youth workers

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*Tommi Kiilakoski*

### **7.1. Introduction**

**H**umans learn as long as they are alive. This point is well put by Professor Peter Jarvis who has spoken about the continuous learning throughout his career. In a recent interview he stated:

Learning isn't just something which is tugged on to life; it's life itself. I question if there can be any real living without learning, and I don't think there can be any human living without learning, and so to me learning is at the heart of living itself. (Jarvis 2015: 112)

Learning is a continuous process, a lifelong and life-wide concern. This perspective emphasises that every human environment is a potential learning environment. Professional growth also involves many different states and learning cannot be confined to formal education alone. There are many different stages before one becomes a skilled expert in any field. When examining the educational and training pathways of youth workers it is important to look at the different stages of one's career as a youth worker and analyse which structures help youth workers to develop and even flourish in their work.

Education and training is usually seen from an epistemological perspective, which emphasises the knowledge transmitted and perhaps the activities taught. Education is therefore an initiation into different forms of knowledge. However, in this chapter an ontological perspective on education and training is adopted. According to the theory of practice architectures which informs the concept of professional learning in this chapter, the epistemological perspective misses some crucial aspects of learning. Instead of talking about knowledge, this perspective sees education and training as an initiation into practice. When one becomes a competent youth worker, one learns how youth workers talk about their work, how they refer to things, what kind of methodologies they use, what they see as being valuable, how their work is affected by the resources available, how they relate to young people and other professionals, and so on. Initiation into practices can be gained through formal education, but it also requires participating in the activities and learning how members of the community talk about things, how they do things and how they relate to different people and organisations. Initiation into practice does not mean blind obedience to the tradition of a certain practice. There is always room for new developments, but these developments are influenced by preconditions that give practices their

shape (Heikkinen *et al.* 2018). In this perspective, the educational pathways of youth workers help them to initiate themselves into the practice of youth work.

In this chapter I further distinguish between becoming a member of youth work practice in general and becoming a member of a certain youth work community, say, for example, learning to work as a municipal youth worker in the city of Oulu in northern Finland. Working in a specific community requires learning the local traditions and learning about networks and the organisational culture of a local youth work community, whereas becoming a youth worker in general refers more to gaining an overall understanding of how youth workers work, what they hold valuable and what meanings and identities exist in the community (Ord 2016: 220.) These perspectives have been studied before in the context of teacher development.

The emphasis in this chapter is on professional youth workers, i.e. those people who identify themselves as youth workers in the interviews and in a survey conducted for this project. In practice this refers to those informants who are currently not working as volunteers, and have paid positions in youth work. This group does not cover all the youth workers in the youth field, since it leaves out a significant number of voluntary youth workers, without whom the youth field would not be able to have the impact it has in different parts of Europe.

The analysis is mainly based on an online survey distributed by The EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, and collected using the Typeform platform (referred to in the chapter as Survey\_1). Of the respondents, those who described themselves as youth workers and who worked in the member states of the Council of Europe were chosen for this study. Youth workers<sup>16</sup> from 17 countries<sup>17</sup> responded (there were separate answers from youth workers in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, so 20 countries or regions were included). A total of 82 responses were examined. Since the study was not representative, I have chosen to analyse the answers qualitatively using a method of content analysis. In addition to the survey, seven focus group interviews conducted during this research were used as data. These interviews were used as secondary data, the role of which was to further illuminate themes and categories found in analysing the survey. These interviews were analysed using the theory of informed content analysis, in practice looking at how the results of the survey resonated in the interviews.

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16. The respondents were given three alternatives to choose from (youth work manager; youth leader; youth worker). While there is no way of knowing if all respondents who described themselves as youth workers actually work as paid youth workers, there are clear indications that the respondents are working professionally. For example, they talk about the time they were volunteering; they talk about projects and project funding; they have formal education degrees. Because of this, I have chosen to treat them as if they are paid youth workers.

17. Youth workers from Austria, Cyprus, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Romania, Scotland, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Wales answered the surveys. Some of the respondents said that they were from the United Kingdom. Other categories of respondents, which are not analysed in this chapter were youth leaders and youth work managers. There were answers from Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Georgia, Kosovo, North Macedonia and La Réunion which were not analysed in this chapter, since the respondents from these countries and regions were either youth leaders, youth managers or did not specify their position in youth work.

The themes covered are influenced by research analysing professional development in the field of formal education. In this research tradition, one can separate the pre-degree phase, the formal education phase and the early stages of one's professional career before one becomes an expert professional with enough expertise in the field. This model can be criticised for being based on a linear model of professional development, which supposes that learning to become a professional follows certain patterns that are more or less shared by every member of a community. Based on these patterns one can talk about different phases of a professional career. It is an open question how much the educational and work life careers of youth workers actually follow these patterns. In this chapter I assume that the above three phases help when further analysing how youth workers learn their trade. Using this model, one can analyse the impact of experience in one's professional career, and also point to its more fragile phases.

In the following sections, three different stages of learning pathways are analysed in the following order. First, the importance of formal education to youth workers is examined. Second, an initial introduction to the youth field and the consequent motivation to join the youth field is analysed. According to the results, most youth workers become acquainted with the youth field before they access education. To some extent, they have already been initiated into practice as participants and as volunteers. And third, induction methods available in the first years of one's professional career are examined. While nothing conclusive can be offered about national structures, the importance of induction systems is covered.

## **7.2. The importance of formal education in learning how to do youth work**

Education is different from mere schooling, but formal education paths are usually part of the educational trajectories of professionals. Finding out how important formal education is to one's professional career has been a matter of debate in the educational sciences. On a practical level, most people probably tend to think that formal qualifications are only a part of the story, and one learns how to become a professional by actually doing the work, by learning from colleagues or by attending different seminars and training (which are all examples of non-formal learning events) (Jokinen, Heikkinen and Morberg 2012). From a social learning perspective, one can talk about learning as participation, which emphasises the importance of becoming part of a larger community of practice (Wenger 2008). In the case of youth work this means becoming a member of a larger youth work community, which in turn is shaped but not determined by a set of arrangements that affect how youth workers are able to talk about their work, take action and relate to other professions inside and outside the youth work field (Kemmis 2014).

The majority of the youth workers that took the survey view formal education as either important or even vital to their work. The answers emphasise different perspectives on why formal education is useful in youth work. These can be grouped into four categories: formal education helps one to become reflective and/or critical; it provides one with skills, tools and knowledge that can be applied to the work; it helps to convince financial decision makers; and in some countries it is simply needed to get paid work in the youth field.

The first perspective emphasises the ability to look at youth work from the outside. The importance of formal education helps one to look at practices differently, in a critical manner, a point expressed by a youth worker from Northern Ireland in the following way: "I'm studying for my degree in youth and community work and I definitely believe that it has helped me become a more effective and reflective practitioner." A similar point is made by a youth worker from Austria, who thinks that formal education is "really important":

"Reflection is one of the most important things in my work and you can only learn it with a good education." (Survey\_1)

The idea of reflective practice has been important when thinking about youth work education, which helps youth workers to engage in "multi-faceted, dynamic, messy, and unpredictable work that requires expertise that cannot be rote learned following rules and instructions" (Bessant 2012: 62). It seems that this idea is reality at least for some of the respondents. Besides reflexivity, other respondents talk about criticality and cognitive flexibility as well.

The second perspective addresses the applicability of theories. Compared to the first perspective this point emphasises that theories are important not only because they are helpful in reflecting on the practice but actually doing it. A youth worker from Cyprus who has studied political sciences talks about the importance of university studies in the following way:

"Being a political scientist is really helpful [for] my youth work career (youth policy). Mainly due to the fact that all the theories I came across during my academic years have been transformed into practice." (Survey\_1)

A youth worker from Austria who has a degree in vocational education states that:

"Formal education gave me knowledge and skills that I can use in my daily work in youth information." (Survey\_1)

In these perspectives, the dichotomy between theory and practice is overcome by pointing out that these two actually go together.

A similar point was expressed in the focus group FGI\_1. The respondents said that they needed theories which would connect their learning experiences in youth work to wider frameworks. This way, they were able to understand better what is happening in the field. At the beginning of their careers in particular they did not get enough support to understand the processes.

"I used to be a Scout, and we had these experiences but we never reflected on them. ... I started as a volunteer, as an animator, kids with social difficulties and so on. And I always lacked this social support system as well. It was really difficult for us, we were like 19 or so and not having education. You learn by putting yourself in a position where you just have to cope as a human being in the end. So, when I did EVS in X for ten months, I always kind of learned by doing this. It felt really good when I started working as a trainer: all these theories of how groups work and how to help the young, there actually were some frameworks that taught me why the group was working in a certain way. And I spent five years working in a network for youth centres." (FGI\_1)

Youth work, as a practice-oriented field, is usually about doing. Training is also needed to understand the reasons for doing things in a certain manner.

The third perspective concerns how formal education can help one in securing resources and convincing decision makers that youth work is important. This can be a health issue as well. A youth worker from Greece makes a connection between being able to acquire resources for youth work and being able to describe what the job is about. Without formal education this might eventually lead to burnout. Human qualities and the ability to work with young people are important, but formal education brings an added element to the picture.

“[It is] very important; without it I couldn’t do my job and I would suffer from burnout. Partly all you need for good youth work is being there, motivating the youngsters and showing them how precious they are. But in most fields, particularly supporting youngsters with fewer opportunities and taking care that your projects get enough funding and are supported by politicians and stakeholders, you need to know what tools can be used and how to use them. Further, it is essential to be able to write scholarly articles on the work (to be) done.” (Survey\_1)

The fourth perspective on formal education emphasises the fact that formal education is important because it is a basic requirement to be able to do the job. Formal qualification is the “entrance ticket” needed to enter the field of youth work. A youth worker from Northern Ireland says that he needed formal education because:

“ ... it was essential to get in as the career is limited to those who are professionally qualified here in Northern Ireland.” (Survey\_1)

However, he also emphasises the importance of understanding the core principles of youth work, which can be gained through youth work education. “It is also essential in creating a common philosophy and understanding with the profession and a commitment to some fundamental principles” (Survey\_1). A Finnish youth worker formulates his view in a similar vein.

“Education is important since you need a qualification to do this kind of work. Of course, it is also important to be qualified and know what you are supposed to do as a youth worker.” (Survey\_1)

For the majority of the respondents, formal learning seems to be important and beneficial to doing the work. However, the value of formal learning is not always clear in youth work. Some of the respondents were sceptical about the value of formal learning and emphasised practical issues more. A youth worker from Youth UK states this point in the following way:

“I wouldn’t say that anything you can learn in a book will prepare you for youth work. It’s a quality you either have or you don’t.” (Survey\_1)

Others respondents take a more moderate perspective, like a German youth worker who says that formal education may not be helpful in working with young people but might be helpful in fulfilling the more managerial aspects of the work.

“It is complementary – allowing me to efficiently find funding for youth activities, manage funds and projects from a technical point of view. Therefore, it is not essential

to youth work itself, but enables me to be more rigorous and efficient when it comes to [managing] the overall framework supporting youth work.” (Survey\_1)

Another respondent from Hungary notes the importance of knowledge about wider society, but most of the relevant information comes from the training:

“So, I use some of my knowledge about minorities and society but mainly I use what I have learned through experience and youth training.” (Survey\_1)

What should be noted is that all of the above respondents have degrees outside youth work: in sociology, in advertising and in political sciences. Given this background it should not come as a surprise that these studies do not help in becoming a competent youth worker.

The responses about the importance of formal education show some hesitation about the importance of formal education in youth work, but the majority of respondents see it as important.<sup>18</sup> Formal education provides a theoretical background and helps one to think about youth work reflexively. Therefore, it is a useful step in getting initiated into practice (Heikkinen *et al.* 2018), since it helps understand the language, the practices and the relationships within the field (Kemmis 2014) more deeply. This perspective helps in developing professional skills and competences. This ideal is shared by many scholars outside Europe as well. At least from the perspective of the United States of America, “a concern in the field of youth development is that many frontline staff begin with little training and develop their professional skills in isolation” (Ross *et al.* 2016: 132). Describing the Australian experience, Judith Bessant writes that good youth worker education helps individuals to become reflective and contributes to creating a reflective practice (Bessant 2012). The perspectives concerning the benefits of formal learning emphasise that through formal education one can learn the primary skills needed to work with the young or how to manage a project, but also secondary skills such as thinking critically about what is needed to develop youth work.

### **7.3. Education is continuous**

With regard to the development of youth workers, Laurie Ross and his team of writers talk about the professional development of youth workers that focuses on the importance of practical know-how and being able to be reflective. Formal education is important, but other learning environments are important as well. Learning to become a competent youth worker requires more than a degree, and practice wisdom and practice artistry are needed as well (Ross *et al.* 2016: 5).

According to the above statement, education is more than academic achievements or a degree. Perhaps one problem is the connotations implied by the word “education”. One might confuse education with schooling.

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18. The focus of this chapter is on professional youth workers. Tanya Basarab and James O’Donovan, who interviewed participants and volunteers in different youth organisations, found that formal learning in youth work was not important for them and some even saw formal qualifications in youth work as not necessary for youth workers (FGI\_2).

Education is the practice that goes on in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Schooling, by contrast, is a process that goes on in the formal settings of educational institutions. (Kemmis 2014: 46)

If this perspective on education is adopted the answer might be fairly straightforward: we need the full scope of education, including formal education, to develop as professionals. In some cases in Europe, formal education for youth workers is not even available.

According to “Mapping of the educational pathways of youth workers” (Chapter 2), 17 of the 44 countries or regions studied have university-level education in youth work. This means that in most European countries there are simply no opportunities to learn the principles of youth work within formal education (see Chapter 3 “Diversity of practice architectures”). For them, learning how to be a youth worker is about on-the-job learning, training, dialogue and different induction systems provided by organisations (see section 7.5.). As has been noted above, some of the respondents who have studied outside the field of youth work are also happy about formal education and see it as beneficial to them. Is there a need for youth work education, then?

As has been noted above, some youth workers see education in youth work as beneficial for many reasons. At the individual and employment level youth work education seems to be fruitful. One can also take a wider perspective and look at formal education as a societal system which is used to transferring valuable traditions in a systematic manner to a generation of new practitioners. From this point of view, the importance of the availability of formal education in youth work could be formulated this way: the availability of youth work education implies at least three things. First, there is a social field of youth work that is recognised as a profession and that has a distinct character. Having an education is an indication that youth work is seen as an independent social entity and not as a sub-category of some other field, such as social work. Second, if a formal education system exists, this implies that there is something valuable that needs to be transmitted to younger professionals. There are probably theories, concepts, research and reflections on youth work which are manifested in the youth work curriculum. And third, the existence of formal education in youth work is an indication that a government is willing to spend resources on youth work. Besides financial resources, it is of symbolic value as well: giving academic prestige to youth work implies that youth work is valued in society. Formal education is one of the cornerstones of youth work professionalism, but is also an indication that youth work is recognised.

The whole story is not so simple, though. A critical perspective on education is justified as well. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has analysed educational institutions from the perspective of power. He has said that:

The act of institution is an act of social magic that can create difference *ex nihilo* [out of nothing], or else (as is more often the case) exploiting as it were pre-existing differences. (Bourdieu 1991: 119-120)

Education in youth work enables one to treat youth work as a distinct activity and to expect a certain amount of social recognition. It may also create a distinction between educated, professional youth workers and youth leaders working on a

voluntary basis. Unity in the field requires recognising and valuing different actors in the field. According to Ellen Gannett, higher education will have an important role in legitimising the youth work field in the way other institutions probably cannot do. This will stabilise the youth work field to some extent. However, the “social magic” of education should not prevent the youth field from realising that the question concerning youth work as both a vocation and a profession is likely to come from the youth field in the future as well (Fusco and Gannett 2012: 12). Formal education may be helpful in professionalising the field, but questions about vocation and voluntary work should not be forgotten if formal educational qualifications are to be encouraged.

