Yael Ohana

What's politics got to do with it?

European youth work programmes and the development of critical youth citizenship

JUGEND
für Europa

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European youth work programmes and the development of critical youth citizenship

An attempt to describe and understand the complex of issues and debates and to contextualise them in past and current youth work-related developments.

special 10

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Peter Lauritzen, whose thought leadership the European youth field misses more and more with each passing day.

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Executive Summary

European youth work[1] interpreted as political is under threat. It is becoming increasingly difficult to address sensitive and controversial issues of the day without negative consequences for individuals and organisations. In an increasing number of countries, including those in the EU, doing so could result in your organisation being excluded from funding, you yourself being accused of over-stepping your mandate as an educator and people in positions of authority withdrawing their trust. This is a political issue in and of itself. For many in the community of practice,[2] an important element of their professional and vocational identities is engaging young people meaningfully as citizens, impacting not only their civic and political acumen but also their political agency.

4

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1 *European youth work* should be understood in a broad sense, as the work with young people (mainly of an educational nature) which a) considers 'Europe' or 'European issues' as a key framework consideration or context, and/or b) uses funding from European youth work programmes or is organised centrally by one of the European youth work support institutions, and/or c) takes place between different countries in Europe (international) or in one country in Europe (national with a European dimension), and/or d) is conducted by organisations whose capacity has been built by European youth work programmes. In our understanding, any combination of at least two of these criteria would qualify a youth work project as European youth work.

2 *European youth work community of practice* should be understood as being made up of all those actors and stakeholders who consider themselves part of the European youth work sector, including, among others, youth leaders, project carriers, youth organisations, ministries responsible for youth and civil servants responsible for youth policy, European institutions and their programmes of youth work support, National Agencies of the Erasmus+ and other youth-relevant education and mobility programmes, multipliers and youth activists associated with the institutional programmes, trainers and their representative associations or the pools they form and even young people themselves.

In this context, it has become imperative for the European youth work community of practice to question what the political dimension of European youth work is, why it is necessary to think about it and work on it and how it is possible to do this in their day-to-day practice with young people in European projects.

Doing so raises six existential dilemmas for European youth work, as follows:

1. **Project Europe:** as an aspirational project to advance human rights, the rule of law and democracy. *Europe has come to be increasingly invisible in European youth work.*

2. **Purpose:** European youth work should contribute to the emergence of a sense of responsibility for what happens in, around and because of Europe. *This is increasingly absent from the structural frameworks regulating, funding and providing capacity development support for youth workers and youth leaders conducting youth work from a local through to a European level.*

3. **Political & social change:** youth active engagement in socio-political causes and change. *This is no longer considered a given good nor is it favoured, funded or extensively supported. It is the result of the closing space for civil society to act as a platform for consensus-building around politically sensitive issues.*

4. **Participation:** in other words, enabling the civic awareness and competence that initiates young people into active citizenship. *This is no longer a*

5

priority topic in European youth work projects; many power asymmetries are even being replicated in the context of face-to-face youth work activities.

5. **Power and agency:** namely, competences for civic engagement and the power of young people to address injustice. *European youth work projects are strong on personal development but less strong on supporting the real world agency of young people; they focus insufficiently on how to put learning into practice. This is arguably due to a lack of competence and confidence on the part of youth workers and leaders in working on the political.*

6. **Pedagogy**: specifically, how the methodological practice is conceptualised. *Evaluation and research show that youth work projects are most effective at engaging young people in motivating experiences and authentic communication with their peers, but there are limits in their capacity to deliver deeper processes of co-creation, participation and social transformation, particularly in short-term projects.*

Unless European youth work reconsiders its own 'politics' and works towards the development of a broad, open and permanently re-evaluated consensus on what it seeks to promote and defend through its interventions – in other words, unless it develops a principled stance towards its own idea of itself – it will be relegated to nothing more than 'lively debate within a politically predetermined spectrum of acceptable opinion.'[3]

The time is ripe for radical renewal in the way European youth work conceptualises its role and purpose, as well as in the way it executes that mission. Radical renewal does not refer to revolution. It is a deliberate and reasoned paradigm change. It requires the idea of working within current systems to consolidate those aspects that already work well, rethinking and changing those that do not and introducing new aspects that can fill identified gaps.

Nine areas of intervention, understood as 'starting points', are relevant for jump-starting this process of renewal:

1. **A transparent and joined up debate:** a more inclusive and open European debate on the political and civic mission of European youth work and how policy can support this mission is urgently needed. This debate must avoid previous pitfalls – being closed, inward-looking and self-referential and running parallel to actual policymaking without having an influence.

2. **Facilitated peer learning:** youth work practitioners need their own peer learning and networking opportunities. At the the same time, they need opportunities for inter-disciplinary exchange (e.g. with other disciplines from the youth policy

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3   Noam Chomsky: 'The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion but allow very lively debate within that spectrum', 'The Common Good', Odonian Press, 1998: https://books.google.de/books/about/The_Common_Good.html?id=I1UftBpLkWgC&redir_esc=y.

6

triangle, i.e. policy and research, and with other sectors, including formal education, private philanthropy, development cooperation, etc.). This will foster a focus on the political and civic mission of youth work, and result in the emergence of innovative practices for its implementation under today's political, cultural, social and economic conditions.

3. **More and better competence development opportunities and offers:** the 'political' needs to once again become a fundamental framework and content for European youth work. This would require, among other things, the operationalisation of existing competence models into training-specialised offers; the reintroduction of regular 'standardised' training courses for youth workers and youth leaders using the European programmes to learn the basics of critical emancipatory pedagogy and how to adapt it to the current socio-political conditions relevant to the European youth work projects receiving funding and training on the civic and political mission of European youth work for managers and project officers working in the European youth work programmes.

4. **Systematic evaluation and research:** mapping key approaches as well as their effectiveness to the political and other themes being addressed in European youth work projects is essential. Explicit enquiries into whether and how those conducting European youth work construct it as political and also into the relationship between the impacts identified and the pedagogical approaches in

use could be included in established youth work evaluation processes. Conducting such enquires as participatory action youth research involving the young people concerned would provide depth and meaning and avoid such research becoming sterile data collection.

5. **Fit-for-purpose funding:** funding approaches need to take into account new and unprecedented challenges to efforts for progressive social change as initiated and implemented by young people. Structural change in the funding operations of key stakeholders is necessary, including efforts to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, to develop more creative outreach strategies and to favour a culture of dialogue and communication with grantees.

6. **Educational innovation:** pedagogy in European youth work needs to be politically explicit and to focus on critical engagement with themes and processes inherent to the health of democracy, rule of law and human rights, locally, nationally and at the European level. The power dynamics that are inherent in the positioning of young people in projects must be a key quality criterion for assessment when it comes to grant-making as well as a key question for the pedagogical approach.

7. **Youth work content:** European youth work projects need to embrace political themes like 'power', Europe/European integration, politics and policy, democracy, rule of law and human rights, as well as contemporary domestic and European controversies and dilemmas of contemporary

society and history in an open and non-judgemental way. European youth work project programmes must encourage potential users to present projects that take up controversial issues and explore alternative narratives about European identity and about visions for Europe and European integration, rather than turning them away.

8. **Co-creation of youth work with young people:** young people need to be in the lead in European youth work projects, supported by others (professionals, adult volunteers, advisors), and not merely consumers of project activities offered to them by organisations that work on behalf of young people and perpetuate their own existence. This requires a 'de-professionalisation' of the project funding application process, but does not have to mean less quality in terms of the process, results and impact of such projects – rather, the opposite.

9. **Europeanisation of youth work:** European youth work needs to continue to move with the times and Europeanise itself, focusing on supporting young people to work on and in European values – human rights, rule of law, democracy, and peace – and to take a position on the deficits and gaps in European integration and cooperation and the position and responsibility of Europe in the world. European youth work needs to engage in advocacy towards European institutions and towards national governments for a European approach to youth work policy development and implementation. It needs to walk its own talk.

The European youth sector has already begun with some work on all of these 'starting points'. The challenge is how to make them more explicit, visible and accessible to the wider community of practice and how to bring them into the mainstream agenda, linking them to each other in a way that forms a viable agenda.

7

Three framing principles for political education – *the obligation to be intolerant, democratising democracy and going beyond personhood* – describe the kind of political championship that is required now and in the years to come.

The question remains: Who is going to stand up for the political in European youth work?

Table of contents

Introduction

'I prefer dangerous freedom to peaceful slavery.'

Attributed to Count Palatine of Posen,
Quoted by Jean Jacques Rousseau in 'The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right'

10

European youth work programmes have often been promoted as engaging young people in meaningful conversations about their positioning in society and in actions to develop their agency as active citizens, in other words as political. Yet, there exists little empirical evidence on how youth work, as supported by European programmes, actually addresses the 'political'. If anything, there is evidence of what has been termed a *creeping de-politicisation* of European youth work.

At one and the same time, there is increasing interest on the part of the community of practice involved in European youth work in what has come to be referred to as the 'political dimension' of European youth work and also trepidation on its part about the implications of engaging more actively with 'the political'.

Although the European youth work community of practice is extremely diverse, and this is by no means true across the board, it is increasingly common for youth workers and youth leaders involved in European programmes to relate how they experience the 'political' in youth work as intimidating and even inappropriate, notably when others conflate it with an intention to indoctrinate. This is hardly surprising. Working in a political perspective with young people is challenging, and demands that those conducting it

and participating in it step out of their comfort zones. Hardly surprising, also, that work deemed political has negative consequences for the sustainability of youth work provision, the employment prospects of youth workers, and even the life conditions of those conducting it and those participating in it. In these increasingly common circumstances, working politically with young people can hardly be expected to be an attractive proposition, regardless of the commitment and motivation of the youth workers and leaders concerned. This is a political issue in and of itself, although it is relatively rare for it to be acknowledged as such. The power dynamics and stakes involved for both voluntary and paid staffers in supporting young people's civic, political and social engagement are often overlooked. An acknowledgement of the implications of the closing space for civil society has been rather slow in coming to the European youth work institutional and policy landscape.[4]

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4   Alex Farrow for the SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre, SALTO Think Tank on Youth Participation: Closer to the edge of participation and activism, 2018. Online at: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3830/Raport_210x210mm_sm.pdf

In this context, practitioners are asking what the political dimension of European youth work is, why they need to think about it and work on it and how they are supposed to do this in their day-to-day practice with young people in European projects.

This discussion paper is an attempt to describe and understand the complex of issues and debates surrounding this theme and to contextualise them in past and current youth work-related developments.

