MOVE IT
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Youth mobility in the digital era

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online event

Photo: Sebastian Voortman

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Documentation (interview)

MOVE IT Online BarCamp:
Self-organised sessions highlight much potential for innovation in digital youth mobility

One core element of the MOVE IT - Youth mobility in the digital era (online event) was the MOVE IT Online BarCamp that took place on 27 June 2020 during week 1. In the twelve BarCamp sessions, the participants brought a variety of experiences and opinions about digital youth mobility to the table and learned from each other. The European MOVE IT organisation team spoke to some of the session organisers.

COVID-19 has revealed what was already quite clear beforehand. While digital youth work was classed as "nice to have" before the pandemic, once the crisis hit it became a "must have". How else would it be possible to stay in touch with target groups, offer activities and keep organisations up and running? This was the insight shared by all young people, youth representatives, trainers and youth work experts who met up on 27 May 2020 for the four-hour MOVE IT Online BarCamp.

BarCamps are events during which the participants decide what they want to discuss. The idea is to share knowledge, get a discussion going, and learn from each other. The success of BarCamps in general, and digital BarCamps in particular, largely depends on the level of interaction between participants.

"The BarCampers were motivated to participate by a mix of video conferences, polls, and interactive elements. It was easy to join the individual sessions, and they provided ample space for informal discussions," explained Daniel Poli from IJAB-International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany, one of the co-organisers of MOVE IT together with the National Agencies for the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps in Germany (JUGEND für

Europa), Finland (Finnish National Agency for Education) and Estonia (Eesti Noorsootöö Keskus /Estonian Youth Work Centre) plus Verke (Centre of Expertise for Digital Youth Work) in Finland.

Exchanging visions for the future

During the three-round MOVE IT Online BarCamp, the more than 100 BarCampers had plenty of opportunities to discuss international digital youth work and youth mobility, explore how other organisations are managing the current challenges, and learn what methods, tools and platforms are being used. Prominent topics of discussion were the design of online and hybrid activities, the benefits of videogames, virtual meetings and digital "open badges" for learners, and more generally how organisations can put together attractive online events.

Other topics of discussion included the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the European Solidarity Corps, support for youth workers during the pandemic and how to reach out to young people with fewer opportunities.

It quickly became clear that digital solutions are potentially suitable for promoting mobility, participation and inclusion. That said, the journey involves a number of challenges and obstacles.

"During the MOVE IT Online BarCamp I almost felt I was attending a face-to-face event. I think we'll be seeing more hybrid formats like this. There's a lot of potential for innovation here," concluded Daniel Poli.

Six of the 14 representatives that organised a session at the MOVE IT Online BarCamp agreed to share their experiences with us in an interview. The following interviews solely reflects the opinions held by the interviewees.

- **Video games and education (Michele di Paola)**
- **Future of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) after COVID-19 (Elena Soroliou**)
- **Training and support measures for youth workers in Europe (Nerijus Kriaučiūnas)**
- **How to involve young people from European neighbourhood countries online (Rea Fraser)**
- **How to be host in online events socialising connecting with people (Salvi Greco)**
- **Cities of Learning and Open Badges for recognition of learning and skills (Johannes Bergunder)**
- Hybrid solutions connecting online and onsite participants (Anne)
- Online activities with young people during the lockdown (Gunhild)
- Erasmus+ virtual exchange of experience (Stephan)
- How to reach vulnerable or marginalised young people with online communication (Sandra)
- How to motivate young people to join online exchange activities (Nora)
- VR simulator people wanting to have an idea about visually impared persons (Michel)
- Retaining the interest of online volunteers (Elena)
- Online communication and online practice for solidarity (Hana)

Graphic summaries of 11 MOVE IT Online BarCamp sessions plus a complete set of MOVE IT documents are available at www.jugendfuereuropa.de/veranstaltungen/MOVE-IT (see examples).
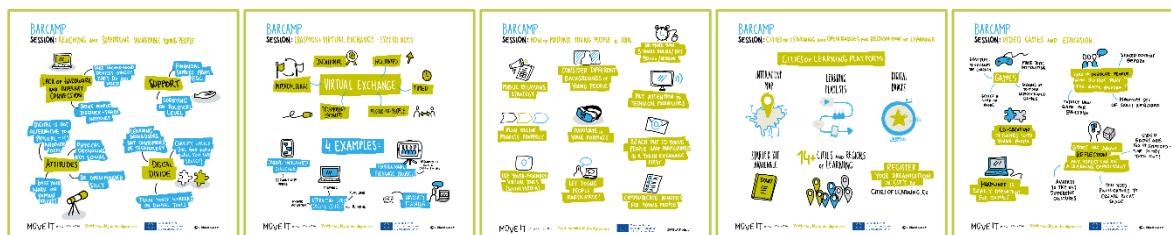
MOVE IT: Michele, you work for Spazio Giovani, an organisation based in Monza, Italy. At the MOVE IT Online BarCamp you offered a session on video games and education. Where did you get the idea?

