

Youth Partnership

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



Concept Note – History VII Workshop

Learning from the History of International Youth Organisations and Their Impact on Youth Work Practice Today *Ljubljana, 2-4 October 2018*

For the final workshop and publication in the History of Youth Work in Europe series, to be co-organised by the EU-CoE youth partnership together with the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth on 2-4 October 2018, it is worth recapping on the vision and achievements in this body of work over the past decade. It was always anticipated that there would be a final, overarching and international perspective on youth work and its contribution to shaping both the principles and practices that focus – through non-formal learning – on the personal development, active citizenship and employability of young people in the 21st century.

The ten-year project so far

For well over 20 years, the UK (through the University of Durham initially, though subsequently in collaboration with the University of Minnesota in the USA) has hosted a youth work 'history conference', reflecting on the roots of youth work policy and practice and considering the implications of the legacies of the past for contemporary approaches to youth work. These history conferences generated a series of publications under the generic banner of 'Essays in the history of youth and community work'.

As a result of discussions between The Flemish Community and the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the youth field ('the Partnership') a European youth work 'history project' was developed. The Partnership was an appropriate hosting structure for such a project, bridging different perspectives on youth work and grounding it in geographic and systemic traditions. As a result, a small inaugural seminar was held in Blankenberge, Belgium, in 2008, to consider – primarily – a sequence of country histories from different parts of Europe (and, indeed, different parts of Belgium). The participants addressed the (very different) forces that had shaped and re-shaped youth work across Europe during the previous 100 years. The contributions to the first history seminar formed the kernel of the first in the *History of Youth Work in Europe* series. Each seminar, and subsequent publication, has sought to explore youth work history in order to consider its relevance in informing youth policy more generally and youth work policy specifically *today*.

A second (also relatively small) seminar was held the following year, also in Blankenberge, mainly to add to the number of countries whose histories had been covered. This led to Volume II in the publication series. Volume III, however, broadened the scope of the history inquiry. The third seminar was a larger event, designated a 'conference', and directly preceded the 1st European Youth Work Convention, held under Belgium's Presidency of the European Union, in July 2010. The history of youth work conference addressed wider issues such as the changing nature of 'youth', youth care, different theoretical perspectives that lie behind and within youth work, youth policy, youth cultures, youth work training, youth information and counselling, and more. This moved the history project far beyond histories of youth work in particular countries, to embrace the place of youth work within its broader context – both the lives and cultures of the young, and the structures and frameworks of policies directed towards the young.

Subsequently, although a strong focus remained on country histories, various threads suggesting how youth work (under the wider umbrella of 'youth policy') took shape in different places started to be woven together. Volume IV, drawing from material at the fourth seminar in Estonia, concluded forcefully that the shape and form of youth work derived firmly from the framework and objectives of the wider youth policy environment, which itself was clearly contextualised in the politics of the day. Youth work was rarely as autonomous as it sometimes proclaimed to be! The study of youth work history thus illustrated that youth work policy needs to be developed in conjunction with more general youth policies. Sometimes in line with and reinforcing prevailing youth policies, but frequently also searching to strengthen the voice of young people to question dominant youth policies, thus contributing to a more democratic development of policy.

This claim was examined more closely in the fifth seminar, held in Finland in 2013. Subtitled 'Autonomy through dependency', Volume V exposed the possibility that youth work was at its strongest (in terms of identity, recognition, resourcing and impact) when connected, to some extent at least, to the wider policy context and prevailing political concerns. Some policy 'dependency' arguably had its merits for youth work, for autonomous practices have rarely had a strong impact on the lives of young people, besides widely supported social movements that were instrumental in societal transformations and in which youth work was often a welcomed partner.