It can be argued that European youth work has reached an existential impasse. If it is to remain relevant to young people's life worlds and to the further development of the aspirational European integration project, as governments and institutions claim it should be, it will have to become more effective in engaging young people meaningfully as citizens, impacting not only their civic and political acumen, but also their agency. And that means it will have to become more political, not less.

The present paper is the result of a series of structured interactions with practitioners actively using or implementing European youth work programmes as promoted by European institutions, especially the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission. The motivation for taking this journey, and for deciding along the way that the paper should be a key output of the process, comes from a longer period of less structured reflection on the part of stakeholders in the field on the basis of the needs they perceive in the community of practice. This paper was mostly written in early 2019, and therefore mainly reflects European youth work sectoral developments at the time.

This paper is an open-ended reflection. It explores questions and issues that are perceived by parts of the community of practice as important and with which it has been preoccupied for some time. These questions and issues include:

_ Why is the idea that European youth work might be political the subject of controversy?

_ How does the political actually manifest itself in contemporary European youth work?

_ What kind of youth work would be adequate for today's European realities and the changed nature of youth participation?

_ What is the context in which European youth work functions today? How does this impact the ways in which different stakeholders in the European youth (work) sector interpret its purposes?

_ Are the expectations that political decision-makers place on European youth work, as outlined in recent political statements, realistic and appropriate? How can European youth work deliver on them? What is the political 'potential' of European youth work?

_ What are the policy, programme and pedagogy implications of the debate on the political dimension of European youth work?

This paper does not necessarily provide answers. It provides what can only be a partial view on this complex of issues – in the absence of adequate mapping of practices and empirical research into the contribution of those practices to specific outcomes expected from the European youth work programmes, in line with their stated objectives. It proposes ideas that different actors and stakeholders could take up and run with if there is political will and opportunity.

The 'what' of this reflection is European youth work. Youth work in Europe is highly diverse, thus it was important to limit the scope of our reflection to a

field that has some identifiable boundaries. In our experience, not all youth work in Europe is European youth work, and there are many levels (not only the European level) at which European youth work is taking place.

In this paper, European youth work is understood in a broad sense, as that work with young people (mainly of an educational nature) that a) considers 'Europe' or 'European issues' as a key framing consideration or context, and/or b) uses funding from European youth work programmes or is organised centrally by one of the European youth work support institutions, and/or c) takes place between different countries in Europe (international) or in one country in Europe (national with a European dimension), and/or d) is conducted by organisations whose capacity has been built by European youth work programmes. In our understanding, any combination of at least two of these criteria would qualify a youth work project as European youth work. This means that any youth work, even that taking place at a local level, and even that which does not include cross-border mobility, can be considered European youth work.

The paper also refers in general terms to the European youth work community of practice. In principle, youth leaders, project carriers, youth organisations, ministries responsible for youth and civil servants responsible for youth policy, National Agencies, European institutions, multipliers and youth activists associated with the institutional programmes, trainers and their representative associations or the pools they form and even young people themselves, can all be considered part of the community of practice that has something to do with or to say about the political dimension of European youth work. The intention of the paper is not to lay exclusive claims on this subject matter for

a particular interest group. Rather, it is hoped that in speaking about the experiences of a wide range of stakeholders active in European youth work as defined above (in the full knowledge that these are not well documented and cannot be considered representative), these reflections will find resonance among those that are concerned with this issue, and that they will further engage with these reflections, with each other in their communities of practice and do so critically. Furthermore, in taking the broadest approach possible to the composition of the community of practice, the aim is also to emphasise that the knowledge, expertise and quality practice of those directly engaged in the field day-to-day needs to be much more prominent in the development of any new discourse, agenda or policy approach on this theme.

European youth work programmes as referred to here are those European-level policies and programmes that have been put in place through European co-operation and that are explicitly aimed at supporting youth work and policy with a European dimension. Although EU programmes are financially better endowed, the most visible among these support programmes, the Council of Europe and organisations like the OECD and UNESCO also have dedicated youth support programmes. Several private philanthropic organisations also have programmes of support for youth work that are based on European principles and whose intention it is to promote European values. Needless to say, the landscape is quite diverse.

Finally, on the question of terms, policy, politics and the political system need to be distinguished, although they are intimately bound to each other, and the terms policy and politics are de facto the same in many languages. Policy should be understood as referring to the products of political decision-making

by politicians and elected representatives. Politics should be understood as the process through which political decision-making takes place. Politics includes the competition that takes place in the context of decision-making among those occupying or vying for positions of power. The political system, or polity, refers to political structures and their workings in states, in Europe, in institutions or in organisations.

It is the intention of the initiators of this process to contribute to pushing the agenda on the renewal of European youth work's political credentials. If the field has been characterised for some years by 'creeping de-politicisation', then the aim of this paper is to jump-start a process of repoliticisation to adapt and respond to the changing political context in which European youth work is located. The paper will be used to initiate and support debates in a variety of settings where European youth work policies and practices are elaborated and discussed. It is hoped that this will encourage more explicit recognition that European youth work needs to take a principled stance on current political and social developments in Europe as they affect young people, civil society, democratic development and European integration.

This paper has three parts.

In Part I, titled 'Political or not political? Is that the question?', the controversies and challenges of this theme for the European youth work community of practice, as this author perceives and interprets them, are laid out. Furthermore, the conceptual foundations of the idea of European youth work as political and arguments for why this continues to be justified given the current youth work developments, are discussed.

In Part II, titled 'How does 'the political' manifest in European youth work?', we attempt to map some of the key markers of the 'political' as observed in existing practice, such that it has been documented, referring to a variety of practice-oriented literature and the results of recent debates among practitioners at events, conferences and through ongoing policy/strategy discussions within the European youth work field. This part of the paper critically reflects on how the political in European youth work is evidenced from six interlinked perspectives: the normative framework within which it takes place; its treatment of issues relating to Europe and the values of the European integration project; the way it conceptualises its change orientation and intentionality; the nature and quality of the participation it offers to its participants; the political agency and action it can support participants to achieve and the conceptualisation of its pedagogy. In so doing, it seeks to point out and understand the challenges and dilemmas facing the community of practice when seeking to conduct politically-relevant youth work activities that are pedagogically sound and appropriate to the achievement of the bigger picture objectives of the European youth work field, notably those laid out by the funding programmes which provide resources for their work.

Part III, titled 'In the end, a new beginning? Starting points for the political renewal of European youth work', proposes the idea that a variety of stakeholders in the field could be engaged with in view of the challenges and dilemmas outlined in the previous chapter. It considers nine areas in which different actions could be taken, and which over the longer term could develop into a more concerted strategy for the renewal of European youth work, so that it makes a much stronger contribution to supporting the critical citizenship of young people.

Part I: Political or not political? Is that the question?

15

In 2018, at a meeting at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, this author overheard several participants in an educational activity on human rights education discussing how they see themselves in the context of the youth work they do. They were having their lunch, and were engaged in an animated debate. It looked like it was meaningful to them. One of them generalised from their own experience and sense of 'who they are' in youth work, saying that people who conduct human rights education are 'activists'. In the group of four or five, just one nodded in agreement. The others vigorously challenged that statement, making it clear that, for them, human rights education is education, and that activism and education have nothing to do with each other. It is unfortunate that there was no opportunity to observe the further development of what was certainly an interesting discussion among committed young practitioners.

Why so interesting, one might ask?

Although only anecdotal, their discussion sums up a key dilemma facing European youth work and the main preoccupation of this paper.

In youth work circles, as well as in the wider public sphere, it has become increasingly common to hear the assertion that education is no place for politics because the 'neutrality' of the educational mission must be ensured at all times.[5] When the question of the 'political' in youth work is discussed at conferences, at consultative meetings or in articles (and it is regularly the theme of these) it is obvious that even those actively engaged in the likes of human rights education, education for democratic citizenship, intercultural dialogue and global education with young people are confronted with difficulties in a) describing and explaining their work as political, b) engaging with and addressing issues deemed political in their practice and c) practicing pedagogy in a manner they feel responds adequately to the political challenges faced by young people, their communities and societies, including Europe.[6]

Several reasons for why this is the case recur:

_ Disapproval of decision-makers, funders, superiors (pressure from above);

_ The questioning of critical youth work by alt-right organisations and parties (political pressure);

_ Lack of interest and even rejection on the part of young people (pressure from below);

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5   For a further discussion on this challenge, see: Speak UP! Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship. A European conference on the political dimension of international youth work in Erasmus+ (16–18 October 2017, Berlin), conference documentation online at http://www.jugend-fuereuropa.de/downloads/4-20-4095/ and the 'political neutrality in Education' debate in Germany https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/schule-afd-meldeplattform-was-duerfen-lehrer-sagen/23182842.html; https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/ANALYSE/Analyse_Das_Neutralitaets-gebot_in_der_Bildung.pdf and in Brazil https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/30/bolsonaro-win-students-urged-report-teachers-who-complain-whatsapp

6   For example, the May 2018 EU-CoE Partnership Seminar on European Citizenship: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/seminar-yw-in-citizenship-education

_ Societal disapproval and/or moral panic about young people being 'brainwashed' (pressure from outside);

_ Difficulties in addressing political issues, themes or events in ways which are attractive and motivating for young people (competence and confidence gaps);

16

_ Concerns about instrumentalisation of the work and/or the young people involved (ethical dilemmas of practitioners);

_ Dissatisfaction with the conditions under which youth work is forced to take place, including more and more prescriptive project formats and themes, demands for ever more 'value for money', problematic job security issues, etc. (frustration and resignation);

_ Concerns that other priorities are simply more urgent and pressing (pressure to be 'relevant').

Hence, the community of practice associated with European youth work finds itself engaged in often contentious and sometimes rather shrill debates on the appropriateness of engaging with political issues in face-to-face work with young people, on which contents and issues such projects should be addressing and on the bigger picture question of the appropriate role(s) of European youth work support and development programmes. It is something of a polarised debate. Some stakeholders are concerned about the lack of attention the political dimension receives, warning that this is having negative impacts on the position and relevance of such programmes in relation to young people's participation in European democracy, and therefore in the development of the European integration project. Others are concerned

with the fact that this issue is even on the agenda, warning that Europe and European programmes have more pressing issues to address, notably redressing the effects of young people's continued lack of access to viable livelihoods. Within this debate, it is possible to identify a wide spectrum of approaches to the purpose of European youth work projects, ranging from the paternalistic to the preventative, to service learning and personal development, to international youth diplomacy and interest representation, to experiments in co-decision-making, critical citizenship education, emancipatory pedagogy and transformative learning, political mobilisation and campaigning or young voter education. There is an entire ecosystem of youth-led work in and around Europe's key political and social challenges that has never received a penny of European funding because it is not predicated on international mobility or international participation, which embodies the idea of a European and political youth work ethos.