Michele Di Paola: I'm responsible for our digital media education activities and so it's my job to come up with suitable activities. I also work as a freelance coach who teaches people how to use digital media and online spaces in non-formal education settings. I've been interested in the role of video games for a number of years. To me, using video games in youth work is a largely unexplored field, although there's a rising number of interesting products and concepts out there.

Today, the budgets of some video games rival that of Hollywood blockbusters. The games influence the lives of many young people around the world.

Exactly. Video games, unusually, offer a digital space where it's pretty easy to recognise emotions, respond to them and even experience them yourself – like rage over losing a game, joy when you've won, or surprise when there's an unexpected twist. I think that unlocking emotions is one of the most difficult things in online youth work and digital projects.

What was the outcome of the discussion during your MOVE IT Online BarCamp session?

Some participants were very knowledgeable about the subject, but some knew little or nothing. The session wasn't very long so it wasn't possible to get everyone on the same page. So we decided to move away from video games as such and instead talked about how potential participants can be involved in a video game project. Obviously, it's also a question of cost. Towards the end we agreed that the subject needs to play a bigger role in future projects. Maybe it's time we used broader projects to produce our own video games or tools, which has already been done in the past with board and card games.

Did the session result in any concrete suggestions?

As a quick fix, we spoke about using online multiplayer games, rather than videoconferencing platforms, as a virtual "venue" for non-formal projects and activities. For the longer term, we've agreed to share contact details and meet up during an online game so people can understand the potential benefits and limitations of this medium. We could start by playing Fortnite, a very popular survival game that is available to play free of charge on a number of different devices.

What does digital youth mobility mean to you personally?

While I'm a big fan of digitalisation, I don't believe that digital mobility exists. Digital spaces are by definition physically empty. That's their biggest strength, but also their biggest weakness! To me, mobility in the education sphere needs to be physical because a learning experience can only happen fully once someone has physically moved out of their comfort zone, away from friends, family and home, and has to engage with new habits, languages, landscapes and cultures.

I would define digital youth mobility as a programme of activities that makes it possible for young people in many different places to use digital media to interact with each other. It's definitely possible to work on a problem, to design a concept or develop a new idea in a digital space, but I see rather this happening in preparation for a subsequent physical mobility project during which a group of young people, or a subset of people, can get together in person.

One last question. The region where Spazio Giovani is based was particularly hard-hit by the Coronavirus pandemic. Were you prepared for the challenges this meant?

As for our internal structures, we had already introduced a platform for remote work last year. The lockdown in our region was very long and very tough. It was not easy for us to settle on a platform,

and in the end we actually chose the simplest one. There was a lot of trial and error involved in finding a model that would be suitable for non-formal needs and activities. For instance, among our requirements is that activities be short, that they involve playful elements, and that they always pay attention to inclusion and privilege.

MOVE IT: Elena, you represent the organisation TurnOut from California, but you're also a so-called e-host for Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. Tell us about your current situation.

Elena Soroliou: TurnOut is based in Oakland, California, one of the hotspots of the pandemic in the US. Right now we're focusing all of our resources on supporting communities and organisations that are impacted by the pandemic, including the LGBTQIA+ community. We're trying to stay positive and strong and to maintain a long-term approach.

During your MOVE IT Online BarCamp session you discussed the future and the changing shape of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) during and after the pandemic. Why did you choose this subject?
I chose this subject because I dream of a Europe that cares and that is taken care of. To me, solidarity and volunteering in the community are core values in this new, digital and digitalised, sometimes bizarre, time we live in. A viable "now" calls for a balanced relationship between "we" and "I". We need to build bridges, not walls.

Did the discussion reveal any challenges?
We had a very lively discussion during which many perspectives were put forward and milestones recognised. A lot of criticism was directed at the cutbacks to the Erasmus+ budget and also at socio-economic and cultural inequalities. Another challenge is that some more traditionally minded policymakers show little interest in listening actively to young Europeans. I think it's time that the European Commission, but also national governments, displayed their management capabilities.

What possible solutions and proposals did the session end with?
I suggested to the participants that we join forces and write a manifesto or memorandum outlining the evolution of the ESC. We could do this via Slack and share the results with all MOVE IT participants so they can comment or sign the manifesto. The final document could be presented to the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the many structures within.