Vocation and voluntary work are connected to the values and goals of youth work. The theory of practice architectures also highlights the ethical basis of practices. A practice is based on the idea of how to live a good life. The value basis of youth work which emphasises democratic participation, human rights and the importance of young people as a resource not as a problem is an example of the connection between a good life and practice. Therefore, any talk about education needs ultimately to include talk about education as helping individuals to learn but also to develop societies. This point is well put by Stephen Kemmis:

Education is a process of individual and collective self-formation, a simultaneous process of growing good citizens and good societies. (Kemmis 2014: 47)

The above point addresses the individual and social significance of education. Education helps individuals to develop, but it also makes communities stronger. Youth work education is therefore both an individual and social enterprise: it helps a younger generation to learn the practical and theoretical wisdom of older practitioners and helps communities to go on to become more reflexive. Kemmis's point also concerns humanistic values and democratic principles: it points towards the need for youth work education that helps individuals to learn how to become members of youth work communities while also influencing European societies to take better care of their young people.

As a conclusion, formal education has helped the respondents in many different ways: in adopting a critical, reflexive attitude towards the work; in understanding the methods better and even in doing them; in convincing decision makers and in getting the resources; and in some cases, where formal qualifications are needed, in getting employment as a youth worker. Most of the respondents have some form of higher education in youth work or related topics. These perspectives therefore present the opinions of the people who have higher education themselves. Based on the research literature, the availability of formal education is likely to help with gaining recognition for the field and in creating reflexive practice. Because of these reasons, promoting the availability of higher education in youth work is most probably beneficial to the field. However, since there are many in the youth field who work on a voluntary basis and who contribute to the well-being of young people in many ways, it is important to note at the same time that youth work can be done on a voluntary basis and different approaches to youth work should not be forgotten.

## **7.4. Motivation to become a youth worker**

Personal experience in the youth field prior to entering education or becoming a professional youth worker seems to play a strong role in the educational pathways of youth workers. Their initiation into youth work practices seems to have begun when participating in youth work activities at a young age. This can be taken to mean that young people entering the field of youth work already have knowledge of youth work at least from the perspective of their local youth clubs or organisations. If they have worked as voluntary youth leaders, they have both the participant and the leader perspective, which means that they already have experience of different roles available in youth work.

Most of the youth workers seem to have prior experience of youth work, either through having had a role model youth worker which they viewed as an ideal professional, or through other useful experiences as a participant in activities. This probably tells us something about the social status of youth work as well: you have to be “in it” to appreciate it, and must choose to devote your time or part of your life to it. Giving back seems to be an important motivation to become involved – to engage in a reciprocal relationship – and giving to others what one received is a common motive when entering the youth work field.

Some of the respondents have followed the route from participant to a professional youth worker. This can be interpreted as a variant of linear career modelling: entering a youth work activity, volunteering, getting education, becoming a paid worker. At least for some respondents this seems to relate to their professional narrative. An Irish youth worker expresses the point accordingly:

“I was involved in a youth club as a teenager. This provided me with an opportunity to take on leadership roles, to have different informal learning opportunities and to grow as a young person in a safe environment. I volunteered with the local youth club as an adult to give something back because of the positive experience and confidence the youth club had given me as a young person.” (Survey\_1)

The same type of narrative is expressed in the focus group FGI\_2. The interviewees express commitment to the youth field and talk about participating and being part of the community. This is an example of a learning process Etienne Wenger calls “learning as belonging” (Wenger 2008: 5). Through becoming a member of a community, one learns the necessary professional skills. In the process, one develops a strong commitment to the community.

“When you are a child or a teenager and you are participating in some voluntary youth programme you see some models in other people and you want to become like them. You feel that you belong to the organisation and you want to give back to the organisation what it has given to you.” (FGI\_2)

None of the participants in the group interview conducted in Mainz in March 2018 came to youth work through student guidance counselling or other paths outside the youth work field. The participants stressed their personal growth and subsequent motivation to contribute to the field:

“My first motivations were training [sessions] that I did in outdoor education which led me to a personal realisation about myself.” (FGI\_1)

"I guess it was personal experiences, as it is the case for most or many people. For me it was through youth participation and the opportunities to be a student leader and youth leader on a national level, and school level first, etc. I guess the question in my mind was 'how can I make a more systemic impact in this field?'. Studying youth work and becoming a youth worker was a way to make a more long-term impact even when I am not a young person anymore." (FGI\_1)

The initial motivation for many seems to originate from personal history and experience. To put the matter in more theoretical terms, the introduction to the youth work field seems to stem from personal experience and individual meaning instead of shared social values about the significance of youth work.

In a focus group interview FGI\_4, one motivation to become a youth worker was based on actually wanting to work with young people. However, the survey seems to suggest that a societal motivation is important as well. A lot of the responses mention wanting to work with the young and to help the young in the current social situation: "to change society and bring peace" was the goal of one Serbian youth worker (Survey\_1). This seems to be an important motivation, especially for those respondents who have studied subjects other than youth work.

"I'm a humanist psychologist and I like to be with teenagers, help them, understand their motivation." (Survey\_1. A youth worker from France, who had studied psychology)

"Using my EU-related skills while refocusing on field work, i.e. working directly with young people." (Survey\_1. A youth worker from Germany, who had studied political science)

The two motivations, personal and societal, are in no way mutually exclusive of course. They can certainly be combined, as in the case of a German youth worker who states that his motivation comes from the "desire to impact young people the same way I got impacted, a desire to change the world." The methodology of youth work and the experiences as a participant in youth work can help youth workers to become motivated to enter the field. For many of the youth workers who were interviewed and who took the survey the learning process for youth work began as a participant. Therefore, their lifelong learning in youth work had already begun at an early stage in life.

## **7.5. Induction systems and mentoring for new youth workers**

Practices are shared and social. They are based on co-operation. Youth work, like any other practice, is based on a community. Practices involve an active commitment from their members, who participate in social communities and who construct identities in relation to these communities. The social theory of learning details how our learning is always related to participating in these practices. Etienne Wenger talks about communities of practice, which exist because people are doing something valuable together, they are:

"engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with each other." (Wenger 2008: 73).

Through participating in these practices, we become members of larger communities and consequently learn how other members of these communities do things, how

they talk about what they do and what they hold valuable. Practices are shaped by traditions, they have a history, a common narrative and identity.

The social theory of learning highlights the importance of paying attention to how a person is able to participate in communities of practice. This way learning is not about specific activities, skills or dispositions, it is about becoming “a full participant, a member, a kind of person” (Lave and Wenger 2011: 53). Through becoming a member of a community, one learns new tasks, activities and functions, which are part of the larger set of relations within a community. In the case of youth work, one learns how to become a competent youth worker by participating in the youth work community and becoming a member of this community.

In the early stages of one’s professional career one needs to learn how to create a personal way of doing the job, but one also has to become familiar with the work community, its values, ethos and tacit knowledge and the whole working culture. Even if one knows theories and general ideas about how youth work is done, one needs to learn how the local youth work community does things. In the research on teacher development this point of the career is called the induction phase, which is seen as a bridging period in a professional career between formal education and one’s own professionalism (Jokinen, Heikkinen and Morberg 2012). At least at this point one starts a journey to become a full member of the community.<sup>19</sup> This involves three different things:

- ▶ Personal dimension. One must come to terms with motivation, skills, competences and values – and integrate these into the development of an identity as a youth worker. One also develops professional self-esteem and self-confidence.
- ▶ Professional dimension. The community of practice emphasises certain sets of characteristics and methodologies that one must become familiar with and learn to master.
- ▶ Social dimension. One becomes a member of an organisation and learns the culture of the local community. (Geeraerts *et al.* 2015: 361)

In youth work the community context is important, since the voluntary participation of young people requires paying attention to the needs of young people in their surroundings (Ord 2016: 95). It requires getting to know the local youth work culture, and also the local context where one works. In youth work an added difficulty is that the cultures of young people themselves can be both global and local. Researchers Sue Cooper and Anu Gretschel (2018) claim that young people and the communities they live in are unique, so youth work should be responsive to local needs. Learning how to do this is not always an easy task and is probably one of the things learned in the process of professional development.

In the induction phase of the professional career, different mechanisms are needed to help new workers to develop. One can talk about an induction system which is seen as a cluster of organisational activities and an organisational culture of support for

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19. The induction phase model suggests a linear professional trajectory; first education and, after that, work as a paid professional. It is fair to assume that in youth work career models might be more fragmented.

helping the learning processes of the new members of the organisation. Mentoring can be part of this system. Mentoring by a more experienced worker helps a new member in a dialogue based on practical issues (Geeraerts *et al.* 2015; Jokinen, Heikkinen and Morberg 2012).

Mentoring models in general can be divided into collegial models, which highlight the importance of peers providing guidance and support, and hierarchical models, where mentoring is formally required and evaluations are part of the mentoring process (Kennedy 2005). The collegial models are based on bottom-up approaches where the emphasis is on communal learning and collegial dialogue. Hierarchical models are based on top-down structures and they can include different elements of control. When offering useful comments on this chapter, Professor Howard Williamson pointed out that a positive perspective on induction systems as ways of enabling youth workers can be adopted. Induction systems can also mean increased control outside the local communities. In this way, induction systems can be seen as instruments for ensuring the quality of youth workers, for example. Following the literature on mentoring used as a source material, the positive sides of induction systems can be appreciated.

## **I. Supporting a new worker**

According to the results presented in the previous part of this chapter, there are many routes one can take to learn how to become a youth worker. There is formal education, the experiential learning gained through participating as a voluntary youth leader in the organisations and by actually doing the job. If a professional life course is seen as a trajectory, the early stages of one's experiences as a paid worker are meaningful when one learns how to be a youth worker. According to the perspective of the theory of communities of practice, this concerns the question of becoming a youth worker and developing a professional identity, as well as learning the methods and tools used by the local youth work community and the values that are important to the community. It is about sharing a practice (Belton and Frost 2010) as well as developing a personal identity. For a new worker, this can be a process of growth, and the aim of the induction systems is to help in this growth process by offering things such as mentoring, training, advice on how to reduce workloads, exchanging practical knowledge, collaborative work, consultations or providing a safe environment in which to talk about issues a new worker may face (European Commission 2010).

In the survey, youth workers replied to the question: How did your work community support you as a new youth worker/youth leader/youth work manager? The answers to these questions can be grouped into two categories. In the first, youth workers were offered support by an organisation, either through collegial help or in a more systematic manner. In the second group, no induction systems existed.

The first category describes situations where the practice is shared through helping the new workers to learn the saying (cultural-discursive preconditions) and the doing (material-economic) dimensions of the work (Kemmis 2014). These ways of supporting new workers range from personal contact to more organised induction procedures. Based on the answers it seems that some of the organisations have a

well-thought-out, formalised system while others rely more on informal interaction between the workers.

More informal induction systems can be based on getting support from one particular colleague. "My co-worker trained me during the first months," says one youth worker from France. The role of managers can be vital as well. There are examples of cases where a colleague or a manager or combination of both describe the induction phase as consisting of delivering information about the work field and offering professional and emotional support to a new worker.<sup>20</sup> The survey offers examples about sharing knowledge and providing a safe environment where one can ask questions. The role of managers seems to differ considerably.

"They explained the ground principles of youth work and youth information, introduced me to the international, national and regional networks and gave me feedback and answered my questions." (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Austria)

"It's supportive in terms of exchanging knowledge and good practices." (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Cyprus)

"When I started full-time youth work it was as part of a new team that had just been set up; we had no support from our manager but a lot of support from each other." (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Wales)

"I have always felt hugely supported by management and the wider staff team." (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Ireland)

Some respondents describe more systematic ways of supporting or supervising the worker. Training is offered, a learning path for the new worker is identified in the organisation and support is offered on many levels. Some of the organisations seem to have a coherent system for induction. On the other hand, in one case organisational support is described as supervision on a monthly basis.

"They are very supportive: financial, training opportunities, feedback, appreciation, materials, challenges." (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Romania)

"There is great support within our organisation; initially there is induction training for new members of staff, in-house supervision and ongoing professional upskilling." (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Ireland)

"We have monthly supervision provided by the organisation that I work for." (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Serbia)

Besides these positive examples there are cases where the initial support was not available for the workers. Also, some of the respondents did not answer the question. The lack of support in the initial stages of one's professional career does not seem to correspond with the strength of the youth work practice architectures of the country (see Chapter 3) and is likely to be based more on the culture of the organisation

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20. The importance of having a community which provides a safe environment for sharing ideas also featured in the second focus group discussion of this project (FGI\_2), as described by O'Donovan: "In considering the ongoing on-the-job or in-house training of youth workers and their retention, participants pointed to the need for 'space and time' to tackle issues."

itself. In some cases, there are accounts about organisations changing the induction systems to better support new workers.

“They did not understand too well that I had just graduated, so I had to find my own way of doing things.” (Survey\_1. A youth worker from Finland)

“I have no support.” (Survey\_1. A youth worker from Italy)

“Not that much, but since I initiated the opening of the youth club in [the local] municipality, my role is much more visible and supported.” (Survey\_1. A youth worker from Montenegro)

“Not supportive for the first year but supervision and other networks were developed.” (Survey\_1. A youth worker from the UK)

In a focus group interview conducted during a European Training Strategy Conference (FGI\_1), youth workers talked about the need for induction systems, but also about providing support in the later stages of one’s professional career. The absence of proper support systems was seen as a factor which diminished work satisfaction. The lack of adequate measures for supporting youth workers on the professional and personal level was seen as especially harmful for those youth workers who work with the young in sensitive conditions. A youth worker with a lot of expertise from working in southern Europe described the situation as follows:

“We do not have support systems for people who are doing it [youth work]. There is no mentoring system for people who work on the ground with young people. ... Working with young people with fewer alternatives is more demanding than working with all young people. A youth worker in X is quitting because she cannot take it anymore. A pure youth worker who does not have a safety net around her. Mentoring and emotional support and I would say insurance [are lacking for youth workers].” (FGI\_1)

The quality of the induction systems seems to be based on the organisational culture, not on a systematic policy in a country or region. The importance of induction systems has been noted in the field of formal education and the need to offer systematic help for new teachers has been articulated in the policy discourse (European Commission 2010). Induction systems are also seen as a way to help professionals to avoid burnout and to not change jobs. Since very little seems to be known about the induction systems in youth work, two suggestions seem to be evident. The induction systems available should be studied further. This study should also pay attention to whether there are effective ways for countries to promote the development of induction systems with the help of existing organisations, networks and training providers.

## II. Mentoring

Mentoring is an important part of the induction systems. Mentoring can be based on the collegial model, where peers help each other. It can also be hierarchical, if mentoring is a requirement in the initial stages of one’s professional career (Kennedy 2005). The study data do not allow me to make informed conclusions about comparing or classifying the mentoring systems available in Europe. The classification of the mentoring models will have to be a task for future research. The data of the study,

though, can be used to pinpoint the significance of mentoring and other elements of induction systems in the educational pathways of youth workers. This point has relevance for the European perspective on at least the following three points: it shows that attention needs to be paid to the induction phase of professional development in educational pathways and that there is consequently a need for adequate induction systems; it shows that there are informal and non-formal ways of mentoring new members of the work community that are important for educational pathways; and it shows that the competence-based professional frameworks capture only one, albeit a very important, aspect of professional development: in the induction phase the professional elements are only part of the story, and the personal and the social aspects are important as well.