The more critical among the observers of the European sector have pointed out how successive generations of European programmes, especially those of the European Union, have come to focus on personal and professional development as an end in itself, characterised by an uncoupling of the motivation of young people to participate in their communities and societies from action for progressive change in the wider society and by a prevalence of the idea that it is the young people who need to be 'fixed', rather than the systems which establish and entrench the injustices that young people experience. The economic crises that have disproportionately negatively affected young people have been held up as justification for the

necessity of focusing on the employability of young people. The idea that European youth work programmes are vehicles for the civic/political renewal of the European integration project and of European democratic development is present as an aspiration in relevant high-level political declarations, but has been increasingly less evident in the actual modus operandi of support available to youth work projects through the programmes.

Some authors have described this as the creeping depoliticisation of European youth work,[7] proposing that the community of practice finds itself at an impasse – a political dimension is inherent to the programmes, exactly because of political statements of intent made by the European institutions, and because of the foundational documents determining the purpose of such programmes,[8] yet there continues to be very little empirical evidence of how, if at all, the political manifests in European youth work, and of the current impact. Practitioners and programme executors have difficulty in conceptualising how they are supposed to work on this, and there is little guidance coming from the European institutions in this regard.

Inevitably, members of the European youth work community of practice ask what the political dimension of European youth work is and wonder how they can work on and with it more consciously and effectively?

In order to discuss this question, we first need to understand how European youth work is or is not defined as political, and why.

17

Defining European youth work as political?

Articles about and analyses of European citizenship, youth activism, participation, civil society, democracy, and how youth work and youth policy do/should support these appear on a regular basis, notably in Coyote[9] and the Youth Knowledge Books series[10] produced by the Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission. Several larger-scale conferences and consultative meetings were held in 2017–2018 to explore and debate related themes.[11] As a result, there is a growing body of work that, although not explicitly addressing the political in youth work, nevertheless provides clues to its nature.

European youth work is highly diverse. It is led/promoted by a wide variety of actors at different levels and often in parallel. It can have normative objectives,

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7   Yael Ohana and Hendrik Otten, 'Where do you Stand: Intercultural Learning and Political Education in Contemporary Europe', VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012.

8   Among the most important are the Paris Declaration: Informal meeting of European Union Education Ministers: Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf; the EU Youth Strategy: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en and the Erasmus+ Regulation: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1288

9   Coyote Magazine: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/coyote-magazine

10   The History of Youth Work in Europe series: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/knowledge-books

11   Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention 2010: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-2803/2010_Declaration_European_youth_work_convention_en.pdf; 2nd European Youth Work Convention 2015: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/eywc-website; and the History of Youth Work in Europe series: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/the-history-of-youth-work-volume-6

take an open approach, is youth-led, adult-led, partnership-led and takes place in youth centres, youth organisations, in residence, on a drop-in/drop-out basis, through outreach efforts, on a mobile basis, ever increasingly in the digital space and is staffed by both volunteers and professionals. There is almost no theme (political or otherwise) that has not been addressed by European youth work at some point. And more often than not, youth work takes place in multiple combinations of formats and themes, and is implemented at more than one level, from European through to local. According to some authors, this diversity is a significant strength of youth work, allowing it to serve many purposes and offering multiple outcomes and benefits to young people, while allowing it to remain responsive and flexible in changing times. However, it has also been argued that it is one of the key reasons for which youth work is regularly treated as if it would be a panacea for all of society's ills and thus has difficulty managing the expectations placed upon it.[12]

The notion of a 'political' form of youth work does not travel easily from one European language to another.

Considering just the English, French and German language traditions, which refer to civics, *education moraleet politique* and *Politische Bildung*, respectively, to denote different forms of education and youth work that have the explicit political objective of educating for citizenship, we can note that all of these refer to specific, but differing sets of educational practices, being conducted in and/or out of school, using curricula that are state sanctioned or not, based on specific and distinct theoretical references, taking distinct forms although they may address similar objectives or values.[13] At the same time, there are countries around Europe and further afield for which the idea of the 'political' in youth work is immediately associated with ideological indoctrination as a result of painful histories of dictatorship and state abuses of power and it is, therefore, to be rejected.[14]

Howard Williamson and Filip Coché have suggested that:

'Youth work is something of a mongrel, a hybrid [...], a hydra that has to be looking in many dif-

12   Marko Kovacic, A critical approach to youth work categorisations in Hanjo Schild, Nuala Connolly, Francine Labadie, Jan Vanhee, Howard Williamson (eds.), Thinking seriously about youth work, And how to prepare people to do it, Youth knowledge 20, 2017. Online at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/thinking-seriously-about-youth-work and the History of Youth Work in Europe series: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/the-history-of-youth-work-volume-6; Howard Williamson, background paper for the European Youth Work Convention, 2015: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262187/FINDING+COMMON+GROUND_Final+with+poster.pdf/91d8f10d-7568-46f3-a36e-96bf716419be; Shane McLoughlin, reflection paper presented at 'Connecting the dots: Young people, social inclusion and digitalisation', June 2018: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262517/Reflection+paper+final.pdf/41dde555-5701-7822-25d4-ae27b5561d92

13   Hendrik Otten, '1985: Intentionen politischer Pädagogik im interkulturellen Bereich?' and '2003: Interkulturelles Lernen als politische Bildung in der europäischen Zivilgeselchaft', in Günter J. Friesenhahn und Andreas Thimmel (Hrsg.), Schlüsseltexte: Engagement und Kompetenz in der internationalen Jugendarbeit, Wochenschau Verlag, 2005.

14   Per Mourtisen and Astrid Jaeger for the Migration Policy Institute Europe, 'Designing Civic Education for Diverse Societies: Models, Tradeoffs, and Outcomes', February 2018. Online at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/designing-civic-education-diverse-societies-models-tradeoffs-and-outcomes

ferent directions to reconcile many different demands, assumptions and expectations.'[15]

Lasse Siurala provides an instructive historical perspective:

'Youth work can only be understood as a practice that desperately tries to find the right blend between working with youth and for society. From a broad historical perspective, after the Second World War, the task of youth work was to integrate young people into the existing social order ("youth work as a transit zone"). After 1968, the youth phase was seen as valuable for the independent growth of young people ("a social forum", "youth as an actor change"). After the recessions of the 1990s in Europe, all this changed. The task became rather "to monitor, predict and control the individual development of young people".'[16]

Speaking at the 2nd European Youth Work Convention about how austerity has positioned youth work as a replacement measure for essential social support services to young people failed by the formal education system and failing to attain a livelihood in the

mainstream labour market, Williamson makes the case that youth work must promote itself with more clarity and conviction if it is to cater to the needs and aspirations of the widest diversity of young people.[17]

European political declarations and policy documents that consider youth work are instructive in this regard. They provide insight into what might be understood as the nature of the European political consensus on what youth work is for and about – the 'common ground' so to say.[18]

The Youth Ministers in the Council of the European Union formed conclusions on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people in 2013. This document states:

'"Youth work" is a broad term covering a broad scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature 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

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15   Howard Williamson, 'Winning spaces, building bridges – What youth work is all about' in Hanjo Schild, Nuala Connolly, Francine Labadie, Jan Vanhee, Howard Williamson (eds.) https://pure.south-wales.ac.uk/en/publications/winning-spaces-building-bridges(5a-fe0c38-0a97-4377-a120-eb2c0b04b66a).html, 'Thinking seriously about youth work. And how to prepare people to do it', Youth Knowledge 20, 2017, p. 19. Online at: https://pure.southwales.ac.uk/en/publications/winning-spaces-building-bridges(5afe0c38-0a97-4377-a120-eb2c0b-04b66a).html

16   Lasse Siurala, 'What are the meanings and underlying concepts and theories of youth work?' in Hanjo Schild, Nuala Connolly, Francine Labadie, Jan Vanhee, Howard Williamson (Eds.), 'Thinking seriously about youth work. And how to prepare people to do it', Youth Knowledge 20, 2017. Online at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/thinking-seriously-about-youth-work

17   Howard Williamson, 'Winning spaces, building bridges – What youth work is all about' in Hanjo Schild, Nuala Connolly, Francine Labadie, Jan Vanhee, Howard Williamson (Eds.), 'Thinking seriously about youth work. And how to prepare people to do it', Youth Knowledge 20, 2017, p. 20. Online at https://pure.southwales.ac.uk/en/publications/winning-spaces-building-bridges(5afe0c38-0a97-4377-a120-eb-2c0b04b66a).html

18   Note that this consensus is not binding, but the 'common ground' of European youth work was explicitly described and debated at the 2nd European Youth Work Convention. Convention documentation online at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-part-nership/eywc-website

20

leaders. Youth work is organised in different ways (by youth-led organisations, organisations for youth, informal groups or through youth services and public authorities). It is delivered in different forms and settings (e.g. open-access, group-based, programme-based, outreach or detached) and is given shape at local, regional, national and European level.'[19]

The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Youth Work of 2017 gives the following definition in its explanatory note:

'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 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. Despite different traditions and definitions, there is a common understanding that 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. Youth work achieves this by empowering and engaging young people in the active creation, preparation, delivery and evaluation of initiatives and activities that reflect their needs, interests, ideas and experiences.'[20]

Such policy-driven definitions are complemented by the work of theorists. Kovacic and Culum attempted to list the common principal descriptors of youth work through a comparative analysis of documents by different institutions and individual states containing definitions of youth work concepts current in a variety of European contexts, from national governmental to European institutional. At the top of their list is *empowering young people for their active participation in society and politics, equipping them with skills useful for the labour market and decision-making processes'*.[21] Sharlene Swartz, a South African youth researcher, proposes that young people need navigational capacities so that they can find their own ways through the mazes of their lives and the societies in which they live, and that a key purpose of youth work is to develop these.[22] Roholt, Baizerman and Hilderath, academics at the universities of Minnesota and Illinois point out that different types of youth work achieve different political purposes. They make the distinction between

20   Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on youth work (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 May 2017 at the 1287th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies): https://rm.coe.int/1680717e78

21   Quoted in Marko Kovacic, A critical approach to youth work categorisations in Hanjo Schild, Nuala Connolly, Francine Labadie, Jan Vanhee, Howard Williamson (eds.), Thinking seriously about youth work. And how to prepare people to do it, Youth knowledge 20, 2017. Online at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/thinking-seriously-about-youth-work

22   Sharlene Swartz and A. Cooper, 'Navigational Capacities for Youth Success in Adversity: A Sociology of Southern Youth', paper presented at the XVIII World Congress of Sociology, Yokohama, Japan, 2014. Online at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268107906_Navigational_Capacities_For_Youth_Success_In_Adversity_A_Sociology_Of_Southern_Youth

19   Council conclusions on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX-:52013XG0614(02)&from=EN

youth work that focuses on increasing young people's civic and political participation so that they will become the citizens of the future, and youth work that focuses on young people's day-to-day lived experiences of social and political life, because they are citizens in the present and have something to say and do about how society is/should be developing.[23]

Work describing the roles, responsibilities and required competences of those conducting and delivering youth work is also instructive about what it is supposed to be for. Some youth sector stakeholders have introduced their own quality standards that go beyond the technical, logistical and financial management of youth work to consider the quality of educational inputs, processes and outcomes delivered,[24] and have developed tools to help youth workers assess their own competence.[25] The political and civic dimensions of European youth work are all relatively explicitly considered in these various frameworks.[26] Even

if there has often been criticism of the way in which these processes have been conducted – for being too inward-looking (i.e. referring too specifically to limited 'practice bubbles'), for not being sufficiently empirical (i.e. not referring sufficiently to past practice and its impact) and for being too fragmented (i.e. not being linked up despite institutional cooperation agreements) – they are a welcome continuation of thinking on how to make European youth work more effective and relevant. Furthermore, they have resulted in new categorisations of youth work, focusing on common points and shared approaches across geography and time, criteria for quality in design and practice, and they provide useful definitional frameworks for European youth work.