Another long-standing claim for youth work has been its educational base and origins: hence its depiction, routinely, as a practice of non-formal *education*. This claim was tested in the sixth workshop, held in Malta in 2016. Volume VI (in publication) conveys very clearly that a great deal of 'youth work' has antecedents within *social work*. Today this is one of the biggest 'insecurities' of youth work. Youth work sometimes feels squeezed between its predecessors in both welfare and educational systems and structures. The historical inquiry suggested that the clear distinctions between education and social work in fact have a quite recent history. There are, of course, different forms of youth work, a point emphasised repeatedly since the very start of the history project. Some forms were more clearly rooted in social work and combating poverty, other sprang for the public school system, but even in their diversity all youth work practices had both social and educational components. This has meant that very different questions and themes have settled at the heart of youth work: including combating poverty, skills education, citizenship 'training', community development, prevention, and participation. Over the years youth work established itself, to some extent at least, as a distinctive practice from its antecedents and started to build up a philosophy and purpose of its own in which individual problems were connected to societal change and vice versa. This led to a distinct, though always very complex and tensioned

practice. The practice of 'youth work' developed many branches, some more on the emancipatory side of the pedagogical paradox, some more on the controlling side. These are not simple opposites. Just like social work practices and indeed more formal educational practice, youth work practices are equally blurred and layered, but it is precisely our recognition and understanding of this field of tension as an analytical tool that helps us to make sense of the complexity of social and educational practices and draw learning and knowledge for youth work policy-making.

Where we stand now

In all of the history seminars participants have considered extensively the tensions, paradoxes, contradictions and oxymorons that characterise youth work, often in relation to the emancipatory goals and the regulatory objectives of youth work, balanced in different ways in different practices. Historical exploration has contributed to a better understanding of a quite ambivalent, but extremely valuable practice in the positive development of young people and in the democratic development of our societies. The body of knowledge that has been developed has enabled practitioners and researchers to further establish and articulate the basis for national and local practices. The six volumes have been widely cited in academic literature and promoted to the field through the work of the Partnership and its institutional partners, the Council of Europe and the European Commission. Notwithstanding some translations of some of the history documents (into, for example, Bulgarian and Turkish), the work of the 'history project' has been, and continues to be disseminated throughout Europe.

The seminars have also contributed to the view that there is a need for distinctive youth work policies that are strongly connected, though not harnessed, to more general youth and social policies. The history project has provided insights – not least some of the essential ambivalences within youth work – that have helped to underpin a political momentum that has led to the cementing of youth work into European institutional frameworks through a Resolution (European Union 2010), several Council Conclusions (2013, 2015), as well as an all-encompassing Recommendation (Council of Europe 2017). Alongside other numerous workshops and the two European Youth Work Conventions the history workshops have built a broad European consensus that youth work has some core values, but youth work discussions inevitably must be contextualised in tradition, origins and values in specific contexts/countries.

A substantial body of knowledge on youth work (values, methods, recurrent issues, diversity, and connections to other domains in the social and educational fields) has now been built and is available for current and future actors involved in youth work development. The history workshops have, as a result, exerted significant support to the development of youth work in Europe over the past decade. The two European Youth Work Conventions and Declaration that anchored subsequent political support for youth work were inspired by these collected historical insights. Flowing from the 2nd Convention, the Partnership's more theoretical book on youth work (*Thinking Seriously about Youth Work*) illustrates the importance of historical thinking as many authors position their arguments in historical perspectives. The ten year history project has therefore produced a considerable body of knowledge that should support a knowledge-based approach to youth work, where the strengths and long-term benefits of youth work prevail over political immediacy.

At country level, the 68 country and regional (hi)stories and 42 general and thematic reflections have also given stakeholders a reference point for their policy initiatives on youth work and, perhaps more importantly, through such a range of comparative perspectives there has been the possibility for discrete initiatives and developments to be contextualised within the European youth work landscape.

The Partnership has been the most appropriate locus for the development of the youth work history project by bridging its institutional partners' different perspectives on what youth work is (with the EU rather more pragmatic and the Council of Europe more value-based) and also because its programme of work anticipates work that contributes to supporting knowledge-based policy-making in the youth field.

Where do we go from here?