The significance of mentoring was considered important by the vast majority of youth workers who took the survey. As far as mentoring goes, “experience is essential” according to one youth worker from Italy (Survey\_1). The professional role of the youth worker might not be the easiest thing to learn, and mentoring was described as a way to learn about professional relationships with young people.

“Mentoring is imperative to this role. It takes time to build relationships with young people and it would be very hard to jump in without support from a mentor,” says one youth worker from Wales (Survey\_1).

Some of the respondents say they benefited from an older colleague who helped them to learn the craft of youth work. The important feature was that a more experienced colleague provided help in reflecting on how to do youth work and in helping one develop a professional identity. Having mentoring seems to be really important in the induction phase, and in some cases it provides a lasting impression on one’s professional career.

“Mentoring is hugely beneficial to practice. Had excellent guidance during my initial years.” (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Wales)

“I had an older colleague who helped me reflect on my actions through the day.” (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Sweden)

Besides mentoring, one can have other important sources of support, for example by talking to other people who work outside the field of youth but in related areas. This point was raised in the first group interview conducted for this project (FGI\_1). In this interview many youth workers described how they talked about their work with colleagues and relatives and received feedback and peer support.

In the survey, one youth worker from Greece talks about mentoring and about other people giving feedback and ideas:

“Mentoring is more than important. I had a mentor and a coach who supervised my path. For four years I was working close to him; nowadays I still refer to him as a mentor. I also have other support systems like people outside of the field to give me outside perspectives and people from within the field [who provide] ad hoc support according to the expertise.” (FGI\_1)

The answers are not clear on the matter of whether the mentoring was officially agreed on. A mentor certainly does not have to be formally nominated. The crucial thing is having a relationship which helps newcomers to the community to develop their competences and understanding by providing advice, a listening ear, support and role models (Jokinen, Heikkinen and Morberg 2012). Some answers describe mentoring relationships as evocative affairs which are both professional relationships and deeply felt experiences on a personal level as well.

“Even if you don’t realise there is a person that acts as a ‘mentor’ for you, it is very useful to feel supported by a person you trust. Fortunately, I found a person who I would love to call a ‘life mentor’, as his help was always there for me.” (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Greece)

Others feel a need for a more formalised process of mentoring. A youth worker from Ireland who says that she works in an NGO, not a youth organisation, talked about the need to gain support from other youth workers:

“I had informal mentoring from a youth worker in our national youth council. I always intended to formalise this, but it didn’t happen. I would have really liked a more formal mentoring arrangement.” (Survey\_1)

Besides mentoring by a more experienced colleague, some respondents mention team structures that provide support for doing the work. If team structures are working there might not even be a need for a personal relationship between a new worker and a mentor. “I didn’t feel a need for mentoring since the team supported me in the initial phase,” says one youth worker from Austria. In this case professional and social support are provided by a team. Support and encouragement can be available in the form of team meetings and officially acknowledged roles within the organisation. Also, more informal peer support was seen as an important part of professional development.

“I did not have a mentor but there is a system in place to provide support if I want. For instance, we have a team meeting once a week to plan and to discuss, among other things, how we are doing and of course how we perform our work during the week. There is a team leader you can talk to in case you need help or support. The director of the centre is also available if you need help.” (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Finland)

In some cases, mentoring had more to do with the official roles of the organisation, not necessarily deeply personal interaction. In these cases there seem to be formal procedures for providing support.

“I did feel the need for mentoring, and I got it in the form of formalised conversations with senior youth workers and youth managers in my organisation,” says one youth worker from Serbia (Survey\_1).

In some cases, a manager or the head of an umbrella organisation provided professional support. As an example, a youth worker from Ireland says:

“My line manager was of tremendous support from the outset. She supported me with situations that were new to me and guided and directed me to best practice and safe practice at all times.” (Survey\_1)

In some cases, respondents say that they would have needed mentoring but this simply was not available for them. In hindsight they think that mentoring would have been good for their professional career.

“I did not have any kind of support, even if I needed it.” (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Montenegro)

“I have not had mentoring but I think that it would be much easier if I had one.” (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Slovenia)

“I did not really have mentoring, I was sometimes at training and learned from others, but all in all I learned by myself. But mentoring is really important, so you can work better from the beginning. I have worked there for seven years and I have been really good for four years. With mentoring, maybe I would have been good for six years.” (Survey\_1. Youth worker from Austria)

Based on the responses to the online survey and the interviews it seems that the induction phase is of importance to the educational paths of youth workers. In some cases, mentoring and other forms of induction systems seem to happen informally, based on the relationships available in the organisations or with colleagues in and outside the youth field. Sometimes mentoring is offered non-formally, based on the rules of the organisation and hierarchical structures. In youth work mentoring seems to be based on the collegial model, with no official evaluations or supervision. Most of the respondents talk about the need for induction systems.

This study only hints at what good practices in the induction phase for youth work might be. Analysing good practices in induction systems would probably shed light on how the youth work community helps younger members to develop and could also shed light on the available support offered to youth workers. This probably relates to the issues of occupational satisfaction and occupational health. Mentoring is one of the key factors of induction systems in the teaching profession (European Commission 2010), and could be potentially useful in youth work as well. Since relatively little is known about mentoring, different mentoring systems should be further examined and developed. Also, analysing the possibilities of providing systematic European networks on mentoring might be fruitful.

## **7.6. Conclusions**

Professional learning paths can be divided into different phases. All of these phases are distinct steps in getting initiated into practice. In this paper, three phases were examined. The pre-degree experiences of youth work and the motivation to become active in youth work were analysed and the results show that many people in the field had personal experience of youth work before they began to study it or started to become professional youth workers. The motivation to become a youth worker can start from satisfying personal experiences, following a professional role model, wanting to contribute to building a better society or wanting to work with young people. If youth workers already have experience of youth workers and participants, their educational paths start from their informal and non-formal experiences in youth work.

Most of the youth workers involved in the study thought that formal education was important. It helped in becoming a reflective and critical practitioner, in understanding

the methods of youth work better, in convincing people outside the youth field and in getting labour-market qualifications. The perspective of reflective practice offers an interesting insight into developing youth work. Analysing the induction systems in youth work showed that there is a lot of variety in how new youth workers are supported on their professional paths. No systematic national or regional strategies for helping youth workers to learn to become professionals were found. This leaves a lot of room for innovative bottom-up approaches but will most likely mean that some youth workers do not get proper guidance at the beginning of their professional careers.

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations can be made.

- ▶ According to the respondents, formal education in youth work has benefited them in many ways. Research literature also suggests that formal education helps in legitimising the youth work field. Setting up formal youth work education in those practice architectures that lack formal education is likely to be beneficial for youth work.
- ▶ The motivation to become a youth worker can be individual (based on positive experiences as a participant in youth work activities) and social (wanting to help young people). Individual experiences seem to play a strong role in entering the profession. Spelling out the social benefits of youth work might help in encouraging those young people who do not have youth work education to consider youth work as a profession.
- ▶ Induction systems, and especially mentoring, play a strong role in the initial stages of one's professional career. The mentoring experiences vary considerably. This theme should be studied further, since, based on this information, mentoring models or induction systems in general cannot be classified. No systematic descriptions of mentoring systems were found. Creating models for bottom-up induction systems, perhaps with a European dimension, could be useful in promoting the continuous education of youth workers.

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## Chapter 8

# Youth workers' competences and learning in non-formal training

*Dunja Potočnik and Marti Taru*

### **8.1. Introduction**

**T**his chapter presents, firstly, a framework for supporting high-quality youth work that is based on the concept of competences and, secondly, an overview of some aspects of youth worker non-formal training and learning that can be carried out to support their acquisition of competences. The first part builds mainly on analysis of policy documents. The second part, empirical analysis, is based on the results of two focus groups, one online survey and 10 individual interviews. All data were collected from national and international expert practitioners – both trainers and managers – in the field of youth worker training.

This chapter is guided by the principles embraced by the Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention (2010) and the Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention (2015), which emphasise that youth work helps to develop positive attitudes and values in young people as well as more tangible skills and competences. The value of youth work in acquiring skills and knowledge is also recognised by the Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 to member states on youth work (Committee of Ministers 2017), which sees youth work as contributing to “active citizenship by providing opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes for civic engagement and social action”.

These positive outcomes can emerge from (and perhaps only from) the immediate contacts of youth workers with young people. These encounters are more effective when youth workers themselves possess skills, knowledge and attitudes that meet contemporary European standards of youth work. Naturally, these characteristics require training; youth workers do not possess them automatically. This chapter focuses on several issues around the provision of non-formal training for youth workers so that they can acquire a sufficient level in the competences that are considered crucial for performing high-quality youth work in contemporary Europe.

#### **8.1.1. Approach to youth workers' competences**

The concept of competence embodies a general understanding that performing a particular task can be described in three dimensions: skills, attitudes and knowledge. It also includes an understanding that, to be successful at a job, a practitioner must

possess some minimal level of certain knowledge, skills and attitudes specific to that job. One of the central features of competence is that it integrates the three aspects – skills, attitudes and knowledge – and does not focus on any of them separately. It is the combination of the three that counts.

Depending on context, “competence” can have a wider meaning and not be limited to work-related situations only; think of intercultural competence. However, in this chapter the term “competence” is used, as in European Union (EU) policy documents, only in the context of labour markets and job performance, to which the concept of competence is linked in the context of lifelong learning. In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU adopted the recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (Council of the EU and European Parliament 2006) and 12 years later the Council of the EU adopted an amended version of the recommendation (Council of the EU 2018).

The concept of competence has been found useful also for describing what youth workers do – we find it in the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio as well as in the Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally (SALTO Youth 2016). Also, in 2008, Fennes and Otten used a similar structure to describe the competence profile of youth workers (Fennes and Otten 2008). A youth work competence model should contain descriptions of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are deemed important for performing good-quality youth work. Such descriptions can have several functions, such as being a baseline for assessment of youth work quality, developing self-assessment tools, communication of content of youth work to other social actors and the development of a general youth work competence framework.

Of the three youth worker competence models mentioned above, the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio is the most comprehensive one. It comprises 31 competences that are divided into eight groups according to the functions that youth work is seen as capable of performing. The eight functions are:

- ▶ addressing the needs and aspirations of young people;
- ▶ providing learning opportunities for young people;
- ▶ supporting and empowering young people in making sense of the society they live in and in engaging with it;
- ▶ supporting young people in actively and constructively addressing intercultural relations;
- ▶ actively practising evaluation to improve the quality of the youth work conducted;
- ▶ supporting collective learning in teams;
- ▶ contributing to the development of their organisation and to making policies/programmes work better for young people;
- ▶ developing, conducting and evaluating projects. (Council of Europe 2015)

According to the model, performing each of the functions is possible by exercising the relevant competences – so a youth worker who possesses the competences that make up any one of the functions is capable of performing that particular function. Different forms of youth work may require different sets of competences

from a youth worker and, naturally, not every youth worker is expected to possess all competences to the same extent.

Possessing and making use of a particular competence is best described by a continuum, which may take on values from low to high level; it is not a present-or-absent feature. The levels of competences can be improved in many ways, including attending a formal education programme, involvement in professional skill development programmes and networks (e.g. mentoring), self-reflection and self-improvement, and non-formal training. Such methods can be combined, and this is often the case. On a European policy level, the White Paper “A new impetus for European youth” (European Commission 2001) articulated the idea that non-formal learning is a significant aspect in the European youth field and that juxtaposing formal education and non-formal learning is counterproductive. Instead of drawing a line between them, the formal and non-formal aspects of learning should be seen as complementary. Seeing formal education and non-formal training as two complementary aspects holds valid also when it comes to youth worker competence development. Without going into the vast area of learning and education, we only mention two definitions of non-formal learning that have made their way into European policy frameworks in the youth field. The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy defines non-formal learning fairly widely:

Non-formal learning is a purposive, but voluntary, learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. ... The activities and courses are planned, but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. (EKYP 2005)

To the European Commission, “non-formal learning means learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present” (European Commission 2015). These two definitions share the core understanding that non-formal learning takes place outside formal education settings, but still is a planned and supported activity.

In the EU, providing opportunities for youth worker training to support the provision of high-quality youth work was endorsed by the first EU youth strategy – An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering (Council of the European Union 2009a) as well as by the new EU Youth Strategy 2019-27 (Council of the European Union 2018). The Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work points out the need to provide youth workers with education and training opportunities (Committee of Ministers 2017). In practical terms, provision of non-formal learning opportunities is heterogeneous as it includes civil society organisations, youth clubs, cultural clubs and sport and leisure organisations. Training may be carried out in different places, including municipal facilities and schools and by people whose main job is other than youth work. For instance, they might be employed as teachers or specialists in other related occupations. In the second part of the chapter, we look into some aspects of youth workers’ non-formal learning.

## **8.2. Empirical analysis**

The empirical analysis uses data from an online survey (Survey\_2), focus groups (FGI\_7 and FGI\_8) and 10 individual interviews (Survey\_3). We now proceed to analysis of the datasources.

### 8.2.1. Youth workers' non-formal learning

Figure 11 compares youth work experience and participation in training. It shows that, in general, respondents were fairly similar in terms of their number of years active in youth work and the number of years when they had participated in youth work training.

**Figure 11. Years of experience and years of training in youth work (n=34)**

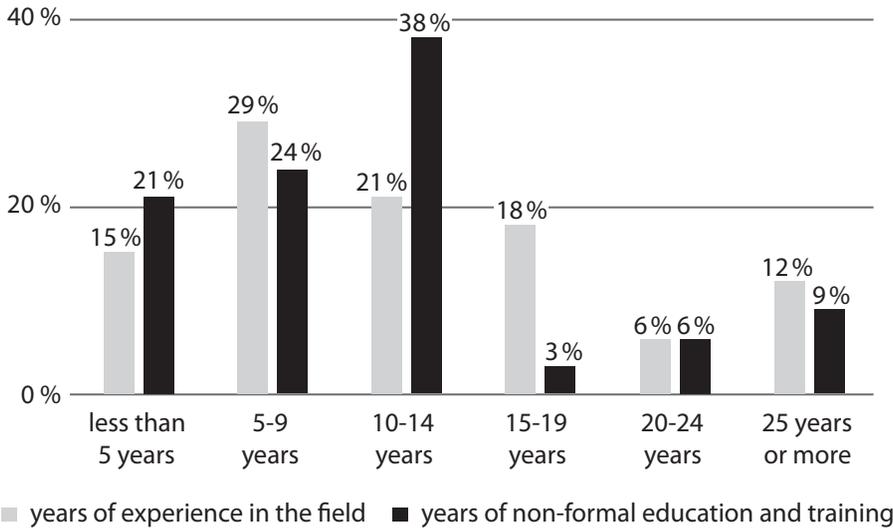


Table 12 provides confirmation that the years of non-formal education and training and the years active in youth work do co-vary positively – among more experienced respondents, a higher percentage reports more years of non-formal training than among less experienced respondents. This allows an interpretation that participation in training is a natural part of youth work practice.