One such framework, the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio, defines youth work as follows:

> 'Youth work is commonly understood as a tool for personal development, social integration and active citizenship of young people. Youth work is a "keyword" for all kinds of activities with, for and by young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature. It belongs to the domain of "out-of-school" education, most commonly referred to as either non-formal or informal learning. The main objective of youth work is to create opportunities for young people to shape their own futures.'[27]

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23   See 'engagement' vs. 'engaging' youth work practice in Ross VeLure Roholt, Michael Baizerman, and R.W. Hildreth (Eds.), Civic Youth Work: Cocreating Democratic Youth Spaces, 2013, p. 6. We shall return to differences between these concepts in more detail in a later section of the paper.

24   International Standards Organisation, ISO 29990:2010: Learning services for non-formal education and training – Basic requirements for service providers: https://www.iso.org/standard/53392.html

25   Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio: https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio; European Training Strategy Competence Model for Trainers: https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/trainercompetencedevelopment/trainercompetences/ and https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3752/180320_SALTO-CompetenceModel_Trainer_08_0.pdf

26   Notably the 'Quality standards in education and training activities of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe' (revised in 2016): https://rm.coe.int/ddcp-yd-etd-2016-202-quality-standards-yd-et-activities/16807c8bb9 and SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, European Training Strategy: https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/trainingstrategy/

27   Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio: https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio, section on Youth Work Essentials.

The Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio presents the following typology of 'Six Es' to explain what youth work is for.

WHAT IS YOUTH WORK FOR?

ENABALING
young people to do the things they want to do together and individually

EMPOWERING
young people to change things they think need to be changed in their immediate surroundings and society

Providing young people with opportunities to **EMANCIPATE** and gain autonomy

Helping young people to **ENGAGE** with power and policy

Providing young people with healthy and safe opportunities for leisure that they can **ENJOY**

Providing young people with relevant and engaging non-formal **EDUCATION** opportunities that improve their competencies

Figure 1: What is youth work for?

Dovetailing with several of the above definitional frameworks, the European Training Strategy Competence Model for Trainers published by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre,[28] includes an entire competence area related to the political dimension, titled 'being civically engaged'. This refers to four main aspects or competence indicators: a) applying democracy and human rights principles; b) connecting (youth) policies and educational programmes; c) integrating values and beliefs and d) supporting learners to develop critical thinking.[29]

The evaluation of youth work is increasingly demanded by funders and institutional stakeholders, and as a result is taking place on a more regular basis. Approaches to evaluation in European youth work are as

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28   https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/train-ercompetencedevelopment/trainercompetences/

29   https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3753/180320_SAL-TO-CompetenceModel_Trainer_07_0.pdf

diverse as the manifestations of European youth work itself, and many of the evaluations that are conducted are done so on a punctual and needs basis to meet conditions imposed by donors or to satisfy internal institutional accountability demands. Nevertheless, these can be an interesting source of information for understanding how the purpose of European youth work is understood.

At the Council of Europe, for example, a whole library of good practice manuals and pedagogical guides have been developed on the basis of the evaluation of pilot educational and training programmes, including key political educational tools, such as the 'all different–all equal' Education Pack,[30] the Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education With Young People[31] and Bookmarks[32] on human rights education and hate speech online, to name just several that have gained significant traction. The same can be said for the products of the SALTO Resource Centres[33] with regard to some specific European youth work formats, notably European youth exchanges and European volunteering projects, and on some themes like participation and inclusion.[34] These, and the training programmes that have been developed to encourage their use, also provide us with evidence for the nature and content of European youth work as they relate to key policy themes for the European institutions.

Research-based Analysis of Youth in Action, or RAY,[35] is especially valuable as it is conducted in a systematic manner across countries and over time, focusing a lot of attention on end beneficiary young people that participate in projects supported by Erasmus+ funding and not just on the project-carrying organisations and their staff managing the projects. Even if the RAY studies are somewhat limited in remit, in that the core of the questions important for the evaluation are focused mainly on personal efficacy outcomes rather than on outcomes and impacts in terms of socio-political change per se,[36] each new study provides the community of practice with evidence of its progress in relation to specific indicators, notably European awareness and identity, personal competence development and the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, in coherence with the aims and fundamental values of the Erasmus+ programme, the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and other fundamental guidance documents, together with national objectives.

Successive RAY studies have shown that participation in projects funded by the Erasmus+ programme have both intended and unintended positive effects

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30 Education Pack 'all different – all equal': http://www.eycb.coe.int/edupack/

31 Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education With Young People: https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass

32 Bookmarks: A manual for combating hate speech online through human rights education. Available online: https://rm.coe.int/CoERM-PublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=-090000168065dac7

33 SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres: https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/

34 https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionpublications/

35 Research-based Analysis of Youth in Action (RAY): http://www.researchyouth.eu/

36 European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

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on young people, and the positive effects are most obvious among young people who self-assess as having fewest opportunities. By virtue of the competences and capacity participating project coordinators and organisations gain, youth organisations are also strengthened. This is confirmed by the external evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme and also by the Shadow Report of the European Youth Forum on the Erasmus+ evaluation.[37] The 2018 RAY special study on the long-term effects of participation in Erasmus+ youth projects shows that such participation can be the impetus to civic engagement over a longer period of time, eventually even through the life course, and especially for those participants who can be considered least advantaged. These results are important for political and social development in Europe, as strong civil societies, made up of citizens who choose to actively engage with each other and the issues of concern to them and the greater good, are essential to the health and vibrancy of any democracy.

This cursory and partial review of how youth work is understood and defined in the policy, theory and practice literature of the European youth field demonstrates the extent to which inherently political themes and questions – notably the pursuit of the 'greater good' – are embedded in European youth work. The 'red thread' running through these references is something like a 'theory of change' of European youth work that proposes that intentional educational approaches to work with young individuals will help them gain in capacity and prosper, which in turn will motivate them and qualify them for further participation. Through this, they will have an influence on the people around them which will have beneficial knock-on effects for the wider community and will make change for a more just and integrated Europe and world in the long run. Yet, research and evaluation do not unequivocally show that change for a more just, human rights-friendly and integrated Europe results from European youth work's interventions in young people's lives – although this is often how it is presented.[38]

In the following section, we will try to gather together and categorise what is understood by the community of practice as 'characteristic' of how the political dimension in European youth work is manifest.

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37   Ibid.

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38   RAY: http://www.researchyouth.eu/facts-and-figures; European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter; European Commission – Youth, Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union: http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/study/youth-work-report_en.pdf

Part II:

How does 'the political' manifest in European youth work?

Just as the definitions of youth work and of youth work as political are diverse, so are the manifestations of the political in European youth work. The coming section lays out ideas on what the political dimension of European youth work looks like in practice, to the extent that this can be said to be known. Six sub-sections deal with aspects that have been identified by members of the community of practice themselves as characteristic of 'the political' in the European youth work with which they engage, and which they also find challenging to deal with.

It might be tempting to imagine the following as a checklist of indicators for the presence or absence of the political dimension in youth work interventions and for the evaluation of its impact on the civic acumen and motivation of young people or of its social/political impact (in the broader sense). However, it cannot be credibly claimed that the presence of any or all of these will guarantee efficacy, neither does the absence of any of these have to mean a lack of quality in youth work. Rather, these should simply be understood as ways in which a political dimension in youth work can be identified, and an analysis of why it is challenging for those conducting European youth work projects. As such, the coming sections represent both an analysis of what is out there in practice and of the dilemmas associated with that practice.

1/ Project Europe

European youth work programmes have traditionally been presented as an explicit measure for young people and youth civil society organisations to be involved in the co-creation of the aspirational European integration project. However, as the European project develops, so too do the ways in which it is conceptualised and presented within the programmes. If at one time the 'European dimension' was defined by the cross-border/international character (i.e. that it brought together young people from different countries, understood as different cultural backgrounds) of the youth work receiving support, the question of how it should be expressed and further developed in a contemporary European society that has changed significantly and is continuously changing, has to be posed again and again. For quite a large proportion of young people participating in the programmes, growing up has been defined by the freedom to travel, study and learn in another country in the European Union and even further afield and by increasing awareness of cultural diversity (multinational and other kinds). Many young people today take the rights that Europeans and those on European soil enjoy for granted. A very large proportion of young people are not aware that these were not rights or were rights that were not respected until relatively recently, and they have little or no knowledge of how hard-won these rights were and of the pain and devastation Europe had to experience before those rights could be legally enshrined.

As such, their starting point with Europe is rather different than that of their parents and grandparents, many of whom have living memories of war, the ideological and political division of Europe, of life behind an iron curtain or of a lack of opportunity to study and travel due to social class, gender, race or the lottery of being born in one country but not another. Furthermore, young people living inside the EU and young people living in Europe but outside the EU have different starting points with this theme. The extent to which and how the theme 'Europe' is articulated in European youth work projects, and whether the co-creation of a common European future by and with young people is present, is rather unclear. Certainly, it is rare for there to be an explicit and deliberate 'harnessing' of any such narrative developed by young people in the public discourse around the future of Europe, the notable exception being the high profile advocacy work that the European Youth Forum and the European Parliament are doing.[39]

In the first place, this poses a philosophical challenge. The meanings and intentions of so-called European values[40] as outlined in the foundational documents of European cooperation and integration are continuously being challenged from within by everyday national political discourse in member states of the EU and across geographical Europe.