What obstacles did the discussion flag up?
We heard a wide variety of opinions on the mentalities and activities of governments. There was also much discussion around the question of whether a memorandum was the most effective way to reach out to the target group.

What does digital youth mobility mean to you?
I think it's the fourth and possibly most significant revolution. Globally, we're currently at a fork in the road. We need to decide whether we want to help shape the future or become a passive hostage to progress. I think digital youth mobility is a great way to curb the many inequalities faced by the younger generation. We need to continue supporting joint activities and partnerships run with, by and for young people.

MOVE IT: Nerijus, you are one of the directors of the International Youth Work Trainers Guild (Guild of Trainers), an organisation that represents the interests of youth work trainers. Unsurprisingly, your MOVE IT Online BarCamp session was all about training and support measures for youth workers in Europe.

Nerijus Kriaučiūnas: Exactly. During the session we talked about our petition "Responding to the Impact of COVID-19 on International Youth Work Mobility". In our view, stakeholders of international youth work mobility reacted too slow. Although it's possible for international training sessions and support activities to be moved to a virtual space, it took three months for new basic and advanced training for youth workers and trainers to be launched.

What does digital youth mobility mean to you?
It's a way to reach out to other Europeans and keep exchanging opinions and talk about realities. And it's a way to feel connected to our European peers. We're seeing a great deal of dynamic change in digital youth work. The Coronavirus pandemic has helped to redefine and rethink activities and opportunities. Digital youth work is starting to become a part of youth work before our very eyes.

What challenges did you discuss during your MOVE IT Online BarCamp session?
Many youth workers and trainers were forced to discontinue their international activities without contractual protection. Many organisations lacked support and were given no guidance or financial support in overcoming the challenges. Also, many trainers are struggling to cope with an uncertain future. The crisis has revealed a clear gap between those who have digital skills and those who don't.

The session participants mentioned that there is much room for improvement when it comes to recognition for mixed online/offline activities, or blended learning as it's known. More space needs to be given to experimental approaches before international youth work can really undergo a viable digital transformation. An online course on digital youth work was proposed.

Did the session produce any other proposals that could help move in this direction?
We spent most of the time talking about networking and designing training curricula in the context of the pandemic; but we also discussed offering training on organising and using digital tools. Exchanging successful approaches and getting together to discuss how to transform in-person activities are steps in the right direction.

What questions remained unanswered?
A big question mark remained in regard to the financial resources required to offer young Europeans consistent professional support. Youth work services and organisations are somewhat left forgotten in the newly announced emergency relief measures targeted at supporting health systems and preparing to deal with economic crisis. And it became clear that open dialogue and consultations with the institutions and National Agencies [of the EU youth programmes] is needed because they have decision-making powers and influence the programmes' priorities and resources.

MOVE IT: Rea, you are the founder and president of the organisation Strait Up in Tangier, right on the border between Spain and Morocco. What was your MOVE IT Online BarCamp session all about?

Rea Fraser: At Strait Up we use bicycles to achieve social change and enable intercultural learning. We're based right on the Strait of Gibraltar between Tarifa (Spain) and Tangier (Morocco). Although the cities are just 14 km apart, there's a visible divide between them – the border. Generally, digital youth work has always played a key role in our work, even before the pandemic and independently of what digital youth work means in the Erasmus+ context. We are new to this field and hence wanted to use this session to discuss how young people from neighbouring European countries can be involved online. [Note: See also the opportunities for neighbouring EU countries at Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange.]

Why did you propose this subject?
I am not sure where we stand concerning digital youth work, but I do know that I have not encountered a single format that is suitable for the young people I work with. Our target group consists of youngsters from Tangier with fewer opportunities. None of them are in education, employment or training. Their life is dominated by the proximity of the border, visa issues and profound cultural and political conflicts. Most interaction takes place digitally via memes, emojis and stories, because all of them have a smartphone and are very active on social media. At a time where personal contact is even more difficult than usual and we have no idea when the border might open again, the internet is absolutely vital.

What challenges emerged during the session?
Really, all I did was ask questions because I hoped the other participants could help me to work out what direction I need to go in. The way I see it, the focal point of digital youth mobility is reversed: under normal circumstances it calls for all young people to be given access to technologies, yet in Morocco all the youth workers have much better digital skills than I do.

How did you benefit from the session?
Although the MOVE IT Online BarCamp didn't produce any definitive solutions for me, it still made me very hopeful because I, as a newcomer to Erasmus+, was able to benefit hugely from the input of experienced colleagues. The Coronavirus pandemic may have been a trigger, because the digital sphere is currently our main space for interaction. I keep trying to make young people aware of Erasmus+ projects that are open to them, but the issues and the language used there are miles away from the way they use the internet to communicate. Also, their social media accounts have 40 thousand followers, mine have 400 – so does it make sense for me to be leading this debate?