**Table 12. The relationship between the number of years of non-formal learning and the number of years of experience in the field (n=34)**

		Years active in youth work		
		0 to 9 years	10 to 19 years	20 years or more
Years of non-formal youth work training	20 years or more	0%	0%	83%
	10 to 19 years	33%	62%	17%
	0 to 9 years	67%	38%	0%

### 8.2.2. Significance of competence frameworks

According to the online survey, 85% of respondents were aware of at least one youth work competence framework, and 62% said that they had made use of a competence framework in managing or developing their organisation. Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of using a competence framework for developing their organisation, using a 5-category scale, with 1 indicating the lowest importance

and 5 indicating the highest importance. As the survey shows, using a competence framework in developing the organisation was considered highly useful: altogether 88% ticked options “4” or “5”, 12% ticked the option “3” and nobody chose response options “1” or “2”.

Next we look at the opinions of youth work trainers and managers on the potential impact of youth work competence frameworks. Opinions on potential impacts were collected through open questions, and the responses could be grouped into seven categories, which are presented in Table 13. The most frequently mentioned topics were raising the quality of youth work, professionalisation of youth work and support for evaluation and self-assessment. Second most frequently mentioned was the theme of setting standards for youth work and defining ethical standards of youth work. After that, equally frequently were mentioned themes around defining learning objectives in youth worker education and training, and the development of competences.

**Table 13. Areas of potential impact of competence frameworks in the youth field (n=29)**

Potential impact of youth competence frameworks on the youth field	Number of responses
Raising the quality of youth work	11
Defining professional and ethical standards of youth work	5
Supports youth worker education and training	5
Supports recognition of youth work	4
Supports youth workers and organisations in being more focused	2
Supports raising visibility of youth work	2
Supports the creation of guidelines for the development of youth organisations	1

The role of competence frameworks as tools supporting self-reflection and quality improvement of youth work provision was mentioned also in the individual interviews, and the following quote illustrates the perceived benefits:

Having a set of competences gives a benchmark for setting professional standards and ensures that staff are committed to ongoing professional development within their respective roles. The competences also create a broad theme for focusing on ensuring that young people get the best possible support and focusing on the development of their skills, knowledge and attitudes. It strengthens youth work and aids reflective practice because staff can conduct their own analysis and reflective practice against the competences. (Survey\_3)

Survey results show that 56% of respondents had been advised to use competence self-assessment tools. What tools exactly, was reported in a separate question, and results of analysis of the responses are presented in Table 14. As the reader sees,

European and national frameworks were reported in approximately similar numbers. They together exceeded notably other frameworks.

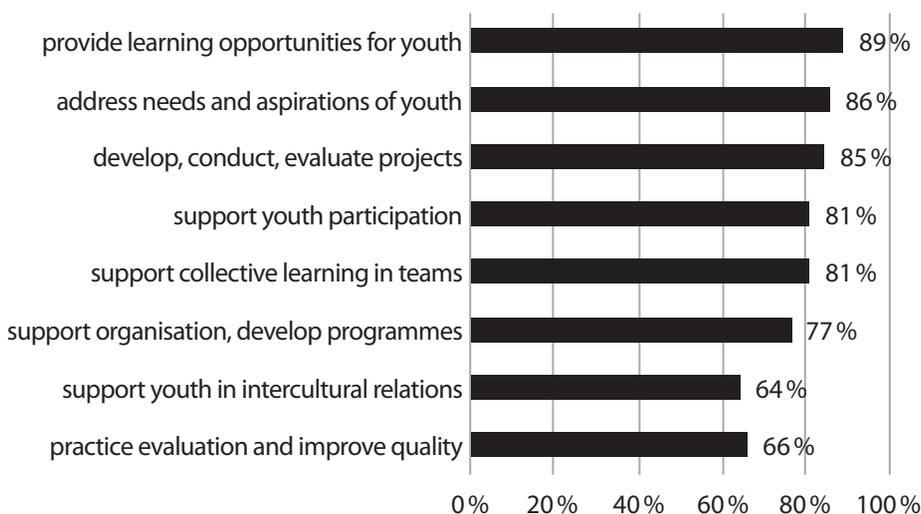
**Table 14. Tools and instruments used or recommended by youth worker trainers and managers for competence self-assessment (n=17)**

Tools and instruments	Number of responses
European frameworks	7
National-level frameworks	6
Individual plan	3
Other	1

### 8.2.3. Youth worker competences and training for competences

Survey 2 respondents were asked to assess the levels of competence of the youth workers they work with. Methodically, they were presented with the eight functions of youth work in the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio and, for each youth work function, the respondents were asked to assess the level of youth workers' skills, knowledge and attitudes that belonged to that function. The mean values of the responses are presented in Figure 12.

**Figure 12. Assessment of youth workers' competences using the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio framework**



For the majority of functions, more than 80% of respondents ticked response option "4" or "5". This can be interpreted as showing that the level of youth workers' competences was assessed as high. There are no major differences across the eight competences, but two competences were assessed to be more weakly represented;

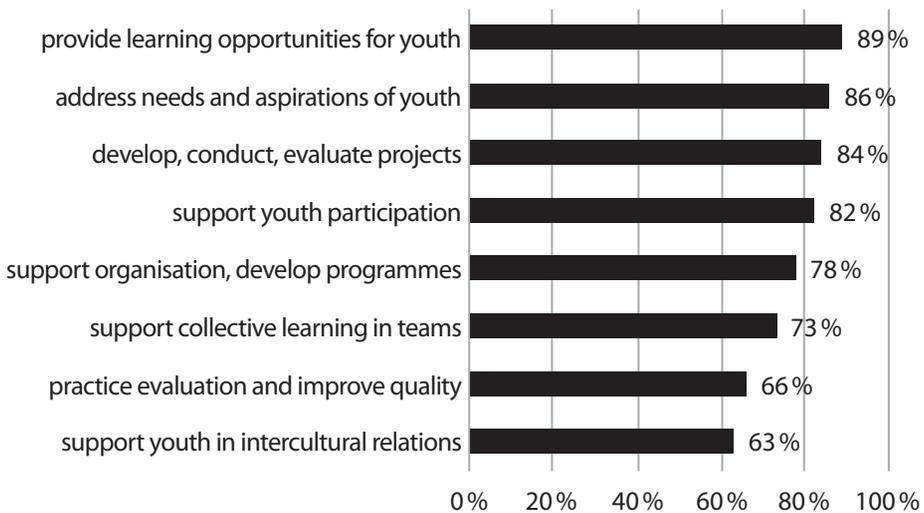
these were “providing support to youth in intercultural relations” and “practice evaluation and quality improvement”.

The finding that youth workers’ level of competence is at least satisfactory was further corroborated by the focus group interview (FGI\_7) and individual interviews (FGI\_8). From the interviews, some ideas for improvement emerged. Coding of the focus group discussion and individual interviews resulted in the following four categories where the need for improvement was identified:

- ▶ skills of listening to young people and ability to adapt to their needs; communication and presentation skills, especially in outreach youth work;
- ▶ devising and organising specific learning opportunities for specific groups like trainers, youth workers, etc. for acquiring pedagogical and psychological skills;
- ▶ critical thinking, self-assessment and evaluation skills;
- ▶ project management and fundraising competences.

When looking at the competence fields where training had been provided, we see that the chart describing this (Figure 13) to a large extent overlaps with Figure 12 – the level of youth workers’ performance on the eight functions and the areas where training was provided are almost the same.

**Figure 13. Areas of training provided by the organisations that youth worker trainers and managers currently work with (n=25 or 26, depending on function)**



Analysis of focus groups discussion (FGI\_7) and individual interviews (FGI\_8) identified the following areas of competences taught to youth workers in the organisations where focus group participants were engaged:

- ▶ development of personal traits (e.g. enthusiasm, motivation, proactivity, social intelligence);
- ▶ intercultural skills and values;
- ▶ values important for youth work;

- ▶ communication and presentation skills;
- ▶ pedagogical skills;
- ▶ knowledge of European projects;
- ▶ knowledge of the functioning of local, regional and national government;
- ▶ knowledge and skills required for inclusion of sensitive groups in youth work.

Interestingly enough, there is almost no overlap between the survey results and the focus group results – the themes of training that emerge from the focus groups differ from the themes obtained in the survey. There is no contradiction either though, so the lists could be seen as complementing each other.

### 8.2.4. Challenges to providing youth worker training

Survey respondents were also asked to characterise the problems and challenges in delivering training to youth workers. One of the challenges mentioned was the lack of long-term strategy for the provision of youth worker education and training, from local to international level. As a result, youth work training is often provided on an ad hoc basis; the issue is illustrated by the following quote:

There is no long-term strategy, only one-time grants without long-term vision. (Survey\_3)

Issues and challenges with youth work recognition and accreditation of youth worker competence acquisition were also mentioned. Respondents and interviewees expressed the opinion that both themes need more attention, as exemplified in the following quote:

We need to evaluate and reshape the system of accreditation and the process of gaining this recognition; it should not be only on the basis of one two day-long training [event]. (Survey\_3)

There is a lot that youth worker training organisers could accomplish to make training more useful for youth workers, as the following quote says:

Youth workers should be given the choice to engage in quality opportunities for their further development, including training at local, regional, national and European level, as well as online support such as webinars and MOOCs. At the moment, there's a multitude of great training opportunities for youth workers out there, many of which the majority of youth workers are unfortunately unaware of. The way training offers are communicated to youth workers needs to be improved, including why they should develop certain competences or increase their knowledge on a certain topic. Moreover, as most international seminars, training and events are in English, many youth workers who do not feel confident with their English skills automatically reject the idea of going abroad for a training opportunity. Developing regional training courses (in northern and southern European countries) might be helpful, but only by providing on-the-spot translation will you solve the issue. (Survey\_3)

Proposals for improvements at organisational, local, national and European levels were among core topics of the online survey (Table 15). Analysis of survey responses separated out two relatively large categories, which in general can be labelled "More

diverse provision and better quality of youth worker training” (12 proposals fall into this category) and “Better recognition and validation of youth work” (11 proposals). Also, recommendations to provide financial and organisational support were quite numerous (9) as well as recommendations to develop competence frameworks further (8).

Only two (!) recommendations were on establishing a formal education system in youth work. As Tomi Kiilakoski argues in Chapter 7 on early career paths, youth workers themselves see formal education as useful in several ways. Also, the existence of formal education programmes is itself an important attribute of an occupation, as chapters 3 and 4 by Taru and Kiilakoski argue. However, for youth work trainers, non-formal training was in first place, not degree programmes. This is consistent with what is presented in Chapter 3, in the report of the enlarged expert group on youth worker education and in the report by Dunne *et al.*, which all make clear that, for the development of youth worker competences, non-formal training is of major importance. Though these two positions may seem somewhat inconsistent, there is no contradiction or mutual exclusion. Both formal education and non-formal training can – and should – be offered in an integrated manner.

**Table 15. Proposed improvements at organisational, local, national and European levels in providing youth workers with opportunities to obtain competences for quality youth work (n=28)**

Category	Number of responses
More diverse provision and better quality of youth worker training	12
Better recognition and validation of youth work	11
Providing financial and organisational support to youth worker training	9
Developing competence frameworks and professional standards of youth work	8
Use of evaluation tools/quality-assurance frameworks and support for applications	3
Establishing formal educational systems for youth work	2
Other	5

Table 16 presents modes of support that are currently offered to youth workers. The overwhelming majority of responses fell into the category of “providing help with organising training”, which provides youth workers with an opportunity to obtain new competences, while other modes of support include supervision of youth workers’ activities, providing help to recognise skills and help with self-assessment.

**Table 16. Support offered to youth workers to acquire competences (n=29)**

Support offered to youth workers to acquire competences	Number of responses
Organising training	31
Regular supervision and co-ordination of activities	5
Opportunities for networking and peer learning	3
Providing help in obtaining certificates	2
Providing tools and guidance for self-assessment and evaluation	2
Support in writing project proposals and project management	2
Dissemination of information on relevant youth work activities	1
Help from the pool of trainers	1

The following quotes illustrate how support is offered.

We offer an educational programme for youth workers and youth leaders. Both programmes last for 11 months with a practical placement. At the end, those people who successfully finished received a certificate. For people who practise youth work, we also offer validation processes where they can validate and evaluate their gained skills and knowledge. For the organisation, we offer accreditation processes to ensure quality in youth programmes.

Our youth workers are frequently asked to participate in the writing, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of different projects and training and are taking a direct part and an active role in the youth work provided by the organisation, thus deepening and enhancing their relevant experience and expertise.

### **8.3. Conclusions**

This chapter has looked into the area around youth worker competences from several angles. First, it introduced the notion of competence, which today is seen as consisting of three components: skills, knowledge and attitudes. Youth work competences are outlined in the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio, which uses 31 competences that constitute eight functions of youth work. This chapter then moved on to describing opinions about both positive and challenging aspects of youth worker training, using data from focus groups, individual interviews and an online survey.

Of the online survey respondents, 85% were aware of at least one of the youth work competence frameworks and two thirds of them reported having used these frameworks in their work. It is interesting that, among youth worker trainers and youth work managers included in the survey, slightly more than half use or advise youth workers to use competence self-assessment tools. The most frequently cited potential impact of the youth competence frameworks in the youth field was to raise the quality of youth work, to support youth work professionalisation and to support evaluation and self-assessment.

Providers of youth work training and individual youth workers face multiple challenges that diminish their engagement in the provision of non-formal training and

learning opportunities. As the open-ended questions of the online survey show, there are five types of problem:

- ▶ lack of non-formal learning strategies;
- ▶ practical issues of provision of training;
- ▶ lack of recognition of learning outcomes;
- ▶ lack of support to youth workers who participate in non-formal training, either as trainers or trainees (this is a more general challenge, rooted in the lack of validation of skills acquired in training);
- ▶ lack of cross-sectoral, cross-ministerial, cross-level, cross-organisational and even intra-sectoral communication. Partly this problem is rooted in poor know-how on how to monitor and document activities and processes that constitute the core of youth work. One aspect of this problem is the rather weakly developed documentation of good-practice examples in the field.

Lack of long-term strategies and lack of recognition of youth work are manifested in lack of financial and organisational support. A great number of civil society organisations are still project-funded, which is a challenge from the perspective of planning activities for a longer period. There is also a shortage of co-operation between stakeholders in the youth field who could facilitate non-formal learning provision and recognition. The last challenge to be mentioned here is insufficient outreach, meaning that information about youth worker non-formal training sometimes reaches only a narrow circle of youth workers. This, at least partly, is attributable to weakly developed youth work organisations.

There is a certain amount of knowledge about the competence frameworks devised at the local, national and international levels, but this amount is not satisfactory. The youth work competence frameworks need to become more widely known and used. Existing models need to be developed further, and there is also a need for new competence models that would describe specific types of youth work (e.g. working with vulnerable and marginalised youth). The competence frameworks should also be updated constantly, recognising changes in society and in the expectations of youth workers themselves.

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## Chapter 9

# Associations, networks and support for youth workers in Europe

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*James O'Donovan*

### **9.1. Introduction**

**T**his chapter aims to identify and consider the various ways in which youth workers associate, network and support each other in Europe. In particular, the chapter focuses on the role that associations, networks and support organisations of youth workers can play in promoting youth work as a professional practice, supporting the development of youth workers and providing a platform for their interests, concerns and aspirations. The chapter also considers both the capacity and sustainability of such associations, networks and support organisations and the particular value, or potential value, that they can bring to the youth work field. Finally, it poses a number of questions. What in particular can or should associations and networks of youth workers do? What in particular can they not or should not do? And, what in particular can such associations and networks do that none of the other stakeholders in the youth field can do? The chapter is effectively divided into two parts. The first part analyses the data on associations, networks and support organisations of youth workers provided by the countries surveyed within the process of mapping educational and career paths for youth workers in Europe (see Chapter 2). The defining features of associations of youth workers, umbrella organisations and networks of youth organisations and bodies and organisations that place a particular focus on training and the provision of other support for youth workers are outlined and considered, and some features of European-wide associations and networks are also highlighted.