Lora Berg writes,

> 'Terms that once were shared are now falling to the same pressures of political opportunism and nationalist backsliding that several national political climates are facing. […] A salient example of a word embroiled in this phenomenon is "European". In its most literal use, it means simply "relating to or characteristic of Europe or of its inhabitants". But its literal definition is not its only meaning anymore, for it has been infused with connotations that detract from its ability to exist as a neutral word in a shared political language. "European" has been co-opted by the rising nationalist right as a dog-whistle for white ethno-nationalism, while it is also a word that has been drawn into the vision of the European Union. The word "European" sits at the centre of the tug-of-war over the continent's future.'[41]

What European identity is or should be is increasingly defined by those who shout loudest, and the debate is increasingly falling foul of a right-wing nationalist discourse that seeks to racialise what can be considered European. This is far more present in the minds of most people than any ideals of European integration, of any European imaginary, one of the downsides of the ubiquity of social media. Worse still, governments of the European Union member states claim that they are defending European values when they silence human rights defenders, use constitutional changes to muzzle independent media and prosecute those

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39   https://twitter.com/hashtag/youthup?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoog-le%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Ehashtag and https://europa.eu/youth/eu/news/50/59390_en

40   It goes without saying that the values that Europe claims as European are not exclusively European, but actually humanity's values.

41   Lora Berg, 'When Words Are No Longer Common Ground', German Marshall Fund Blog Post, May 2 2018: http://www.gmfus.org/blog/2018/05/02/when-words-are-no-longer-common-ground

who participate in humanitarian rescue missions in the Mediterranean as criminals for saving the lives of drowning people fleeing war and persecution in their countries of origin, and when they change the rules of parliamentary democracy to maintain their monopolies on power. European Union policies that de facto classify human beings as illegal (migrants, asylum seekers, refugees) and that fly in the face of the self-declared 'European values' of human rights and solidarity even exist.[42]

An example of just how critical open dialogue on what the 'European' idea has become, is the discussion that emerged after the suggestion in September 2019 by Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen to name one new portfolio 'Protecting our European Way of Life' to cover a wide range of policy areas including migration, security, employment and education and culture.[43] MEPs, the media and civil society rightly asked what is this European way of life? Is it a set of like-minded cultures, languages and folkloristic traditions that needs to be shielded from alien influences, as the European alt-right demands? Or is it a mindset, a (political) culture firmly rooted in common responsibility for upholding the values outlined in the Lisbon treaty[44] – in other words, respect for human rights, adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law and the protection of minorities? Clearly, these two interpretations of a European way

of life could not be further apart, and the heated debate that emerged from this proposition shows the degree to which the term 'European' is ambivalent. It also shows the urgent need to put European narrative high on the agenda, before proclaiming its defence.

Polemic as it may appear to use such examples, these are among the ways that European values are being articulated in European societies, and people involved in European youth work are understandably confused by the discrepancies between what politicians and governments say and do at home and what they say and do 'in Europe', especially when the resulting policies have a direct bearing on the life realities of the young people they are working with. At the same time, European youth work has not really been the avant-garde of contest and protest on these issues. In fact, the youth work community of practice has demonstrated relative complacency with regard to questioning the direction in which European policymaking is going, with the exception of that relating to funding for European youth work itself. The records of grant-making and project evaluations that now exist across Europe as a result of more than 30 years of funding for youth work projects by just the European Union alone indicate that such 'critical' content has become increasingly marginal. Furthermore, what is being done is hardly being communicated beyond the community of practice.[45]

42   For example, the EU's immigration policy: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/152/immigration-policy

43   https://euobserver.com/political/145976; https://www.youthforum.org/new-team-commissioners-what-about-youth-way-life

44   http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/5/the-treaty-of-lisbon

45   European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

Stakeholders of the European youth sector are, therefore, beginning to question whether current project formats, and the European programmes overall, can accommodate the kind of conceptual co-creation of European narratives, and how (if at all) they can provide mechanisms and structures through which new European narratives can be communicated to decision-makers and power holders.[46] This poses a second challenge – a structural one. The Structured Dialogue in the EU (since 2019, EU Youth Dialogue) and co-management in the Council of Europe have traditionally been understood as such mechanisms, and indeed offer many youth-representative organisations the opportunity to be involved in youth policy-related deliberations. Nevertheless, they are limited in terms of participation and inclusiveness, and in terms of influence over the real decision-making on youth and other policies of the European institutions of national governments. Most of all, however, they are limited in

terms of influence over the narratives that drive European integration and cooperation. De facto, young people have a say on aspects of youth policy, but hardly at all on Europe and its future development/directions.

Recent evaluations of the Structured Dialogue have been critical regarding the political will of European power holders to take on board the results of any initiative to co-create alternative European narratives, such that young people's visions would be systematically considered and taken into account beyond input into the development of European programmes and policies.[48] Other projects, such as the New Narrative for Europe project, which are located outside the youth sector, have actually been more relevant in this regard. Within the community of practice, the 2019 European conference, Regaining Europe, provided space for reflections around the future of Europe and European cohesion.[49] Basically, this boils down to the question of power and its distribution (i.e. power asymmetries), where the inherent power relations governing the future of the European project are not necessarily the subject of reflection in European youth work, and neither are there necessarily opportunities for young people, even youth organisations, to influence them. In reality, the 'environment' remains more limiting than the enabling of a strong influence of

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46   European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

47   The Structured Dialogue was a process enabling young people to be involved in the shaping of policies that affect them, through continuous cooperation among youth representatives and decision-makers. It was first launched by the European Commission in 2009. See: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/dialogue_en. One of the main outcomes of the Structured Dialogue is the EU Youth Goals which were formulated in 2017–2018 in co-creation with 50,000 young people, listing 11 focus areas: 1) Connecting EU with youth, 2) Equality of all genders, 3) Inclusive societies, 4) Information & constructive dialogue, 5) Mental health & wellbeing, 6) Moving rural youth forward, 7) Quality employment for all, 8) Quality learning, 9) Space and participation for all, 10) Sustainable green Europe, 1). Youth organisations & European programmes. See: http://www.youthgoals.eu/. In 2019, the Structured Dialogue became the EU Youth Dialogue and remains a key instrument for participation in the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027.

48   European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

49   https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/ueber-jfe/projekte/RegainingEurope/

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youth associative life (institutionalised or otherwise) to contribute to a permanent process of rethinking the aspirational European project. European youth work could indeed be a place to reflect on such power asymmetries that exist, and the development of innovative participation practices led by young people to address them, but what would be the conduit for those practices and innovations to influence the core policymaking of the EU?

The question is raised of whether a European civil society, in which young people and their organisations and initiatives play a constituent and leading role, actually exists in the way it is often assumed and portrayed, i.e. as a viable and vibrant movement. The question of what role the European institutions and programmes should be playing to support the development and vibrancy of youth associative life in Europe and its position in European civil society is also posed. The European institutions have tried, through extensive funding for the European Youth Forum and the Advisory Council on Youth, and through cooperation at the national level with National Youth Councils, to develop formal structures of youth participation and representation. However, these very quickly become distanced from the day-to-day in the field and through professionalisation and institutionalisation, and thus lose their authentic connection to the grass roots and their movement-like dynamism. The disruptive power of new social media and technologies has also shifted how young people engage with power and participation structures, making the more formal ones less and less attractive. European youth work projects are potentially an ideal space for developing authentic civic dialogue with youth and other civil

society organisations/platforms working with young people or promoting their participation, and could be a space for experimentation in non-bureaucratic and non-institutionalised approaches to the development of the 'European imaginary'.

An effort to bring certain agendas into convergence could foster such a developmental push, for example, the youth participation, youth inclusion and digital youth work agendas pursued by the European institutions. This requires political and institutional decisions, however, and synergies between different areas of institutional action is not a strong point of European institutions, even in a relatively small field like the youth sector. It would also be interesting to try to harness some of the expertise being developed outside of the 'formally' recognised European youth sector that is being generated by young people at their own initiative, with peers in both the virtual and face-to-face civic/citizen action field.[50] While most of these initiatives are not youth-specific – i.e. do not focus on specific youth issues or agendas – they are often led by young people and they often engage a lot of young people on aspects they believe are important. Providing support for this kind of work, which in and of itself fosters democratic practice, and giving it visibility, could also be relevant for encouraging young people to get involved 'in and through Europe' and for sourcing alternative European narratives for young people.

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50   Yael Ohana (ed.), Mapping New Forms of Citizen Engagement in Europe, MitOst Editions, 2017. Online at: https://www.mitost.org/editions/clnewengagement/1/clnewengagement.pdf

There appears to be a growing awareness for the need to engage more substantially on this issue. Both the new EU Youth Strategy and the proposal for the new Erasmus programme generation and the European Solidarity Corps include new features that could offer potential. For the first time, an EU Youth Strategy explicitly refers to the need for more participatory governance and more accountability.[51] At the same time, the stronger engagement of young people in key political processes for European integration, such as the elections for the European Parliament, remain relatively haphazard and under-funded. European youth work programmes are not funding this work extensively, and youth organisations, who see it as their mission to enable young people to act as European citizens in this formal sense, are turning to other sources to fund such campaigns.

2/ Purpose

During his pre-closing reflections at the European conference 'Speak UP, Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship' in Berlin in October 2017, Hendrik Otten said that *European youth work is not a politics free zone*. He went on to explain that as education, (European) youth work cannot be politically neutral because it is a space regulated by specific policies, which are the products of political negotiations, thus making it an object of politics.[52] He pointed out that, even more so, European youth work programmes are clearly regulated by policies that flow from ideological traditions and current conceptions and assumptions (i.e. political ideas), not only about the place of young people in society, but about the kind of society that is desirable to have and to strive for, and that young people should be encouraged to contribute to and participate in. For many in the practice community, this fact is a first indication of a political dimension in European youth work, even if it is necessarily implicit.[53] In theory, this means that a political dimension

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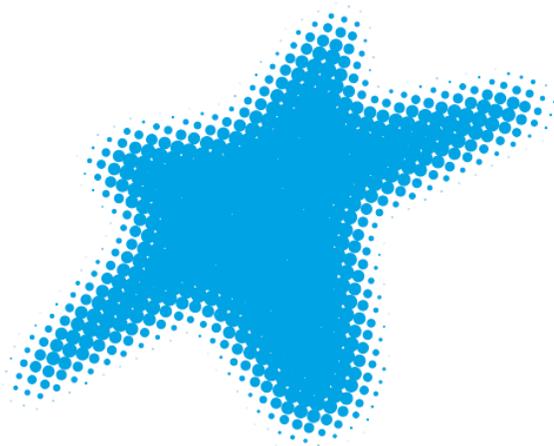
52   Hendrik Otten, speaking at: Speak UP! Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship. A European conference on the political dimension of international youth work in Erasmus+ (16–18 October 2017, Berlin). Conference documentation online at http://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/downloads/4-20-4095/ and Filipp Coussée, 'Escaping or shaping reality: On youth, extremism and democracy', Coyote Magazine #20, February 2014. Online at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/issue-20-february-2014

53   Hendrik Otten and Hans Georg Wicke speaking at: Speak UP! Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship. A European conference on the political dimension of international youth work in Erasmus+ (16–18 October 2017, Berlin). Conference documentation online at http://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/downloads/4-20-4095/

51   EU Youth Strategy: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en

32

is present in any youth work that is funded with public resources, irrespective of what it is actually about or seeks to explicitly achieve.