MOVE IT: Salvi, you are part of the organisation insight_epd from Lecce (Italy). How are you coping with the challenges of the pandemic there?

Salvi Greco: We're still in the middle of a tough period, so it's too early to say how successfully we are dealing with things. As a rule, we prefer to take our time in bringing about long-term change. We're a very small organisation. I carry legal responsibility inside the organisation, but to me it's mainly a place where I can be creative and design projects and training courses with a local but also European flavour.

Your BarCamp session was all about how organisations can be good at offering online events. Explain your choice of subject to us.

That's true in theory, but we ended up mainly talking about how we can connect different people who are sitting in front of a screen but want to share their stories. It's a subject that I think has always been relevant: how people can experience learning in a positive and meaningful way. In the current situation, I'm trying to improve my understanding of how to translate this to a digital space.

Any challenging issues you came across during the session?

We mostly talked about creating a safe digital space, meaning a positive atmosphere in which participants can be "understood" on screen without others making wrong assumptions about them. For instance, what kind of place are they logging in from? Should their cameras be switched on? What about gestures and online etiquette?

Did the session produce any concrete solutions?

Someone proposed putting together a set of guidelines that describe, for instance, what "acting as a host" really means. That could help to raise awareness of a number of aspects. These guidelines can be aimed at various groups of participants, such as listeners and spoken and sign language interpreters.

What does digital youth mobility mean to you right now? Where are we now?

Of course it's a new concept. Personally, I like to think that it helps Europe and European programmes to remain within reach of people who are unable or unwilling to travel. It's interesting to think about the bridges we still need to build. There's not many countries, organisations or individuals who have actively embraced this subject and done some important work.

I also get the feeling that we talk a lot about creativity but fail to go ahead and experiment. Sometimes it seems as if we are trying to transfer our existing activities and methods directly to the virtual space. I've not yet seen any genuinely new formats that are specifically designed for digital learning.

MOVE IT: You work for GOEUROPE! and the Europe Direct information centre in Saxony-Anhalt. Your MOVE IT Online BarCamp session was all about cities of learning and digital learning badges, known as open badges. Have you been working on this issue for a while?

Johannes Bergunder: I led this session together with Nerijus Kriaučiūnas, who I've already worked with on several projects and partnerships on this subject. We've been thinking about open badges and certificates for non-formal learning achievements since 2011.

What is it all about exactly?
A while back we launched a multilingual platform called Badgecraft and an app called Badge Wallet. We tested the open badges in a variety of learning contexts and also created a platform called Cities of Learning that displays local youth work activities and projects on an interactive map. Meanwhile, there are 14 platforms in various cities and regions across Europe. The idea is to inform the participating multipliers that these tools for the recognition of learning achievements and skills exist, because they can be useful for many organisers of activities and events.

What were the main issues you discussed during your MOVE IT Online BarCamp session?
One of the challenges we discussed is whether it's necessary to reach out to local or regional authorities when an organisation wants to launch a platform. We shared our respective experiences in this regard and concluded that while it's not necessary, it can be very helpful. Good examples are the cities of Ljubljana and Cagliari, where the approach has worked very well. There's a Cities of Learning starter kit with helpful hints and tips on how to get a project like this off the ground.

Did the session result in any concrete suggestions?
Yes, mainly the suggestion to continue exploring the tools after the session and to offer a space where all participants can learn more about and test the tools.

Your gateway to the international youth work community was a European Voluntary Services placement in Lithuania. What does digital youth work mean to you?
Given that it offers so many technical opportunities and tools, I would say that digital youth work has enormous potential for connecting with young people in new and unexplored ways who have so far not had access to any EU youth programmes. However, I think that digital mobility is no replacement for real-life mobility; it's an enrichment. Generally speaking, although it can feel like it's still early days, the process has been ongoing for some time. My organisation and I began to work on this subject quite some time ago. As for the wider youth work community, I get the feeling that we are still struggling with the idea of integrating digital approaches in our daily work. Sometimes the doubts are so overwhelming that we fail to make use the enormous potential that they offer.

How is the new situation impacting on your day-to-day work?
We've developed Instagram Live formats, digital playlists and modules for workshops for young people in our region to keep them informed of what's on offer. We have also launched an "online living" library. These tools are very helpful in getting our work done, but of course there are some aspects of our work that cannot be moved to the virtual level, especially when it comes to dialogue that needs to happen face to face. In the long term we will certainly be using digital youth work more than we did in the past, but we also want to keep offering our regular tried-and-tested activities.

Lisa Brüßler on behalf of MOVE IT / JUGEND für Europa
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