The second part of the chapter examines the role and impact of three associations (one each in Finland, Malta and Serbia), one network (in Slovenia) and one youth support organisation (in Belgium), with a view to considering what can be learned from them in the broader context of developing and supporting educational paths for youth workers in Europe.

Question 6 of the questionnaire that provided the data for the mapping report focused on associations of youth workers and requested data and information from each country on:

- ▶ the number of associations of youth workers at national, regional and local/municipal level;
- ▶ the approximate number of members of such associations; and

- ▶ whether or not associations provided in-house or contracted development and training courses for youth workers.

The data gleaned from the questionnaire, as well as data provided through links to relevant material provided the basis for this chapter.

## **9.2. Associations of youth workers**

Of the 41 countries that responded to the questionnaire, 24<sup>21</sup> countries indicated that some form of association or network of youth workers was in existence. Associations of youth workers are the most common form of organisation among youth workers and focus in particular on promoting professional practice, recognition of youth work, ethics and standards, and training and development.

Seventeen countries, out of 24 – Belarus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Serbia and the United Kingdom (England and Wales) – indicated the existence of associations of youth workers, with some providing the number of members and/or the role of such associations in the training and development of youth workers. The membership of these associations tends, in general, to be numerically small and the number that provide training and support even smaller. Membership of these associations varies from under 100 in Greece, Malta, Lithuania and Serbia to between 100 and 300 in Belarus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Iceland and the Netherlands and to several thousand in the case of the United Kingdom (England). The varying size of membership of such associations may be due, to some extent at least, to the overall size of the youth population, as for example in Malta, Serbia and the United Kingdom, but may be more a reflection of the relative status and level of development of youth work in a country: NUOLI in Finland (population 5.5 million) has some 1 300 members while the Association of Youth Workers in Greece (population 11.15 million) has 50 members.

The provision of training and development for youth workers is one of the main roles of associations of youth workers. While the data on training, both in-house and contracted, provided by the associations is somewhat patchy, there are some examples of what it entails. In Belarus, for example, the Association of Youth Workers, which comprises some 170 members, does not provide in-house or contracted development and training courses and all activities are voluntary. However, the association's aims are:

[the] consolidation of youth workers' specialists for mutual support and co-ordination of activity by means of creating conditions for developing professional competence and raising the prestige of their work and determining the social status of youth workers, protection of rights and interests of association members. (Belarus: Response to Questionnaire)

In Iceland, Félag fagfólks í frítímaþjónustu (Association of Youth Workers), which has some 200 members, provides training on an ad hoc basis, primarily seminars and

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21. Belarus, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, the United Kingdom.

study visits, but rarely provides training courses. In Serbia, the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) is the only body providing training for youth workers at the national level.

In addition to providing training, associations also focus on promoting professional practice and recognition of youth work, including issues relating to ethics and professional standards. NUOLI in Finland provides practical ethical guidance tools for everyday youth work practice, while NAPOR has a code of ethics as well as an ethics council to monitor and make recommendations on ethical issues.

In countries in which there is an overlap or a blurring of the lines between youth work and related professions such as social work, there appears to be a similar overlap or a blurring of the lines in associations of youth workers. The Czech Republic has an Association of Educators of Leisure-time Child and Youth Worker, which is an independent non-political professional organisation, that:

supports the development of leisure-time centres – of which there are some 260 in the Czech Republic – provides training opportunities, defends the professional interests of youth workers and volunteers and is one of the main consultants of the Youth Department (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports) concerning youth policy and legal framework. (Czech Republic: Response to Questionnaire)

BVJong, in the Netherlands, with some 150 members, is the national association of children and youth work professionals.

In some countries “youth workers” are effectively subsumed into associations of related professions. In Germany, Deutscher Berufsverband für Soziale Arbeit V. (DBSH; with 6 000 members) and Berufs- und Fachverband Heilpädagogik (BHP; with 5 000 members) are respective associations of social workers and remedial teachers, reflecting the close affinity between youth work and social work in Germany. In Luxembourg, youth workers appear to be subsumed into associations of educators and social workers. In contrast, the Federation of Detached Youth Workers in the United Kingdom (England) is a rare example of an association related to a specific aspect of youth work.

In a number of instances, associations appear to effectively be trade unions and are often described as such. NUOLI, in Finland, has 1 300 members (with approximately half in employment and half in training) and is an affiliated trade union that promotes both the recognition of youth work and good working conditions for youth workers. Trade unions for the public and welfare sectors in Finland also promote youth work and good working conditions for youth workers. In the United Kingdom (Wales), the trade union Unison has membership specifically for full-time and part-time youth and community workers. It also provides subject-related training in such areas as safeguarding young people and diversity awareness, and also circulates newsletters about local training. Trade union membership is also available for youth workers through the British trade union UNITE. In France, there are major unions/professional organisations in the field.

These variations in both the role and forms of association tend to reflect the particular nature, role and status of youth work in the surveyed countries in the mapping report.

### **9.3. Networks of youth workers**

The second defining feature in the 24 respondent countries is networks and umbrella organisations of youth organisations, NGOs or centres at national, regional or local level. In all, nine countries – Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden – have such networks or umbrella organisations. While networks and umbrella organisations are not associations of youth workers per se they do provide information, training, education, support and advice to organisations, NGOs, youth centres, youth clubs, holiday camps and municipalities that provide a wide range of youth work activities and services for young people. Consequently, paid or volunteer youth workers can indirectly benefit from such networks and umbrella organisations in terms of training, advice and related support.

Kanuuna is a network of youth services in the 27 largest towns and cities in Finland – comprising 60% of the youth population under the age of 29 – that also provides training. In France, the Comité pour les relations nationales et internationales des associations de jeunesse et d'éducation populaire (CNAJEP) brings together over 70 youth movements and ensures that associations are represented in dealings with the public authorities. The Jeunesse au plein air (JPA) is a confederation of informal education NGOs promoting holidays for all children, while Union nationale des associations de tourisme (UNAT) is a national union of social tourism NGOs. Some 200 organisations in France also provide training for those working with children and young people.

The Entente des Gestionnaires des Maisons de Jeunes in Luxembourg is an umbrella organisation comprising 37 institutions that manage 69 youth centres or service providers. It organises seminars, workshops and training for the staff of the member institutions. It also provides information and assistance for the member institutions concerning finances, accounting and insurance. The Federation Formaat in the Flemish Community of Belgium is also an umbrella organisation for some 400 youth clubs and provides them with information, training, education, support and advice. In the French Community of Belgium, 14 federations comprising some 90 youth organisations and youth centres also provide support and training.

Eesti Avatud Noortekeskuste Ühendus in Estonia is an umbrella organisation of 158 youth centres. In Slovenia, a network of youth centres, MaMa, has 47 member associations, while in Portugal the FNAP is the National Federation of Youth Associations. In Sweden, KEKS is a network of municipalities – 43 out of a total of 290 municipalities in Sweden – and organisations that practise open youth work and it supports them with training, seminars and coaching. Fritidsledarskolorna is an association for high schools that offers youth work training, while Fritidsforum is an association for recreation centres and youth clubs that also provides training for youth workers. In Sweden, as in other countries, the nature and size of these associations vary widely depending on youth population size and the extent of youth work provision.

### **9.4. Support bodies and organisations**

A third defining feature of the responses received from the 24 countries is the existence of bodies and organisations whose primary function and focus is on supporting

and promoting youth work. These bodies and organisations often tend to have a particular focus and purpose whether relating to the training and development for youth workers in supporting vulnerable young people, promoting good professional practice, providing information, recognising the values of youth work and through advocacy and lobbying.

Uit De Marge vzw, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, is a centre for youth work with disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people that supports youth workers who work with them. The centre focuses on building and promoting quality youth work with disadvantaged children and young people as well as providing guidance and support for local and regional youth initiatives that work with disadvantaged children and young people. Uit De Marge also supports youth work in general and other social sectors and services that address the needs of socially vulnerable children and young people.

In Liechtenstein, the Youth Work Foundation conducts training seminars, which are obligatory for its youth workers, and also pays half the costs for youth workers attending external courses. De Ambrassade, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, supports 106 youth work organisations that are officially recognised under the Flemish Parliament Act of 2012. It is a youth support structure relating to practice development, practice support and the provision of information to and about the youth sector.

The Institute for Youth Work in the United Kingdom (England) supports and promotes youth work as a profession through recognition of the benefits and values of youth and community work and by raising standards and increasing membership and support for the profession. In its Strategic Plan (2018-2023) one of the three priority areas is raising professional youth and community work standards. The Training Agencies' Group (TAG) is a network for those delivering youth worker education and training in both the United Kingdom and Ireland, which also provides seed funding for additional training and learning events.

Allianssi (Finnish Youth Co-operation) is a national service and lobbying organisation for youth work in Finland. It is a politically and religiously non-aligned lobbying body with more than 100 national youth and educational organisations as members.

## **9.5. European associations and networks**

In addition to associations and networks of youth workers at country level, there are also a number of pan-European initiatives that seek, through different methods and contexts, to promote both youth work and the interests and concerns of youth workers.

The European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC), established in 1976, represents a European network of youth work and youth club organisations that practise and promote open youth work and non-formal education. With 19 nationally represented organisations in 18 countries and reaching over 2 million young people annually, the confederation seeks to promote democratic and civil society and to encourage young people to be actively involved in their community by providing them with the skills and knowledge to make their own informed decisions.

The European Network of Youth Centres (ENYC), established in 2003, has 16 members in 13 countries and is a voluntary association that aims to develop standards for local, regional and national centres; provide support to individual centres; facilitate study visits and other exchanges so that centres can learn from each other; and promote the study of the processes of intercultural and international learning in non-formal settings.

Other related initiatives are the Council of Europe's Quality Label for Youth Centres, which aims to support the dissemination of quality standards for youth centres that have been developed in the European Youth Centres, including quality standards for educational and youth work activities, while Professional Open Youth Work in Europe (POYWE) aims to strengthen the position of professional open youth work through heightening its visibility and adopting common approaches to quality development.

## **9.6. Examples of associations, networks and support organisations from across Europe**

This second part of the chapter will briefly examine and consider the role and impact of three associations of youth workers – MAY (Maltese Association of Youth Workers), NAPOR (Association of Youth Workers) in Serbia and NUOLI (Youth and Sports Experts Association) in Finland – one network of youth centres, MaMa in Slovenia, and one support organisation, De Ambrassade in the Flemish Community of Belgium. In particular, it will consider the role they play and have played in the development of youth work as a discipline, a practice and a profession and the influence they have brought to bear in the promotion and implementation of youth work as a non-formal learning process for young people in their respective countries.

The reasons for selecting these associations, network and support organisation were three fold. First, they are a reasonably representative sample of the associations, networks and support organisations in the respondent countries. Second, they reflect some of the salient issues relating to associations, networks and support organisations in general: aims and purpose, capacity and sustainability, values and their relationship with other stakeholders in the youth work field. Third, the responses to the questionnaire and related links provided appropriate and relevant data.

### **Maltese Association of Youth Workers (MAY)**

The Maltese Association of Youth Workers (MAY) was established in 1998. Its founding members comprised the first graduates of the first degree course (part-time) in Youth and Community Studies in Malta. In 1992, the University of Malta established an Institute of Youth Studies (now the Department of Youth and Community Studies) to provide training for those who wished to pursue a professional career as youth and community workers. Up until the 1990s, however, youth work was exclusively the domain of the voluntary sector and while the newly established Ministry of Youth and Arts published the first document on youth policy in 1993, the state provided no material or financial support (Teuma 2018).

From the outset MAY had three primary aims. First, to promote professional youth work practice with the ultimate aim of having it formally recognised as a profession.

Second, to advocate youth work as a non-formal learning process for young people. Third, to engage actively with the relevant ministry, authorities and stakeholders with a view to establishing sustainable management, administrative and financial support structures for youth work and, consequently, enhanced employment opportunities for youth workers.

In pursuit of its aims, MAY developed and published a Code of Ethics for Youth Workers in 2001. The association also applied for professional recognition from the Maltese Federation of Professional Associations that resulted in youth workers being represented, along with other professional associations, on national consultative bodies in relevant areas of policy development.

However, it was not until 2010 and the establishment of Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, the National Youth Agency, that the state provided the sustainable management, administrative and financial support structures for youth work that MAY had long sought and advocated. As a consequence, youth work was formally recognised as a profession under the Youth Work Profession Act, 2015.

MAY was and is a youth work success story. It played a significant role in transforming youth work in Malta from a voluntary activity and service for young people into a fully state-supported, funded and professionally recognised discipline. However, there were bigger actors in this success story. From the outset MAY emerged from a clear, established and recognised education path: a university degree. It already had or soon acquired recognisable aspects of professionalisation. While the state took time to commit itself, its intervention in providing sustainable management, administrative and financial support was to prove decisive for the future of youth work in Malta.

## **National Association of Youth Workers in Serbia (NAPOR)**

NAPOR (National Association of Youth Workers) in Serbia is a union of civil society organisations (CSOs) established in 2008, in the absence of a state-recognised and supported national association for youth work. NAPOR's primary aims were, first, to lobby, advocate and introduce new policies and influence laws for the recognition of youth work as a tool for youth employment and social inclusion, and second, to enhance the capacities of NAPOR members in order to increase quality youth work and consequently make a greater impact on youth unemployment.

NAPOR brings together 90 CSOs and over 2 250 youth workers and adopts a consultative and participatory approach in partnership with the Serbian Ministry for Youth and Sport. NAPOR pools the expertise and experience of its member organisations in providing support for advocacy, capacity building, working with marginalised youth, employment, education and research. This expertise and experience also enable NAPOR to analyse relevant national, regional and local policies, laws and regulations. NAPOR is also recognised by the professional public in the field of youth policy as the national body of civil society organisations representing the voice of professionals working with diverse young people. NAPOR has also played a defining role in the development and implementation of standards and curricula.

Since its establishment, NAPOR has gained an impressive list of achievements, including the development of:

- ▶ three vocational/occupational standards in the field of youth work and non-formal education (Youth Activist, Youth Work Co-ordinator and Specialist for Youth Work and Policies);
- ▶ standards for quality youth work and non-formal education and a mechanism for their implementation;
- ▶ non-formal education curricula for the youth field;
- ▶ a mechanism for validation of previously attained competences in youth work;
- ▶ a pool of licensed organisations and trainers for delivery of multi-modular training for youth workers;
- ▶ a tool for the recognition of competences of young people gained through youth work programmes; and
- ▶ a code of ethics for youth work practice.

NAPOR is funded by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and also seeks financial support from European funding programmes.

In addition to its code of ethics, NAPOR also has an ethics council which is an independent body to ensure that the code of ethics is promoted and adhered to. The council is also mandated to respond to any breaches in the code of ethics and to make recommendations to member organisations to address such issues.

As an association, NAPOR also pools resources of experts from the field in the areas of youth and social policies and non-formal education, as well as from formal education institutions. It maintains relations and co-operates with national authorities and international bodies and donor organisations. NAPOR uses established partnerships with relevant European organisations and institutions to build its capacity, and seeks examples of good practices which can be applied in Serbia and advocates their implementation.