However, European youth work also has a very clear set of *normative objectives*, and these frame what might be considered the *explicit* political dimension of European youth work. These normative objectives are enshrined in any number of political declarations and policy documents, and *spell out specific principles and values that should guide youth work* conducted under the auspices of European programmes.[54] These documents include everything from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), to the treaties on European Union and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, to the Paris Declaration through the statutes of successive generations of European programmes supporting youth work and the EU Youth Strategy. The following quotes confirm that European youth work has normative objectives to which it is expected to respond.

_ *Article 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon:* The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance,

justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.[55]

_ *Article 2 (f) of Erasmus+:* The Programme shall contribute to the achievement of: the promotion of European values in accordance with Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.[56]

_ *Paris Declaration:* The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people – in close cooperation with parents and families – to become active, responsible, open-minded members of society.[57]

_ *EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027:*[58] Young people should not only be architects of their own life, but also contribute to positive change in society. […] By involving and empowering all young people, youth policy can contribute to successfully meeting the vision of a continent where young people

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54   Speak UP! Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship. A European conference on the political dimension of international youth work in Erasmus+ (16–18 October 2017, Berlin). Conference documentation online at: http://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/downloads/4-20-4095/

55   The Treaty of Lisbon: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1571220568576&uri=CELEX:12007L/TXT

56   Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC Text with EEA relevance. Online at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1288

57   Informal meeting of European Union Education Ministers: Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf

58   EU Youth Strategy: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en

can seize opportunities and relate to European values.[59]

Programme documents and regulations on the purposes of project funding for youth work provided by the European Union and the Council of Europe translate such principles, and make clear that, among others, one key objective is *to develop 'European identity' and awareness among young people*. From a conceptual point of view, the approach traditionally favoured and promoted by European youth work has been one that understands European identity and citizenship as a sense of responsibility for what happens in, around and because of Europe that includes an awareness of the rights and privileges that come from living in Europe. In other words, as a form of *critical Europe awareness and active citizenship*, rather than any cultural, folkish, racializing approach to a common European identity. This concept is understood as a contribution to Europe both maintaining and developing its democratic credentials and living up to its own human rights standards. This necessarily means European youth work is active on the 'value education' front. European integration aspires to be a process guided by values common to humanity and to put these into practice through concrete legal and political mechanisms and practices of cooperation between states and peoples. There is broad consensus that youth programmes supported by European institutions are

supposed to contribute to making sure young people share and develop this kind of understanding and awareness, and are supported to act on it.

However, and in the opinion of practitioners, this normative framework receives far too little recognition and attention, especially in face-to-face work with youth participants.[60] As political statements of intent; as guidelines for how the programmes concerned, and European youth work in general, could/ should 'change something' in Europe; about how European societies should function and develop; about the values and practices they should be espousing in politics and decision-making; about the position of young people and civil society in European politics and society and in relation to Europe's role and positions on global issues and its responsibility in relation to sustainable human development, and so on – the normative framework appears to have become quite lost, having been superseded by other issues, notably personal development, young people's successful integration into the labour market and even their obedient assimilation into the current socio-political and economic system. At the level of the educational work being done with young people in the European youth

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59   The specific 'European values' are set out in 'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture': https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture_en.pdf. Among others, it refers to common identity, unity in diversity, a more democratic Union, and the social dimension of Europe.

60   Hendrik Otten speaking at: Speak UP! Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship. A European conference on the political dimension of international youth work in Erasmus+ (16–18 October 2017, Berlin). Conference documentation online at: http://www.jugendfuereuropa. de/downloads/4-20-4095/; Hendrik Otten and Hans Georg Wicke speaking at Speak UP! Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship. A European conference on the political dimension of international youth work in Erasmus+ (16–18 October 2017, Berlin). Conference documentation online at: http://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/downloads/4-20-4095/ and Forscher-Prakitker Dialog: https://www.forschung-und-praxis-im-dialog.de/publikationen/literatur/

34

work projects, it is unclear how the issues that naturally flow from this normative framework are actually being problematized, questioned and worked on, and if they are, to what extent across the programmes.[61] Funding programmes and the institutions that provide them have, until recently, appeared to be rather unconcerned with this point.

Programme users also point out that the normative objectives that Erasmus+ and other European youth work programmes are supposed to serve are not clearly enough articulated in the public domain as the reasons for such programmes to exist. What appears to be retained among the uninitiated, is the potential personal and professional benefits of participation – in other words, the 'utilitarian' aspects for achieving one's private individual aims of success and prosperity. Indeed, even a cursory review of promotions in Erasmus+ youth programming directed at young people in the public domain provides evidence of a focus on learning, travel, professional development opportunities, discovering yourself, meeting new friends, discovering 'new cultures' and enjoying the 'folkloristic' diversity of Europe in hedonistic terms. These 'benefits' are presented as vehicles for

pursuing European solidarity.[62] Comparatively, there is little attention given to aspects such as the existence of deeply entrenched stereotypes and prejudices between people across Europe and how to work on addressing these, to consensus-building on controversial issues that divide societies, to how to create spaces for young people to engage with each other on these issues, to young people's right to take a critical stance on day-to-day European and national politics or to the responsibility of power holders to engage with those critiques. The discourse and narrative that positions European youth programmes as contributing to the democratic renewal of European democracy is declarative at best.[63]

Two specific challenges are obvious in relation to how the normative framework is being or not being articulated in the context of European youth work, and these are both intimately related to youth worker identity.[64]

61   Speak UP! Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship. A European conference on the political dimension of international youth work in Erasmus+ (16–18 October 2017, Berlin). Conference documentation online at: http://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/downloads/4-20-4095/; European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

62   'Speak UP! Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship. A European conference on the political dimension of international youth work in Erasmus+' (16–18 October 2017, Berlin). Conference documentation online at: http://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/downloads/4-20-4095/ and Gavan Titley, 'Plastic, Political and Contingent: Culture and Intercultural Learning in Directorate of Youth and Sport Activities', in Ramberg, Ingrid (2009) Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work – Which Ways Forward, Strasbourg, Council of Europe. Online at: https://rm.coe.int/16807037de

63   European Solidarity Corps: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNk0QN2rxAc and Discover EU: http://www.youdiscover.eu/

64   Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention 2010 https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-2803/2010_Declaration_European_youth_work_convention_en.pdf; 2nd European Youth Work Convention 2015, website: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/eywc-website

The first is posed by a question that many practitioners ask – if European youth work is value education (as it is often discussed and promoted), which specific values should it be educating for? Many would immediately respond that European values are what European youth work, understood as value education, should be educating for. However, this question is truly tricky. To put it bluntly, youth work is not in and of itself 'progressive'. The European values it has sought to develop among young people have not always been in line with fundamental human rights. It should be enough for us to refer to the European colonialists' civilising mission, a strong value statement that was translated word for word into education and socialisation practices that all but eradicated indigenous cultural practices across the globe, with catastrophic consequences for those countries and communities still today. The Nazis considered themselves a value community and educated accordingly, with great success, including through an advanced concept of youth work.[65] Continuing in that tradition, extreme right wing parties and white power groups are increasingly present in the youth work scene. These do not shy away from the discourse of European values. They use it to normalise hate and are also successful in socialising young people into their fold through activities whose formats are similar to those offered by mainstream European youth work (seminars, camps, charitable work, community work, activities engaging young people's motivation, helping them to feel part of something), even if the values they promote are

the polar opposite of those which the European youth work community of practice would say they are defending and promoting through their youth work (e.g. human rights, tolerance, etc.).[66]

The second challenge is directly linked to the first. There are an increasing number of people in the European youth work community of practice that are confronted with accusations that what they do is politically motivated indoctrination because they promote a progressive understanding of values through the youth work they do. This can have far-reaching and often negative consequences for them as persons and for the youth they work with.[67] It is becoming increasingly obvious that some issues are rejected in some places – they will not be funded and people can get into trouble (social, professional, legal, administrative) for addressing these with young people.[68] Right-wing extremism, the rights of migrants and sexuality/gender identity and are just three obvious cases, even in member states of the European Union, where overarching agreements like the Charter of Fundamental Rights are applied and although European-level political declarations relevant to European youth work explicitly refer to its role in the promotion of a culture

65   For example, Hitler Jugend and Bund Deutscher Mädel. Hamburger Zeitzeugen berichten – 1933 bis 1947: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DqymZPiNHQ and Die Hitlerjugend - Unveröffentlichtes Material: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMY1gKEqD-w

66   For example, https://www.routledge.com/Decolonizing-European-Sociology-Transdisciplinary-Approaches/Gutierrez-Rodriguez-Boatca-Costa/p/book/9780754678724

67   See the 'Political Neutrality in Education' debate in Germany: https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/ANALYSE/Analyse_Das_Neutralitaetsgebot_in_der_Bildung.pdf

68   European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

of human rights.[69] In the best case, such work is ignored in the hope it will simply wither and die for a lack of resources and attention. This has, indeed, been the case for a lot of youth work on right-wing extremism in comparison to the 1980s and 1990s, especially in Western and Northern Europe.[70] In the more worrying scenarios, youth work organisations supporting LGBTQI young people and young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are demonised in media aligned with the state, and in social media, as 'gay propaganda', as part of an international (Jewish/Zionist) conspiracy and/or as the avant-garde of an Islamic holy war against Western culture.[71]

It is, therefore, not adequate for the political challenges Europe and European integration experience at the current time to simply assert that European youth work is the 'right kind of value education', as is so often done in political declarations and even by the community of practice, well-meaning as this may

be.[72] There are too many dilemmas and contradictions associated with both the notion of European values and value education for that to be a credible and useful standpoint. Suffice to say at this point, that to be a constructive contribution to *critical Europe awareness*, European youth work cannot promote a closed, static, and culturalized concept of European values.[73] And, rather than promoting the idea of Europe as a 'value community' per se, it should be promoting *the development of a community that stands up for the values of the aspirational European project* – those that are explicit in the normative framework within which European youth work programmes have been established and continue to evolve.