What would conclude the loop in the history project is a focus on transnational or pan-European youth work activity, in the form of single issue youth movements, youth organisations that have achieved international prominence, political youth work that affiliates to specific political positions rather than geographical locations, and other 'hybrid' youth work. Nor has the history project explored sufficiently how such 'cross-border' youth work activity has advocated for some European, sometimes even global, principles and procedures that could inform the practice of youth work and youth work policy.

The seventh, and final, workshop, and the ensuing publication (Volume VII), will therefore consider the history of transnational or pan-European youth work activity and the place of transnational youth organisations and movements throughout the whole youth work (hi)story. The workshop will address the following questions:

- Why they exist?
- Where they came from?
- How they evolved?
- What they did, and what they do now?
- In which ways have they added value to the national stories?
- What were critical changes?
- What are shared core elements and principles that drove practice?
- How did they contribute to how we understand youth work practice today and which of their principles and procedures are central to (or could have more weight in) actual youth work practice and policy?

As with previous seminars, there will have to be reliance on voluntary contributions from those willing to play their part – sometimes academics, sometimes government officials, sometimes practitioners. In other words, the History of Youth Work in Europe material has been compiled from all three corners of what has sometimes been called the 'magic triangle' in the youth sector: research, policy and practice. This invariably produced sometimes partial and selective accounts, but the intense debates and the editorial work of the volumes have permitted a critical distance from individual contributions, pointing to divergences and convergences, disconnections and connections, within and beyond the youth work field. Critically, these volumes often suggest how youth work may both inform youth policy and draw from it, in order to cement a stronger position for itself and strengthen a positive offer and experience for young people. International youth work has been especially prominent in this exercise through an expertise that draws on diverse knowledge and experience from across different borders and boundaries.

The addition of the history of international youth NGOs and movements will finalise a mosaic of histories of youth work: from grounded national narratives and commentaries, through the connection of those accounts to the changing national political and policy contexts in which youth work had to survive, to youth work activity that almost sits above those national realities in order to advance both their specific agendas (for example, political or faith positions) and some level of shared commitment to a common set of youth work aspirations and principles: the participation, engagement, inclusion, and empowerment of young people.

A call to make a contribution to the thematic clusters

The workshop will seek to ***learn about the histories of very varied forms of transnational youth work development*** through international youth work, through the activities of international youth *organisations*, and through transnational institutional arrangements designed to support youth work in a variety of ways. Some organisations will fall into all three camps, but for the logistical organisation of the workshop, sessions will be clustered in the following way:

- (a) Those designated as the 'Big 6', having secured a global reach, though their roots were often within Europe
- (b) Youth work organisations and initiatives reflecting and addressing the sustaining 'grand narratives' of discrimination and inequality: race, gender, class and geography. Here the focus will be on international youth work concerned with ethnic, sexual and other minorities, including rural youth.
- (c) Those engaged in a 'struggle for ideas': belief-driven youth work through faith-based organisations, the youth wings of political parties or the youth strategies and structures of authoritarian regimes.
- (d) Issue-focused youth work development that has emerged in response to new European and global challenges: ranging across but not excluding such themes as housing and homelessness, environment and ecology, tolerance, mobility and conflict
- (e) Transnational youth work advocating for or defending particular methodologies of youth work: self-governed youth organisations, club-based, street-based, project-based, information-based and more.
- (f) Institutions and NGOs established whose institutional and professional role incorporates the promotion and support of youth work

The Big 6 comprise the Scouts, the Guides, the YMCA, the YWCA, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, and the International Award Association. Under (b) one can think of the International Gay and Lesbian Youth Organisation (IGLYO) or the 4H/Young Farmers' Clubs. Within (c) there are bodies such as the Young European Federalists (JEF), JEMI/MIEC, the International Falcon Movement or the Komsomol. In (d), there are the Young Nature Friends, and UNA Exchange; and in (e) the European Youth Forum, the European Confederation of Youth Clubs, Dynamo International and EYRICA. Finally, under (f) there are both long-established political institutions, such as the European Commission (with its Youth Unit) and the Council of Europe (with its Youth Department), and more recent initiatives such as InterCity Youth – the association of municipal youth work services. The role of national youth councils is also of relevance here, as many have shared experiences across borders and their roles have subsequently evolved from service organisations to advocacy bodies as they have engaged in new forms of cooperation and collaboration in the context

of youth work. The list is clearly no more than illustrative and far from exhaustive. There are, of course, many more.