NAPOR's work in Serbia over the past 10 years has been comprehensive and wide-ranging, from helping to formulate youth policy, to developing curriculum and quality and occupational standards, while also providing training and other support for youth workers. Its role, it might be argued, was largely determined at its inception: NAPOR emerged "in the absence of a state-recognised and supported national association for youth work" and has effectively sought to fulfil that role. However, the general absence of formal education and training for youth workers in Serbia and the measured and nuanced approach of the state, which appears to have adopted a partnership approach with NAPOR, may also be relevant factors. In this context, and while the results of its work and endeavours have still to be fully realised, NAPOR may be seen as *primus inter pares* in terms of the evolution and development of youth work in Serbia.

## Youth and Sports Experts Association (NUOLI) in Finland

NUOLI (literally, Arrow) is a professional association and trade union affiliate organisation in Finland working in the field of professional work in the youth and sports

sectors and in higher education institutions. It aims to promote awareness of the youth and sports sectors and the professional profile, disciplines and skills of its members, and to enhance the career prospects and working and study conditions of its members.

NUOLI, which was founded in 2001, has 1 400 members, half of which are in employment as youth specialists or in the sports sector and half are in higher-level institutions pursuing a relevant degree. It is one of 23 member organisations of Akava Special Branches, a multidisciplinary trade union and services organisation whose members work in expert and managerial positions in the fields of culture, administration, communications and well-being. Akava's negotiating organisations, Senior Officials (YTN) and the Public Education Training Association (JUKO), are responsible for negotiating with employers. NUOLI is also actively involved in the development and advocacy activities of member organisations of Akava and other partners.

Members of both NUOLI and Akava are entitled to a wide range of benefits, services and support. These include:

- ▶ employment and legal services, wages counselling, influence and lobbying;
- ▶ unemployment, layoff or alternate leave services;
- ▶ conditions of employment in the private sector, including recommendations for a minimum wage;
- ▶ special education services for unemployed members;
- ▶ self-employment and self-employment guide;
- ▶ travel insurance, leisure accident insurance, liability and legal expenses insurance;
- ▶ family and financial advice.

NUOLI also provides training and related events for its members as well as offering them the opportunity to profit from state-funded scholarships.

NUOLI and Akava also publish reports and surveys that monitor members' interaction with the labour market and emerging trends and issues. In addition, recommendations and guidance are also available in related work environments such as camping and other leisure-time activities in the municipal sector.

For NUOLI, professional ethics is an expression of attitude and responsibility as well as a basis for reflection on youth work practice. Ethical guidance, as set out in two publications – "Professional ethics in youth work" and "Small acts, big issues – Ethics for youth work" – is seen as a practical tool that can be used in everyday youth work settings as well as an integral part of induction, training and problem solving.

NUOLI, as a professional association and affiliate trade union organisation, not only reflects the essentially professional status of youth workers in Finland, but also the parity of esteem in which they are regarded by professional associates in related fields. This parity is also reflected in its formal negotiating and bargaining position with both the state and the private sector and in its role as advocate and provider of professionally recognised advice and support to its members.

## Youth Network MaMa in Slovenia

While there is no formal education or accredited qualifications for youth workers in Slovenia, there are many different generic training opportunities available for youth workers, both paid and voluntary, in project management, communication skills, public relations, intercultural learning, intergeneration co-operation, and fundraising and organisational management.

The main providers are the Slovenian National Youth Council, Institute Movit, the national agency for Erasmus+, various NGOs and the Youth Network MaMa.

The main public funding sources are the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, the Erasmus+ programme and local communities.

The MaMa Youth Network is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that brings together and represents organisations that run youth centres in Slovenia. At present, there are 47 youth centres that are member organisations of the network. Youth workers are either employed or are volunteers in youth centres and MaMa's primary focus is on the training and professional development of youth workers.

MaMa provides supports to its member organisations through a range of measures that include:

- ▶ connecting organisations running youth centres or other activities in the field of youth work;
- ▶ representing common interests of member organisations in relations with the state sector;
- ▶ regularly informing members and other interested parties on issues and activities relating to youth work;
- ▶ organising meetings and promoting communication and project interaction between member organisations;
- ▶ offering professional support to member organisations;
- ▶ providing non-formal education for young people and youth workers.

MaMa's Development Strategy (2016-2021) focuses on developing the potential of some 50 youth centres and the training of youth workers. Central to this strategic approach is the MLADIM project, which was co-financed by Slovenia and the EU's European Social Fund and aimed at strengthening the competences of young people to increase their employment prospects.

The MLADIM project, which was implemented over a two-year period, 2016-2018, encompassed 18 youth centres. Youth workers in these centres participated in the project to develop their skills and competences in order to be able to deliver training modules. In addition, 360 unemployed young people between the ages of 15 and 29 were also included in the project through the youth centres. Following the culmination of the project, the youth centres' aim was to employ 32 trained youth workers. The project sought to provide a sustainable model for the training and employment of youth workers in youth centres and to further strengthen the active citizenship of young people. The project employed innovative and inventive

methods of training, based on non-formal learning methods, and provided support and visibility for youth centres at local, regional and national level.

The project's system of training for active citizenship and enhancing the competences of young people consisted of 10 modules based on non-formal learning methods, and comprised:

- ▶ the basics of youth work
- ▶ an evaluation of youth work
- ▶ project management
- ▶ international youth work
- ▶ public relations and communication
- ▶ peer-to-peer information for young people
- ▶ youth worker as mentors and instructors
- ▶ education for citizenship and social inclusion
- ▶ social skills for young people.

The MaMa Youth Network is an example of voluntary youth NGOs that are largely reliant on European co-operation and financial support. While it exemplifies the benefits of partnership and co-operation between countries, European institutions and European funding programmes such as the European Social Fund and Erasmus+, it also casts light on some of the limitations. Partnerships are reliant on mutual support and allocated funding. Projects are time bound, thus raising issues of sustainability and durability, and tend to focus on current and perhaps transient policy issues such as unemployment, where the training and employability of youth workers may be a welcome by-product rather than a sustainable commitment.

## **De Ambrassade in Belgium**

While there are no associations of youth workers, per se, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, there are a number of national umbrella associations and centres that support youth work and youth workers. The Federation Formaats is an umbrella organisation that supports 400 youth clubs by providing information, training, education, support and advice. Other national umbrella organisations, such as Chiro Flanders and Scouts en Gidsen Flanders, comprise both professional and voluntary staff and support local youth organisations by providing training and exchanges and promoting mutual co-operation and working together.

De Ambrassade is not an association of youth workers, but a centre that supports over 100 organisations that are recognised under the Flemish Parliament Act of 2012. De Ambrassade (youth support structure) is recognised and grant-aided by the Flemish Government and is mandated to carry out specific tasks that include practice development, practice support and the provision of information to and about the youth sector. Its stated mission is to put "youth, youth work, youth information and youth policy on the map ... strengthen the position of children and young people in society and contribute to the happiness and well-being of all children and all young people".

De Ambrassade is at once:

- ▶ an expertise centre for youth work, youth information and youth policy;
- ▶ a support and network organisation for the youth work sector in Flanders and Brussels;
- ▶ the co-ordinator for youth information in Flanders;
- ▶ the link organisation between youth and other sectors that have an impact on children and young people;
- ▶ the catalyst behind the Flemish Youth Council, the official advisory council for the Flemish Government on all areas that concern children, young people and their organisations in Flanders.

De Ambrassade's values are durability, solidarity and participation, which it seeks to promote through experiment and open public debate with the aim of fostering "a sustainable, inclusive and participatory society with room for experiment and open public debate", by providing both young people and youth workers with relevant information, inspiration and appropriate training. De Ambrassade sees itself as the engine in a network of youth players and cross-sectoral partners that includes the Flemish Youth Services Association (VVJ), the Flemish knowledge centre for international youth mobility and international youth policy, the national agency for the Erasmus+ programme in Flanders (JINT), the Children's Rights Knowledge Centre (KeKi) and the Children's Rights Coalition. Participatory work and co-operation with relevant partners are common threads in De Ambrassade's internal and external organisational structures – "by continuously interacting with our co-owners, we continuously shape the organisation together".

De Ambrassade is, as officially mandated, a youth support structure in Flanders that also supports youth workers, among others. It is not *primus inter pares* but rather just one organisation in a network of mutually supportive and interrelated bodies that aim to strengthen and add value to youth work in Flanders. Despite its focus on experimentation, its values are those of sustainability and durability which of themselves reflect the long tradition and embedded nature of youth work in Flanders.

## **Conclusions**

Associations or networks of youth workers tend to be a feature of those countries where youth work is either well embedded with both status and support or at least in countries where youth work is being developed (see Chapter 3). Membership of associations of youth workers can vary widely in size and their provision of training for their members, whether in-house or contracted, tends to be patchy and uneven. While they all appear to have a role in advocating and promoting youth work as a profession, with due regard for ethics and standards and seeking to improve the working conditions and career prospects of their members, they also display and reflect issues related to youth work in general as outlined in the respective chapter. Associations of youth workers tend to reflect the overlap and blurring of the lines between youth work and related fields such as social work, child welfare and leisure-time activities evident in the mapping report. In some

instances, associations of youth workers are effectively subsumed into associations of social workers and teachers. Finally, associations of youth workers can effectively be trade unions with the consequent bargaining power with employers in the state and private sectors.

Youth workers, whether paid or voluntary, working in a wide range of youth work settings can benefit from information, training, advice and other support provided by networks or umbrella organisations, while there are also a number of bodies whose main task is supporting the development of youth work in general and who can consequently provide related support for youth workers.

The role, nature and features of the associations and networks of youth workers in Belgium, Finland, Malta, Serbia and Slovenia that we considered in part two of the chapter appear to be very much determined by the status and role of youth work in these countries on the one hand, and, on the other, by the extent to which youth work is embedded and has a history in these countries and the support and recognition it gets, particularly from the state. This also appears to be generally the case in all of the 24 countries that have associations and networks of youth workers.

The associations and networks we considered in both Belgium and Finland appear to be specific, focused and tailored in relation to issues concerning youth work and youth workers. This is also the case in Malta, where the association of youth workers had two specifically focused outcomes for youth work and youth workers: state support and professionalisation. In the case of both Serbia and Slovenia, however, the associations and networks we considered appear to be looser, more fragmented and at the same time broader and more comprehensive in relation to issues concerning youth work and youth workers. For example, in Finland NUOLI is a trade union and professional association focused on the well-being of its members in terms of pay, employment security and prospects, working conditions and associated benefits and support. In Serbia, however, NAPOR has undertaken a very broad and varied role in relation to youth work and youth workers, including legislation, standards, quality, curriculum, training and validation. These different roles might be traced back to the nature and features of youth work itself in these countries, the extent to which it is embedded and has a history and the extent to which it is recognised and supported, particularly by the state.

While there are many aspects to the role that associations and networks can play in promoting youth work and in facilitating education and career paths for youth workers, three in particular may be worthy of further consideration: capacity, sustainability and value.

Chapter 3 on mapping singled out the respective roles of the state, either centrally, regionally or locally, through public-funded bodies or institutions; European support programmes; and the voluntary youth sector, in the provision of youth work. While each of these stakeholders or partners has its role, responsibilities and capacities, they are not commensurate or proportionate. The state, it might be argued, whether at national, regional or local level and in whatever manner or context, has the greater role, responsibility and capacity. Only the state has the legal authority, the legislative

fiat and the financial muscle to determine both the role of youth work and youth workers. As indicated in Chapter 3:

in a minority of countries, with a history of youth work and where it is embedded, education/training and employment paths appear reasonably clear – career paths perhaps less so – regardless of how youth work is defined and operates. In other countries surveyed, where youth work is not embedded, education/training and employment paths often appear both limited and sparse.

In countries where youth work is embedded, the role of the state, in whatever manner or context, is a significant factor. The role of European support programmes, while relatively recent, is also significant, but such programmes tend to be measured, tailored and time bound in terms of both programme duration and funding.

When we come to the voluntary youth sector, however, we see a somewhat different picture. The capacity of the voluntary youth sector is potentially considerable in terms of its human resources, but it is not proportionate to the youth work load it often assumes and carries. While the voluntary sector is often the most active stakeholder in terms of its interface with young people “on the ground”, it is the stakeholder with least capacity in terms of financial and material resources. The voluntary youth sector does not have the capacity or resources of the state. The work and capacity of the voluntary sector, it might be argued, is often bedevilled by a lack of money and resources, which when available are often temporary and conditional. It can fall to the voluntary youth sector to involve itself in legislative, quality, standards and training issues for which it may not have the necessary expertise or capacity. Associations and networks of youth workers are a significant feature of the voluntary youth sector in Europe and as such share the lack of proportionate capacity that is a feature of voluntary youth work in general. As a consequence, it might be argued, responsibility for youth work and youth workers is not proportionally shared between the relevant stakeholders and partners.

Lack of capacity is intertwined with lack of sustainability. The state and, to a certain extent, European support programmes can provide sustainability, but for the voluntary youth sector, including associations and networks of youth workers, sustainability is an ever-present issue. Lack of capacity and consequent sustainability are not only an existential threat to the voluntary youth sector but also impede and frustrate the sector’s work, focus and potential.

Finally, there is the issue of value. What, we might ask, is the particular value of associations and networks of youth workers in the context of both youth work and education and career paths for youth workers? What in particular can or should associations and networks of youth workers do? What in particular can they not or should not do? And, what in particular can such associations and networks do that none of the other stakeholders in the youth field can do? As we can see from this chapter, associations and networks of youth workers can take on many forms in response to different contexts, situations and needs. However, advocating and promoting the values and role of youth work, peer-to-peer learning and support, professional ethics and instilling self-esteem and pride in youth workers and the contribution they can make to young people’s development and the general well-being of communities

and society might be a starting point from which to further explore the value of and opportunities for associations and networks of youth workers.

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## Chapter 10

# Toward professionalisation? Youth worker as an occupation in Europe

*Marti Taru, Ewa Krzaklewska and Tanya Basarab*

### **10.1. Introduction**

In the years since 2010, Europe has been witnessing increasing interest in and reflection on youth work. This interest has centred around the possible and potential role of youth work in society, in particular how it could contribute to realising social policy goals, including the development of integrated youth policy. The Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work, CM/Rec(2017)4 (Committee of Ministers 2017), called for further development of quality youth work to be maintained and actively supported at local, regional and national levels. While calling for institutional support for youth work quality from member states, the Recommendation highlighted youth workers, emphasising that efforts are needed to invest in developing their knowledge and skills, as they are the crucial resource for the sector and its quality depends on their level of engagement and competences. The Recommendation also suggested the establishment of frameworks and strategies in youth worker education, thus emphasising the need to adopt longer-term perspectives than has been customary until now.

The exercise in mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers (Mędlińska and Basarab 2019; Expert Group 2019), carried out over three years from 2017 to 2019, aimed at a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the learning opportunities and pathways of youth workers. This book presents the outcomes of this effort. This final chapter offers some reflections on youth workers' educational and occupational pathways, based on the data collected during the exercise and analysed in individual chapters. The empirical material is quite rich: a thematic questionnaire filled out by EKCYC correspondents and other contributors from 41 states (and covering 44 regions), a Europe-wide online survey of youth workers and an online survey among youth worker trainers and organisers, as well as eight focus groups with youth workers and youth work managers, most of whom were active at European level. The chapters in this volume highlight some of the important debates and findings of this process. As the mapping exercise has shown, there is wide diversity in Europe in its institutions and legal frameworks around youth work education, youth work practice and youth work as an occupation. Youth workers in different countries experience fairly different situations in formal education, non-formal learning opportunities and the

connections between learning and working lives. In this closing chapter of the book we look at questions and debates that the different chapters have opened up. We hope that this book will signpost new directions for research, policy and (above all) the development of high-quality practice.