There are at least three obvious ways that the normative framework, and by implication the thorny question of 'which values', could be addressed in a more explicit manner in European youth work in comparison to how it is being dealt with today.

The first relates to the political process surrounding decision-making on the role(s) and purposes of the European youth work programmes. Quite simply, the normative framework needs to be the subject of more overt and explicit discussion within the policy-making processes that determine the focus of the programmes, in other words at the political level in negotiations among EU and Council of Europe member

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69   http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/01_-_janvier/79/4/declaration_on_promoting_citizenship_527794.pdf

70   http://www.taz.de/Jugendarbeiter-ueber-Rechtsextremismus/!5535324/

71   Closing space for civil society background and resources: https://www.opendemocracy.net/openglobalrights/closing-space-for-civil-society; Arun Kundnani, The Muslims are Coming!: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror: https://www.versobooks.com/books/1765-the-muslims-are-coming; 'Stop Soros' Law' in Hungary: https://www.politico.eu/article/open-society-takes-hungary-to-court-over-stop-george-soros-law-asylum-seekers-ecj/; 'Gay Propganda Law' in Russia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_gay_propaganda_law and ARD report on extreme-right wing activism: 'Am Rechten Rand' ('On the right fringe'): https://www.ardmediathek.de/ard/player/Y3JpZDovL2Rhc2Vyc3RlLmRlL3JlcG9ydGFnZSBfIGRva3VtZW50YXRpb24vZXZvZXdpLzM1ZWFiNDgaW0gZZXJzdGVuLzYyYjYjYTk3LTJjMGItNGQ3Mi1iZDh-kLTdjMjJmOGNhMjJlMA/

72   For example, the TED Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/wanis_kabbaj_how_nationalism_and_globalism_can_coexist/up-next?language=en

73   Gavan Titley and Hendrik Otten, in Yael Ohana and Hendrik Otten, 'Where do you Stand: Intercultural Learning and Political Education in Contemporary Europe', VS Verlag Fur Sozialwissenschaften, 2012

states, respectively, and with the European Commission in the case of the EU programmes. At the moment, discussions on the presence and treatment of the normative framework tend to be dispersed across a variety of parallel processes (youth work development, recognition, pedagogical tools development) and are often relegated to the responsibility of youth workers to resolve on their own – even though many people doing youth work with European funding and support are little aware of the normative framework themselves.

There has traditionally been very little appetite or space for a discussion that would include policy and decision-makers with real power, despite evaluation evidence that shows how important it would be – although this may slowly be changing in view of the 2017 evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme and improvements in the new EU Youth Strategy for 2019–2027.[74] Preparations for the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work could provide space for a relevant discussion and debate in this regard. As proposed by both of these, a European Youth Work Agenda is being developed as a central theme for the 3rd European Youth Work Convention under Germany's EU Presidency and Council of Europe Chairpersonship in 2020. Such an agenda must be driven by the higher order principles and aims enshrined in the normative

framework, rather than specific instrumental socio-economic interests. More concerted advocacy on the part of the European youth work community of practice on this complex of issues will be necessary if the current momentum is to have any long-term impact.

The second relates to the prescriptions on projects being funded by European youth work programmes. Under programme arrangements that have been in place since the beginning of the current generation of EU programmes, the project formats that can be used by the community of practice include only implicit reference to the normative framework, whereas they are relatively explicit when it comes to desired outcomes such as socio-economic inclusion and employability. Dependency on European funding means that youth project carriers have an overarching interest in ensuring their applications and, therefore, their projects ensure good coverage of the explicit outcomes prescribed by funders – in other words, 'what you ask for is what you get'.[75] There is little or no space for thinking about how projects and the processes begun within them address the normative framework, beyond relatively superficial considerations of the European dimension, which usually boil down to the fact that there are young people from different member

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74   European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

75   European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

states of the EU taking part in the project.[76] European Youth Foundation funding takes a slightly different approach, but the sums and number of grants that can be awarded in any given year are extremely limited, with obvious consequences for scale of impact on approach in the community of practice.

38 Rather, it would appear that less prescription on themes and outcomes, at the same time as much more emphasis on the normative framework and the process orientation of European youth work projects would be relevant. This would encourage youth work project carriers to creatively source project ideas from within the communities of young people on behalf of which they are applying, and to actively engage young people in the process of project development. Applications should be welcomed from projects that engage with young people's own discourses around the normative framework and around issues of public relevance. This would promote the idea that projects should be making a contribution to the fulfilment of the 'value' mission of European programmes. This could promote a more democratic and participatory approach within youth organisations and youth initiatives, and would be inviting for potential programme users who have until now not considered participation because the logics of project funding are not easily made to fit with their modus operandi with young people (for example, the youth care and welfare

community of practice). At the time of writing, there are indications that change in this direction is coming, notably with the announcement of new funding lines within the new European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus programmes, acknowledging deficits raised in the evaluation of Erasmus+ and making it possible for youth organisations based in different countries to set up joint projects to facilitate young people to share their ideas about the EU, encourage wider civic participation and to foster a sense of European citizenship. Thematic priorities will include active citizenship, network-building, European values and European citizenship, democratic participation, democratic resilience and social inclusion related to youth.[77]

The third relates to the actual educational practice within projects supported by European programmes. An important first step towards a practice that would consider the normative framework more explicitly would be for educational staff of projects to critically re-evaluate how they actually engage with the paradoxes and contradictions of the European integration project and the effects on the life realities of the young people engaged in the projects and the societies in which they live. Are projects creating spaces where young people can critically reflect on their own and others' positions in different societies, in Europe, in the European integration project? Are projects creating spaces for young people to critically engage with the day-to-day injustices that are also the reality of Europe? Are they creating spaces where young people can think about alternatives to the status quo?

76 For further discussion about conditions for intercultural learning in European youth work, and the problematic interpretation of international encounters as being automatically intercultural, see Ohana and Otten, 'Where do you Stand? Intercultural Learning and Political Education in Contemporary Europe', VS Verlag Fur Sozialwissenschaften, 2012.

77 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:C2018/133/09&from=EN

And, are projects doing this in ways that make such subject matter accessible to all kinds of young people? Or are they following recipes outlined in manuals for discussing issues deemed relevant by (adult) others – European values, human rights, how the EU works, etc.? Rather than attempting to 'promote' values, the current context requires explicit engagement with the values of the young people participating, making links between these and the values explicitly outlined in the normative framework and a de-construction of the often confusing manifestations of 'values' in the day-to-day politics of European cooperation and integration, with the ultimate goal of identifying what young people feel is important to change in the current situation and how they want to contribute to the development of their own European narrative(s).

3/ Political & social change

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A political dimension in youth work is more often than not associated with if and how 'change' should be an, or even the, explicit objective of learning/action in the projects being funded/implemented by European youth work programmes. It is common to hear slogans about young people being 'change makers' in their communities and societies, as if this is a given. The 'theory of change' of Erasmus+, including its Youth Chapter, is explicit in this regard – personal efficacy benefits of learning mobility are supposed to lead to organisational efficacy improvements and these are supposed to lead to policy change, with societal benefit outcomes in the long run, including contributions to policy and value change.[78] A cursory analysis of statements in the media about the value of youth work projects provides examples – the personal efficacy benefits young people gain from being involved in youth work are conflated with social change.

Recent evaluations of Erasmus+ are clear in questioning the validity of such assumptions based on evidence of actual impact.[79] In the end, being young is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for active engagement with socio-political causes. So, even

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78   Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

79   European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en

40

if youth projects have this intention and are making strides in the direction of social benefit (and there are many that really do so for the social integration of young people experiencing some form of disadvantage and the communities they live in), it cannot be taken for granted that injustice is being problematized or that the current socio-political conditions at the root of those injustices are being critically reflected upon. Even when human rights, social peace, intercultural relations, social exclusion and/or discrimination are explicitly addressed, it cannot be taken for granted that the work goes in the direction of developing strategies for change, the relevant competences for pursuing change, including through overtly political action, or that this work will lead to these actions being implemented.[80] European youth work stakeholders are not always fully aware of the necessity of engaging with stakeholders and processes outside the youth work context limiting their impact in terms of social change, where such is intended. Some revision of practice is necessary in this respect.

The community of practice also poses the question of 'change to what'? Discussing intercultural political education in European youth work, this author and Hendrik Otten have argued that to contribute to the

'[…] democratization of democracy … those developing and conducting (political intercultural educa-

tion) will have to come to terms with being "against" again, as well as being "for". […] For the best part of the 1990s and 2000s the youth sector has been worrying about "not coming over too negative". Its slogans and standpoints have progressively shifted from being against racism […] to being for diversity and social inclusion, and this shift (much more than just a nuance of terminology) has infiltrated its educational practice – today, intercultural learning is more about celebrating diversity than it is about redressing inequality […]. Intercultural learning has to stop apologising.'[81]

Sectoral stakeholders, commentators and theorists point out that the potential of European youth work as a contributor to change is that it could be a space for the development of consensus around politically sensitive issues, and could negotiate solutions to challenge and redress any inadequate and/or unsatisfactory arrangements – including in relation to the direction European integration is taking. In theory, this is a function of civil society in democracy.[82] However, increasingly, the space for civil society to function as a conduit for the results of such consensus-building among young people (and all citizens) is closing, as a result of political actions on the part of governments but also as a result of restrictive administrative and bureaucratic approaches to how civil society can act on its interest aggregation functions in the European political decision-making space. European programmes

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80   European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

81   Yael Ohana and Hendrik Otten, 'Where do you Stand: Intercultural Learning and Political Education in Contemporary Europe', VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012, p. 217.

82   Joerg Forbrig (ed.), 'Revisiting youth political participation – Challenges for research and democratic practice in europe', Council of Europe Publishing, 2005. Online at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/revisiting-youth-political-participation

could be a counter-point to such developments and extend the space for youth civil society to act in favour of the democratisation of European democracy.

However, the idea that this could be a priority purpose of European youth work is itself far from being the stuff of strong consensus. A variety of factors contribute to this, not least the political arrangements determining how decision-making on the further development of European youth work takes place at both the national and European levels. Whether democratic backtracking, creeping authoritarianism or rising populism, one key condition for redress is for there to be acknowledgement of how these impact on the European youth sector itself, as well as on the lives of the young people the sector serves. There is growing awareness that this level of reflexivity is yet to be achieved across the stakeholder groups actively shaping the field.