What such organisations and initiatives have done, however, is to forge an identity of pan-European youth work that has, in turn, played its part in wider youth policy formulation, governance and implementation at a European level, through procedures such as co-management and the structured dialogue.

Choosing which organisations, establishing the rationale for doing so, and identifying individuals who may have the capability, confidence and commitment to write their histories is the paramount challenge for the preparatory team. There is clearly a need both for some proactive selection and invitation and an open call that seeks submissions and applications to make a contribution to one of these session clusters and the ensuing book.

All contributions to the workshop are expected to provide an account (for about 20 minutes) of the following:

- A narrative (hi)story of the organisation around critical and pivotal moments of change, development and transformation: recognising both internal forces (such as charismatic individuals) and external pressures and influences (such as the wider political environment)
- An analysis of the reasons for change
- A perspective on the organisation's contribution, across borders, to the understanding and development of European and transnational youth work development agenda.

Those invited to make such a contribution will then be expected to prepare a text on these issues for subsequent publication following the Council of Europe communication guide.

As with previous workshops, while the focus in history workshop VII is on transnational youth organisations, we continue to encourage authors from member States that have not yet had their (hi)stories written or presented to send us their proposals as well. There remains a [handful of countries whose histories have not been written up](#) or presented yet and which would enrich the European youth work development initiatives. We will be happy to publish online their contributions and will look for spaces to present these stories either in history workshop VII or in other contexts.

Anyone wishing to make such a contribution should indicate in the subject line the number of the session to which they would like to contribute, and submit a short CV and an abstract (around 500 words) by 9 March to Tanya.basarab@partnership-eu.coe.int

Taking stock of the contribution of the history project to contemporary youth work policy development

As the last in the series – a decade of youth work history and reflection – the workshop will also therefore seek to **summarise and take stock of the process as a whole** – the body of knowledge that has been created as a pioneering record of the evolution of youth work in Europe; the analytic understanding of youth work that can be seen as one catalyst for the momentum behind two European Youth Work Conventions in 2010 and 2015 (with a third envisioned for 2020), their subsequent Declarations and their conversion into a European Union Resolution on Youth Work (2010) and Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth

Work (2017); and an invaluable signposting tool that enables youth workers throughout Europe to have a stronger sense of their identity, where they have come from and why they do what they do. The claim of those who have been involved is that the series has, therefore, contributed to research, policy and practice.

An analysis of the key themes and issues emerging from the history series is to be commissioned by the Partnership. This will be presented at the workshop for further reflection and debate as well as circulated to key stakeholders in the youth work field in Europe for additional comment and critique. Beyond the publication of Volume VII of the History of Youth Work in Europe, therefore, the final history workshop will also be the platform for the preparation of shorter paper designed to (a) capture the contemporaneous affect of the 'history decade' on wider youth work development in Europe, (b) outline the current youth policy challenges in Europe (from migration and the refugee crisis, through social exclusion and youth unemployment, to the concerns around violent extremism) and the expectations being placed on youth work to connect with them, and (c) clearly point to the lessons of history in the ways in which youth work may best play its part on these issues without becoming compromised or subordinated by them. In that way, the history project will have shed 'old light on new problems', suggesting effective ways in which youth work can be most relevant to today's youth (work) policy and ensuring that some of the pitfalls of the past can be avoided. It will be particularly important to disseminate the contributions and results of this ten-year project during the year that the EU-CoE youth partnership is marking 20 years of existence and of course for future reference and work on this topic.

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