We use here the notions of youth work practice and youth work as an occupation instead of youth work as a profession. There is a reason for that. Youth work has acquired the position of a semi-profession in only a few countries, and in any case it is unclear whether acquiring the position of profession in the future would be desirable. In most European countries, the word “occupation” is appropriate for describing the situation of paid youth workers among other occupations (see chapters 2 and 4). However, since the majority of youth workers in Europe are engaged on a voluntary basis, this chapter also talks about youth work practice, to underline the important presence of volunteer youth workers for whom the term “occupation” – which is usually linked to earning income – would not be appropriate.

## **10.2. Quality youth work: contribution through diversity**

Today, youth work is seen as consisting of a range of occupations and practices that, on the one hand, differ from each other, but, on the other hand, are so similar to each other that they collectively differ from other occupations and professions. This leads us to ask what sets youth work apart from other fields of practice like teaching, social work, sports coaching, policing, medicine and other such occupations? Being able to substantiate the claim that youth work makes a unique contribution to society translates in many countries exactly into showing how youth work is separate from these other fields of praxis or other occupations and professions.

Currently, there is an understanding that youth work activities are aimed at and concerned with creating spaces for young people and providing bridges in their lives (Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Convention 2015). Several features can be identified as characteristic of youth work: it is seen as developmental, youth-centric, voluntary, supporting social inclusion, self-reflective and critical (Council of Europe 2019). But what are the core features that set youth work apart from other similar activities? Chapter 5 by Petkovic and Bárta on ethics (in this book) elicits features that are present in youth work but not necessarily in other fields of praxis and other occupations.

It can be argued that the simultaneous occurrence of the following three principles is what separates youth work from other areas. Firstly, young people get involved in youth work activities voluntarily; thus participation is not mandatory. Not all occupations and practitioners engage with young people on a voluntary basis; policing and schooling are good examples here. Secondly, youth work is the field of practice where young people’s interests are put first or where the “primary beneficiary” principle is implemented by keeping the focus on young people. In the case of many other occupations and services, other interests may be put first when addressing young people – as can happen, for example, with state interests in social work. Thirdly, youth workers engage with young people in their contexts, in their places – both in the direct, physical meaning, as well as metaphorically – where young people “are present” in the moment. By doing this, youth workers recognise the need to

break down barriers that limit young people's life opportunities in those particular situations. Taking the three principles together, youth work is separated from other occupations by relying simultaneously on the principles of voluntary participation, putting young people in the centre and engaging with them on their own ground. Youth work success strongly depends on building relations based on trust – between young people and youth workers, as well as in the youth work sector as such.

In their analysis of youth work ethical codes, Petkovic and Bárta (see Chapter 5) make no distinction between paid and volunteer-based youth work practice or between formal education and non-formal learning. This means that youth work quality standards must be followed by all youth workers, and all young people involved in youth work must be treated equally, according to the same standard. All youth workers must follow the same basic rules and standards, whether in paid employment or doing youth work on a voluntary basis, whether they have acquired a university degree or learned relevant skills in non-formal training. In the context of educational and occupational pathways, it follows that youth worker training and education must include a module where youth work ethics and its principles are taught. Since this is a universal part of youth work, it must be included in the education and training of all youth workers.

While the previous section outlined the message that youth work was distinct from several other occupations, there are very visible internal divisions within youth work. In fact, nowadays youth work is seen as a rather heterogeneous field of practice, which varies in terms of target groups, goals, methodologies and type of engagement. And, of course, each country has its own specifics (Dunne *et al.* 2014: 109). Although there is sometimes a concern or worry that such diversity may hinder the development of youth work, heterogeneity within an occupational family is not unusual. For instance, this feature is very obvious also in social work, which can be considered to be a neighbouring family of occupations to youth work (Erath 2010). There is, however, one trait of youth work practice which cuts across most of the above-mentioned variations, and that is the division between volunteer and paid youth workers. This division was mentioned in the Resolution of the Council of the EU in 2010 on youth work (Council of the EU 2010) and was one of the themes discussed in the first European Youth Work Convention in Ghent in 2010 (Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention; Nemetlu 2010a; Nemetlu 2010b). Though there are no reliable statistics on the numbers of volunteer youth workers, it is clear that voluntary engagement dominates among the people involved in youth work. An estimate that, in the majority of Council of Europe countries, they constitute 85-95% of all youth workers seems plausible. There are exceptions certainly, with Germany having around 30% of youth workers working in salaried positions (Dunne *et al.* 2014: 109-14) and Estonia even having a majority of youth workers in paid positions (Käger, Kivistik and Tatar 2018; Rasmussen 2018).

Discussing the difference between paid and voluntary engagement in youth work is necessary because efficient work with young people from different backgrounds, and that is aimed towards the diverse goals specified in social policy documents, entails specific activities and requires different resources. Going on a weekend hiking tour or helping at a week-long summer camp, or organising hobby activities with 13- to 16-year-olds from well-functioning middle-class families who are in good health

(a large proportion of young people) represents the “happy face” of youth work. Supporting young people in their early twenties who have only primary education and are trying to find a job, who come from broken families and maybe struggle with drug and/or alcohol dependency, is a completely different story. Helping a 22-year-old refugee who comes from a different culture, has no family to support them, only vaguely knows the local language and culture, and has no skills to find a job, is potentially much more challenging. And persons experiencing disability require yet another kind of support, as disabilities often lead to cumulative disadvantages and discrimination. The enlarged meeting of experts in 2018 suggested that because of the solid, though not impermeable, line between volunteers and paid youth workers, it would be useful to go back to a distinction between youth leaders and youth workers. While paid youth workers would be performing more complex tasks, volunteers would be expected to carry out less demanding tasks with fewer responsibilities, mainly within youth organisations. The question is: would such a distinction help youth work to address the diverse needs of youth people more efficiently? We need to see what settings might require specialised competences, experiences and resources, and where the motivation and engagement of volunteer workers, also equipped with diverse skills, could be crucial.

The coexistence of volunteer and paid youth work also affects engagement patterns and related pathways, which is important when discussing youth workers’ education and learning. Firstly, voluntary engagement can be seen as an introductory phase in becoming a paid youth worker – young people starting youth work within an organisation where they have been previously volunteering. Secondly, the position of volunteer youth worker can be seen as a respectable form of engagement in youth work in its own right. In a range of countries, youth work organisations have developed specific training opportunities, support systems and validation tools for voluntary youth workers (Kiilakoski 2018). Especially in youth organisations, volunteer youth workers carry out significant work in providing young people with support and guidance. This is what they have chosen to do, but they do not plan to become paid youth workers, and their choice is recognised by organisations (FGI\_5). For example, one organisation which thrives on volunteer-based youth work is the World Organisation of the Scout Movement. This coexistence is not unique to the youth sector; in fact it is rather the norm in most sectors that have social purposes, such as education and social work. However, it is worth reflecting on the balance between volunteer youth workers and paid ones, on the support that each group requires in training and preparation and on the expected levels of commitments and impact.

### **10.3. Towards quality-assurance and competence frameworks**

Undoubtedly, youth work is a field of practice characterised by a high degree of variation across countries as well as within countries. Within this kaleidoscopic heterogeneity, there are initiatives aiming at strengthening agreement on common ground by establishing and implementing systems that assure high quality in youth work. This challenge is addressed by using various tools like certification of courses and/or of course providers for youth workers, evaluation of youth workers and youth organisations, national documents describing and enforcing youth work standards

(occupational standards, and educational standards for youth work in general or for a particular youth work method), funding requirements and combinations of those approaches. As the mapping in this book reveals, such quality-assurance standards on a national level exist in only 18 countries out of the 41 surveyed (44%).

Youth worker competence frameworks, which are a sub-system of a more general youth work quality-assurance system, are being developed in another 20 countries. The majority of the frameworks focus on describing the competences necessary in good-quality youth work practice, but there are also some countries which focus on describing educational outcomes (see Chapter 2). By framing how youth work is and should be practised, they support the development of high quality in youth work, and by this means they also support its unique social impacts that differentiate it from other fields of practice and other occupations.

Most of these competence systems include, at least to some extent, competences listed in the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio. Interestingly, the most often included groups of competences are generic competences that are relevant for many occupations and professions. These include skills in communication, presentation, public relations, organisation and project management. But there are also seven groups of competences that are particularly necessary for working with young people: facilitating learning; ability to analyse youth (group) needs; facilitating the personal development of young people; encouraging the participation of young people; leadership skill and the ability to motivate young people; ability to create and maintain purposeful and trusting relationships with young people; and awareness of youth work ethics. On the one hand, this list demarcates certain themes and indicates the need for knowledge of the situation of young people and of the processes that are having an impact on their lives. On the other hand, this list relates to youth work methodologies. This list of competences shows that there exists a set of general competences that youth workers should share. At the same time, while there seem to be a common agreement on core youth worker competences, youth workers may need very specific sets of skills and knowledge to cope with the diversified societal challenges in play.

The survey results presented in Chapter 8 show that the Council of Europe Youth Worker Portfolio (Council of Europe 2015) is one of the most widely used youth worker competence frameworks. Other cross-national and Europe-wide frameworks that support good-quality youth work and are being used include the SALTO Youth Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally (SALTO Youth 2016), the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency's *Quality Management in Youth Information and Counselling – A competence development framework* (ERYICA 2014), or the AIESEC Leadership development model (AIESEC 2017). The various European-level frameworks are probably used in more countries than local and national frameworks.

The value of European frameworks is twofold. Firstly, they help to fill a gap by providing a description of youth worker competences in those countries where a national framework has not been established. Secondly, they represent an overarching framework that potentially could harmonise understandings of what is expected from a highly competent youth worker in all European countries. As Chapter 8

demonstrates, there is a pattern of movement towards establishing a framework of common competences that would be shared by all youth workers. There are also indications that European frameworks help to develop local and national frameworks by being adapted to national and local circumstances. Many countries, while establishing youth work quality systems and youth worker competence descriptions as part of their system, rely heavily on these European initiatives. This, however, does not tell us how effectively the frameworks actually function and what should and could be undertaken to improve their impact.

In light of the diversity of youth work settings and target groups, we can conclude that all youth workers need to share a common core, including ethical competences, but some youth workers need to possess and make use of a set of unique skills and competences, sometimes potentially very specialised. How do youth workers become competent on all specific as well as generic requirements?

#### **10.4. The role of a formal education system**

The importance of academic engagement and knowledge of social theories for good-quality youth work is also stressed by youth workers themselves. Many youth workers with a tertiary-level qualification, perhaps the majority of them, have acquired their degree not in youth work but in some other subject. Some of the subjects are fairly close in content, but others have nothing to do with youth work. Probably this pattern – that many youth workers have acquired a degree in a different subject – is caused by two circumstances. Firstly, youth work university degrees are available only in eight countries and this sets limits to acquiring a degree in youth work (see Chapter 2 under 'Formal and accredited education'). Secondly, opportunities to acquire a youth work degree are relatively recent, so middle-aged or older youth workers have had no chance to study youth work in a university. Nowadays, young people interested in becoming a paid youth worker have notably more opportunities to acquire a youth work (related) degree, which is therefore a country- and cohort-specific phenomenon. In addition to specific youth work programmes, plenty of youth studies programmes are available too. Chapter 6 identifies 100 study programmes in EU member states that focus on the role and position of young people in contemporary society, but there are possibly more. Importantly, most of the programmes point to youth work as one, or the main, professional outcome of following such studies. Looking to the future, youth study programmes could make a good contribution to the overall level of youth worker education.

As discussed by experts in the 2018 meeting, such programmes could serve as a solid base for increasing the number of collaborations between formal education and non-formal learning, which would support more fluid transitions between the levels of formal education and between formal and non-formal learning acquired by youth workers. Such collaborations could help strengthen or adjust the quality of the formal education curriculum and improve the quality of the practice dimension, which is seen as a crucial learning path by youth work practitioners.

In Chapter 7, Kiilakoski takes a deeper look into how formal education programmes contribute to the development of youth workers in the job induction phase and of volunteer youth workers when they begin practising youth work. Beyond acquiring

youth work competences, one of the clear benefits of formal education – in the eyes of youth workers – is that education provides them with the tools to be a reflective and critical practitioner. By tools, they mean theories that enable them to critically examine their activities and tweak them so that they can offer adequate support to young people. Building competences is only a part of what the formal education system contributes. It is impossible to overestimate the contribution of formal education to the social standing of youth work as well as to its perspectives of development. The very existence of degree programmes signals to policy makers and, especially, to groups outside the sector and to society at large that youth work is of high social importance and that working in this sector requires very specific competences that need to be acquired from other professionals and that need to be taught.

In contemporary societies, formal education is one of the central attributes of a profession or a highly professionalised occupation. In fact, expansion of higher education suggests that having a tertiary education is a prerequisite for becoming a professional of any kind and any occupation should also have a formal education branch for transmitting skills, knowledge and values. Under the circumstances that youth work in the majority of European countries suffers from a lack of social and political recognition, as pointed out in Chapter 8, establishing formal education programmes offering a degree in youth work can only be recommended and welcomed. This point is mentioned in Chapter 3 and highlighted more vividly in Chapter 4. In fact, the Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work emphasises that higher education opportunities in youth work should become a new normality, instead of being exceptional as they are now.

Alongside expanding educational opportunities, high-quality knowledge production institutions should also be developed. Currently there is a lack of research centres and think tanks that have youth work as one of their focal areas. At European level, youth work is partly the focus of research in the Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy managed by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, but not the exclusive focus. Moreover, there is a lack of individual research positions within larger institutions with a focus on youth work. The formation and development of such centres and their participation in international research co-operation are necessarily among the next steps in the development and institutionalisation of youth work, as such changes would contribute to theoretical and methodological advancement and the sharing of knowledge.

## **10.5. The role of non-formal learning**

Side by side with the formal education system, which carries more than one function in development of youth work as a field of practice or an occupation, another system of youth worker training and non-formal education co-exists. These training courses tend to focus more on the development of practical competences or on acquiring knowledge in a given thematic area or even learning a very specific set of skills. Chapters 4 and 8 clearly show that youth workers are very eager to engage in these non-formal learning opportunities, partly due to the intrinsic nature of youth work as a reflective practice and partly due to the dire lack of any formal

education opportunity in many countries. Chapter 4 indicates that many youth workers have participated in 10 or more training courses over their working life as a youth worker. We may assume then that youth work training courses have contributed considerably to their youth work competences and had a positive impact on the quality of their work. This contribution was considered valuable to both paid and volunteer youth workers, and it was very much relevant also for those youth workers who had acquired a degree in another field. And we know from earlier research (Dunne *et al.* 2014) as well as from the mapping exercise (chapters 2 and 4 in this book) that, for the majority of youth workers, such training courses are a way to learn youth work competences. It would then be fair to assume that youth worker training courses carry two main functions. Firstly, they are the main tool for widening and updating youth workers' competences, for acquiring practical skills and knowledge. Secondly, they function as a bridge between educational areas, helping people with a different educational background to relocate themselves in youth work.

In the context of non-formal learning, we often observe the ongoing quest for recognition – this theme is considered in Chapter 8. Standardisation seems to be treated as a remedy for recognition. Yet, according to youth workers, there is the need for a long-term vision and strategy of youth worker training and development, since after all, the youth workers are a key pillar of successful youth policy delivery. Would standardisation respond to the need for the diversity of skills within youth work or rather constitute a limitation in this respect? Would standardisation actually lead to better recognition of those learning experiences? Currently there are no ready answers to these questions and, without further exploration of the theme, it would be difficult to formulate specific solutions.

Discussions on youth work education programmes should be widened to consider also the bridges between diverse educational providers, both formal and non-formal. In light of the picture drawn from the mapping study, the relation between formal and non-formal learning is important. In addition, as emphasised at the enlarged expert meeting, developments in the formal education system do not undermine the significance of non-formal learning. Actually those countries which provide clearer educational pathways also recognise to a higher degree non-formal learning activities, and more substantially reflect on their potential and value (Kiilakoski 2018: 10).

Last but certainly not least, in the context of non-formal learning, it is important to consider the impact of European funding programmes and of the various initiatives of European institutions and bodies, on its accessibility, content and utility. In focus groups, European funding, such as the Erasmus+ programme was indicated by youth workers as a critical factor for giving opportunities to participate in training that supports professional development. The aspects of networking and exchanging knowledge and experiences with youth workers from other European countries were stressed by youth workers in FGI\_6. The importance of European funding for learning was indicated as crucial where local or national funding is lacking. The thematic chapter in the mapping study highlights the connection between European training institutions and recognition – it appears that such funding may also support gaining recognition.

## **10.6. Integration into the youth work community and youth work organisations**

Graduating from a higher education institution and obtaining a degree is only the beginning of one's professional journey, not the end. The fresh graduate enters – ideally – into an induction phase of their professional activity. As Chapter 7 by Kiilakoski emphasises, youth workers in the first years of work should be supported by experienced youth workers. There are different methods and ways of doing this. In general, there are clusters of organisational activities supporting the learning processes for new members in an organisation. Unfortunately, it seems that this kind of support is available predominantly to paid youth workers. Volunteer youth workers have notably fewer opportunities to access such support. Partly this can be explained by the weakness of organisations in the field of youth work and the predominance of project-based funding schemes and activity within organisations. The message delivered by Chapter 9 is that, in the sector of voluntary youth work activities, organisations possess notably fewer resources and less capability to support their members. That chapter also concludes that actually it is only the state and public sector which commands enough financial and organisational resources to set up such support systems. This situation has potential to lead to an accumulation of educational and training benefits for paid youth workers who have obtained a formal education degree and are employed youth workers in the public sector, and, at the same time, an accumulation of disadvantages for volunteer youth workers, who most probably have not obtained a degree and also face poor access to support systems.

## **10.7. Practice architectures and the development of youth work**

The concept of practice architectures (see Chapter 3 by Kiilakoski) brings out the complex nature of youth work as a field of practice, as well as its internal and external linkages to other organisations and social institutions. According to the concept of practice architectures, a country with strong youth work practice is characterised by legislative definitions of youth work, either competence descriptions or quality assurance if not both, public support for non-formal learning and identifiable career paths, and formal education in youth work (either in vocational or tertiary education, or on both levels). Based on these criteria, Kiilakoski categorises the countries surveyed in four large groups with, at one end, countries with strong practice architectures and, at the other end, countries belonging to the group of practice architectures that he calls “in need of development”. These countries may have (and usually have) defined youth work in their law, but have no competence descriptions or quality assurance, nor identifiable youth worker career paths. In some cases, there is appropriate higher-level education available, along with public support for non-formal learning and also associations of youth work.

When considering the typology presented by Kiilakoski, the different levels of youth work practice architectures – from least to most developed groups of countries – could be viewed also from a diachronic or developmental perspective. While a cross-sectional perspective compares the four types of practice architecture, at country level, at a certain moment in time, the diachronic perspective adds a time dimension. Clearly, there is no country where youth work has been in its current

state since the beginning of time and it is evident that its youth work will change in the future. How exactly, we do not know. Norbert Elias, one of the renowned thinkers of sociology, maintains that changes in society result from interactions between actors. Nothing is predetermined – at any given moment in time, all futures are possible, because the future unveils as a result of the interactions of countless actors. Actors' actions will depend on their values, opinions, goals and, more generally, on their interpretation of their (social) surroundings, including the actions of other actors (Elias 2013).

This perspective emphasises the significance of deliberate actions when creating the desirable future. We may apply this perspective when thinking of the development of youth work. In the formation of an occupation or a profession, the shared meanings and group identity created around this struggle are of crucial importance. Their development is partly internal but partly takes place through interaction with other actors in society – hence, it is the process of interaction within the group as well as with other groups that leads to wider understandings of the role of a particular occupation in society. Social work has been developing through this process, and therefore perhaps adopting this viewpoint is useful also for youth work. It is evident that this is a process – not a single event in time – and that it takes years. In practice, this time is measured in decades, not even in years. In this process, continual reflection on the role of youth work in society and its position in relation to other social actors is indispensable (see Lorenz 2009).

This diachronic perspective suggests an additional interpretation of the four types of youth work practice architecture. In this perspective, countries pass through these four stages, starting with the least developed youth work practice architecture and eventually arriving at the stage of the most advanced architecture. Along that road, progress may not always be smooth because of the complexities around the development of any occupation, complexities in public policies and in civil society. The chapters in this book show the significance of national and European actors, initiatives and resources, alongside youth work actors and other actors, in supporting the development towards higher quality in youth work and towards higher professionalism in the entire family of youth work occupations. The interplay of European, national and local levels, including youth work organisation and public-sector institutions, is complex and challenging but at the same time it opens up a range of developmental opportunities and resources: adoption of the Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work, the mention of youth work in the European Youth Strategy 2019-27 and increases in the Erasmus+ budget are some examples of how European-level institutions are shaping the playground. These resources can be utilised by national and local organisations to take the next steps in developing the quality of youth work.

Several challenges to the development of youth work have emerged or have been highlighted in this book. One challenge is seen in the diverse realities of the youth work sector in different European countries. Another challenge, which is present in most European countries, is the division of tasks between voluntary and paid youth workers and the differences in their education and training backgrounds and opportunities. Moreover, youth worker degree education that offers a range of options for youth workers is available in only a few countries, and youth worker training outside

the formal education system is, unfortunately, often organised in a firefighting or disconnected approach, without any long-term vision of development in mind.

As the contributions in this book show, current pathways in youth work strongly suggest that youth work is opting for “professionalism as a value” – being directed by the goal of making a positive impact in society – and “professionalism as a discourse” – being influenced by policy makers and other funders – as its courses of development (see Chapter 4). While the “discourse” aspect may be less obvious at the moment, it is probably still at least as powerful as other factors moulding youth work’s future in European countries.

The contributors in this book have reflected on the – actual or desired? – direction of youth work development (see Chapter 4 in particular), and there seems to be a tacit consensus that providing value to society is perhaps the most important goal. As this book shows, there seems to be no other way to provide this value to society than through co-operation between stakeholders from public administration and civil society. Chapter 9 on youth worker organisations emphasises that only the state has the necessary financial muscle; Chapter 8 identifies European-level initiatives as the dominant competence frameworks that are used nationally in many countries; the mapping in chapters 2 and 6 names a range of aspects that are directly within the remit of public administration. The central role of public administration is perhaps most clearly seen in the practice architectures – building blocks in the architectures of youth work – which cannot be imagined without its involvement, in part or entirely. Council of Europe and European Union actions, to a large extent, also fall into this category. With this evidence, there is little doubt that public administration plays a central role in the development of youth work.

What exactly is the role of the national level, and what is the role of European level, needs further discussion. Over several decades, visionary goals have been formulated by youth work activists from different countries and articulated by European institutions. To some extent these articulated ideas have been implemented by national and local governments, making use of local, national and European resources. Clearly, the resources of European institutions – Erasmus+, SALTO, European Social Funds, European Youth Foundation and other programmes – also play a significant role in the development of youth work at national and local level. However, managing the quality of youth work remains under the jurisdiction of individual countries, and national and local governments have a range of levers to influence how youth work is carried out. In practical terms, this means developing and implementing youth work competence frameworks and youth work education and qualification frameworks. It also means allocating resources for youth worker education, training outside the formal education system and youth worker support systems, but also, perhaps most importantly, establishing youth worker job positions on an equal footing with other similar positions like teacher, social worker, or leisure-time specialist. Establishing such positions must entail all social support guarantees, which currently are rather poorly represented in the job of youth worker (see Chapter 2).

The development of youth work is best viewed as a process – we can see it as a train journey from one station to another. On that journey, we may take snapshots and zoom in on certain aspects of youth work, like the state of affairs described in

this book, but we need to keep in mind that these are, while not unimportant, only details of a longer and wider process. The train of youth work has departed, it is speeding up and gaining momentum. It is moving from station to station – from one important political statement like the Recommendation by the Council of Europe to another, from one thematic event to another. On its way, there are larger and busier cities where it stops – like the Youth Work Conventions, for instance, – and smaller, mono-functional settlements, like this process focusing on youth worker educational and career pathways. The train is moving on a very complex web of European rails, a web which is framed by a range of documents. Importantly, regulations differ across Europe and the train, when crossing borders of individual countries, has to take notice of local regulations and possibly also adjust to them. But the most important thing to keep in mind is that the train has departed and is moving. It sometimes moves faster, sometimes slower, and it may encounter problems on its way, which might slow it down for some time, but then it will speed up again. It has been noticed and noted by other trains as well as by traffic regulators and so it becomes seen, recognised and appreciated by more sectors and by society at large.

## **10.8. Policy implications and considerations**

The research in this book, although intended to look specifically at education, learning and career paths, has also, to some extent, revealed a picture of youth work at macro level (i.e., the general state of those policies and systems that govern youth work) and at micro level – the stories of organisations and individuals that, separately and in combination, act as a check on the viability of the policy context. Indeed, individual and collective, micro and macro processes and circumstances are constitutive of each other.

The first, fundamental, finding is that, all across Europe, there is some form of governance and consideration in national contexts of what is youth work, who should be doing it (at least in the structures where the public authorities are directly responsible or are funding them) and what is the general purpose of it. A closer look, however, shows that from almost every aspect there are significant gaps: research gaps in evidence, monitoring and evaluation of the state of youth work development, and gaps in learning systems. Developing such systems is an important step in laying the foundations for informed youth work policy and practice in any country. Accumulation of specialised sectoral knowledge in such systems would then be readily available for new initiatives when these are developed, so that they need not start from scratch. Knowledge systems strengthen and support continuity, both at the level of reflective practices and in well-argued policy interventions.

While there are certain building blocks that need to be in place, the starting point is not always the same – there is more than one route to developing strong national or local youth work practice architectures. Countries or regions, and even organisations, initiating such processes should look at what could spark the biggest development (it may be a legislative initiative with a participatory process, but it may also be developing occupational standards strongly driven by the diversity of youth work practitioners and volunteers, or it may be a clear and transparent system for training and recognition of youth leaders and youth workers in the

non-formal sector). Studying examples from different countries as well as European frameworks and initiatives and combining them with the needs of the country will help define what to focus on first. For this purpose, the mapping study in this book is accompanied by 15 tables (available on the Youth Partnership website) with a wealth of pointers and resources and more detailed information gathered from the 41 countries.

A second consideration for policy makers is to see what type of education and/or training and support is given to volunteer and paid youth workers. Over recent years, youth workers have not feared exploring uncharted waters – this is to some extent inherent in the experimental nature of youth work, which happens in the life world of young people. This has meant that youth work practice can be understood as a malleable form of intervention or learning opportunity, but it has also pushed youth work into a more managed type of activity. Youth workers have become, for many young people and in many contexts, the frontline support workers because of the ethical principles governing their practice – its voluntary nature (in most cases), building trust and reaching out where young people are. However, do youth workers get the necessary education, and is the access to support systems satisfactory?

The results of the research shared in this book show that some consensus has emerged through the development of competence frameworks such as the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio, the Competence Model for Youth Workers who Work Internationally and the number of national and organisational frameworks in place, which set the standards for good-quality youth work. Competences cannot be torn out of context, so the focus needs to shift to implementing frameworks and building a community of confident youth work practitioners. More investment and efforts are needed to translate such frameworks into concrete action plans, engaging the practitioners, the volunteers, their associations and the services that deliver youth work. Research findings show that there is a lack of coherent support systems, including supervision, mentoring or peer support, available to volunteer and paid practitioners, especially in the induction phases – so crucial for building commitment and resilience – and for ongoing support. Youth workers' narratives show a very scattered and patchy picture of support within their organisations, where youth workers learn from whomever they can, most often from peers and leaders that they choose or are inspired by. Youth work remains an invisible area in national career guidance and even in the European context, despite the work already done and despite high investment through Erasmus+ and other programmes that encourage volunteering for solidarity, human rights education, intercultural learning, European citizenship or learning mobility. Youth work in challenging contexts would benefit even more from such support systems, starting with strong information and orientation programmes within organisations, monitoring and learning policies, alongside referrals and support from within and with other sectors.

A third important policy consideration is that, although youth work practice is only partly (or non-)regulated and very diverse in nature, youth workers are generally a highly educated cohort who value the importance of formal education and non-formal learning. In today's world, education and learning are decreasingly

linear, and all forms of formal education focusing on youth work (certificate levels, vocational education, and higher education up to post-doctoral) should be developed in more countries, beyond the eight countries currently offering such opportunities. It is important to see youth worker education as a series of lifelong learning experiences. Educational standards for youth workers should connect and build on the European and local contexts, make the connections between formal education and non-formal learning and foster continuous flexible learning. Several countries have thought out educational pathways for youth workers, and those pathways are a good inspiration for any such initiative that could help enhance opportunities for youth workers and youth leaders across Europe. Common ground is needed, not only in areas of education but also on occupational standards. Education is linked to recognition and is particularly reliant on policy makers, who are needed to advance the recognition of youth work and the space it occupies, especially in relation to neighbouring sectors such as education, social work and any work with young people.

Another important reflection is the need to clarify the expectations of volunteer youth workers or youth leaders, who make up by far the majority of those practising youth work and non-formal education, on the one hand, and the educational and learning support offered by or between them and paid youth workers, who are running the many open youth work centres or are doing the outreach or specialised youth work. We know very little about who the youth workers are, who actually carries out youth work at neighbourhood and community level, which services they reach out to or co-operate with most frequently and how they interact with them, or what other players affect youth work in local contexts (city planners, elected representatives, local youth associations, social workers, justice, police, schools, etc.). This is important to know if we are to understand how the findings of research can be translated into guidance for youth work development in diverse local realities. Policy makers at all levels need to know who the youth workers are, what education and support systems they need and how their time and effort can benefit as many young people as possible. The EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership research continues in this direction, looking for inspiring case studies and disseminating them to the sector.

Finally we argue, alluding to the notion of evidence-based policy making and to good-quality information in this context, that research into youth work should be supported. This book offers research insights into certain aspects of youth work but there are other themes which are still waiting to be addressed. For instance, when we are thinking of youth work as an attractive occupation, then we should be concerned not only with entrance to the practice – which is the focus of this book – but equally so with doing the job and with exit from practice. Under the notion of evidence-based policy making, good-quality information on these and other themes needs to be taken into account when preparing regulatory frameworks and institutions on the way towards developing youth work as a recognised and appreciated field of practice, and as a recognised and attractive occupation, or profession, where social guarantees are part of the job. Much of this knowledge is still waiting to be created, and the place to start is in support for research into youth work.

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