With the advent of Key Action 3 (KA3) partnerships between groups of National Agencies, the field is beginning to see that it is necessary for those implementing Erasmus+ to go beyond acting exclusively as financial intermediaries, to considering their own participation in the power dynamics of the sector and how this has an impact on what they are actually doing. Although these can by no means be considered a transformative learning agenda for the programmes themselves, they are a first step in the direction of a more reflexive and strategic understanding of the 'system' that the European youth sector has undoubtedly become.

4/ Participation

Flowing from the above reflections, notably on the theme of a European civil society, a key and perennial issue for stakeholders of the European youth sector is that European youth work provides young people with opportunities to actively participate. On the part of participating young people, satisfaction with this aspect of European youth work is high. Recent and not so recent evaluations and studies indicate that young people recognise the extent to which taking part in European youth work projects can be a turning point for them, whether regarding professional and social orientation or just personal motivation.[83] Youth participation has consistently been conceptualised as being of strategic value for democracy in Europe, not least in political statements by high profile power holders at the European level. It is common for them to refer to youth work as a 'school of democracy', as enabling civic engagement competence that lasts through the life course and as contributing to the resolution of key social and political challenges. For a significant part of the community of practice, youth participation as a principle is a key characteristic and indicator of the political dimension of European youth work. European youth work programmes have a long track record in the development of youth participation projects and have significant technical

41

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83 Thomas, Chang and Abt, 'Long-term effects on the participation in international youth exchange programmes on the participants' personality development'. Summary of 'Erlebnisse, die verändern: Langzeitwirkungen der Teilnahme an internationalen Jugendbegegnungen', Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007, available online at https://www.ijgd.de/fileadmin/content/ijgd/dokumente/07_download/Langzeitwirkungen_Zusammenfassung_deutsch.pdf

expertise in how to support young people's participation, including through youth-led project development. Even so, much youth work practice in Europe reproduces the disenfranchisement from meaningful participation, reproducing structures and approaches that are difficult to access, lacking in inclusiveness and even tokenistic.

Beyond the European youth work field as such, youth participation and the political socialisation of young people is again of major concern. The political establishment is worried about young people not participating, notably in formal politics, and not without reason. Research conducted at Harvard University and the University of Melbourne shows that young people today have the least trust in democracy than any other age group.[84] Sociologist and youth researcher Klaus Hurrelmann speaks about the extent of youth political disenfranchisement in Germany in 2018 as an example of the broader situation that can be observed in a variety of European countries, but also at a European level. He says:

> 'In Germany we are not succeeding […] we are not the only ones, but it is very noticeable here […] to involve young people in political life, at least in that part of political life where decisions are actually being made, where power is being exercised, where the course for the future is being set.

In these arenas, younger generations under 30 are to all intents and purposes not represented.'[85]

Most widely accepted models of democracy count on the active participation of politically literate citizens who are interested in how their governments work. The idea is that the more participation there is in decision-making, the more democracy there is,[86] and that democracies cannot function properly without participation.[87]

Of course, demographic trends are partly to blame for this situation. Across Europe, the population is ageing fast – approximately 24–28% of the populations of Spain, Germany and France are now over 60, whereas the present-day youth population of those same countries is just 15–18%, and the trend over the past years has been that the youth engage less in formal politics, including elections. For their part, up to four-fifths of over 60s will vote in elections – they have been inculcated into seeing voting as a duty. And therein lies the bind. Mainstream politics speaks to the interests of older people, because they are the more important constituency for re-election and the

84   Guildford G. (2016 November 30), Harvard research suggests that an entire global generation has lost faith in democracy. Quartz: https://qz.com/848031/harvard-research-suggests-that-an-entire-global-generation-has-lost-faith-in-democracy/,quoted in Alex Farrow for the SALTO Think Tank on Youth Participation: Closer to the edge of participation and activism, Tallin 2018, p. 16. Online at: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3830/Raport_210x210mm_sm.pdf

85   ARTE Documentary, 'Rebellisch oder unpolitisch – Protest Generation 2018', May 2018: https://programm.ard.de/TV/arte/rebellisch-oder-unpolitisch-/eid_28724675814177 ; Shell study, stating that the political or social engagement of young people in Germany remains between 33% and 40%, 2019: https://www.shell.de/ueber-uns/shell-jugendstudie/_jcr_content/par/toptasks.stream/1570708594823/cc089c96f35209143fdfdcbead8365dc26f9a238/shell-youth-study-2019-summary-en.pdf

86   Sidney Verba and Norman Nie, 'Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality', Oxford University Press, 1972.

87   European Youth Forum, 'Handbook for Political Parties', 2018. Online at: https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Youth%20Political%20Parties%20Study%202018%20final.pdf

consolidation of power.[88] According to sociologist Anne Muxel, one explanation for this can be found in the fact that young people increasingly see voting as a right rather than as a responsibility – maybe because current young people have grown up in a situation of relative awareness regarding their rights. Abstention is understood to have become a form of political messaging for the politically disenfranchised, including young people.

At the same time, there are also signs of change in the other direction. In the 2019 European Parliament elections, the youth vote increased substantially. While the overall voting turnout has decreased steadily between 1979 and 2014, the 2019 elections saw an increase of 8% to 50,6%, resulting in the highest participation since 1994 – and it is Europe's young people and first time voters who drove up the turnout.[89] Taking a closer look, 42% of the 16/18–24 year old citizens voted in 2019, which represents an increase of 50% in comparison to the youth turnout in 2014 (just 28%). Similarly strong was the 34% increase in the age group of 25–39 years, increasing from 35% to 47%.

Certainly, a contributing factor to this civic re-engagement of young people was the influence of grass roots movements like Fridays for Future, putting political responsibility and agency back on the agenda of a generation that perceives itself as having been failed by mainstream politics. Nevertheless, such trends are highly location-specific, and even election-specific. Elections in Italy (2018) and Austria (2019)[90] have continued the trend of lower overall voter turnouts. It thus remains to be seen how European youth will continue to engage and/or disengage with formal politics in general and elections in particular.

The 2018 SALTO Think Tank on Youth Participation examines the changed realities that influence young people's perception of and engagement with formal politics. It points to three conditions that explain differences between the character of youth participation in both current and prior youth generations. These are:

43

_ '[…] 1/ the world young people grow up in today is fundamentally different than that of 20 years ago – youth unemployment is back, work has become more precarious, housing is often unaffordable, mental health issues are increasingly common and society is fragmented and divided;

_ 2/ politics is being disrupted by social media – it has transformed our ability to connect with each other and has changed the nature of public discourse. The legal and illegal manipulation of social media content risks undermining public trust in institutions;

3/ the belief that democracy is positive is declining as new generations experience – and feel the

88   ARTE Documentary, 'Rebellisch oder unpolitisch - Protestgeneration 2018', May 2018: https://programm.ard.de/TV/arte/rebellisch-oder-unpolitisch-/eid_28724675814177

89   Eurobarometer: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/post-election-survey-2019-first-results

90   https://www.idea.int/data-tools/continent-view/Europe/40

limitations – of the world's prevailing system of government and representation.'[91]

The Think Tank on Youth Participation also puts forward that there has been a values shift among young people, relating this to the rise of 'new power values' over 'old power values'.

44

The following graphic compares the two.[92]

This necessarily raises the question of the quality of social participation in the political issues offered by European youth work programmes. Through the evolution of the project formats that are eligible for funding and changes in the political priorities of governments deciding what the programmes are for and should achieve in the immediate term, the scope for the participants of youth projects to lead project development at their own initiative has become much more limited. The importance of this is that the free

Old power values	New power values
Formal (representatives) governance, managerism, institutionalisme	Informal (networked) governance, opt-in decision-making, self organization
Competition, exclusivity, resource consolidation	Collaboration, crowd wisdom, sharing, open-sourcing
Confidentiality, discretion, separation between private and public spheres	Radical transparency
Expertise, professionalism, specialization	Maker culture, "do it ourselves" ethic
Long-term affiliation and loyalty less overall participation	Short-term conditional affiliation, more overall participation

Figure 2: Old power values compared to new power values

91   Alex Farrow for the SALTO Think Tank on Youth Participation: Closer to the edge of participation and activism, Tallin 2018, p. 19. Online at: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3830/Raport_210x210mm_sm.pdf

92   Ibid.

initiative of motivated young people 'to do something' collectively about the issues they consider important or the injustices they feel need to be addressed, in their immediate environment as well as abroad, is no longer extensively supported by the European programmes. The collective learning and action dimensions of such programmes are no longer sufficiently articulated for change and social transformation to be a realistic objective of the projects they support. Furthermore, they are not sufficiently communicated to young people as objectives of European youth work. Currently, the leisure, learning and lifestyle aspects are much more clearly articulated in the media and communications to young people, both by the institutional actors and the official channels of these programmes[93] and by their beneficiaries[94]. Practitioners raise the challenge that participation opportunities are often nothing more than opportunities for 'going through the motions' of adult decision-making – simulating political processes that young people will never actually have the opportunity to take part in with real power to make any decisions that will actually be acted upon by the policy community. On this basis, the question of whether the programmes position young people as active citizens and actors of social change or as consumers of learning experiences needs to become more prominent in discussions on the effectiveness of programmes and the approaches they support, because the extent to which the result of participation counts

as a real contribution to empowerment and emancipation is currently not that obvious.[95]

Many new frameworks for both the identification and development of quality in European youth work have been worked out, and a key element in all of them is the quality of participation of young people. A number of these are very explicit with regard to fostering meaningful youth participation. The development of a Participation Strategy in the Youth Field, spearheaded by SALTO Participation and Information, is on its way. When thinking about the meaningfulness of participation, an important aspect is the role that young people have access to in projects. A further issue is the way in which power holders engage with young people's negotiated consensus on issues of concern to them. Current structural participation arrangements remain far too exclusive and far too 'formal'. Given the changing nature of young people's ways of participation, the major question is how to extend the formats that exist to young people whose participation interests are defined by 'new power values'. *The ambition of the new EU Youth Dialogue to include 'the voice of all young people, including those with fewer opportunities and of those not organised in youth associations'* can certainly be seen as a sign that the need to engage with these 'new power values' is gradually

45

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93   For example: http://www.youdiscover.eu/, https://youtu.be/wLelCDsaTAQ, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaU0KPr16U4

94   For example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzCloAwu2bk, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNko0QN2rxAc, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_DVpcutiUc

95   Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en; In EU Youth Goal 9, young people call for youth-friendly and inclusive information, access, mechanisms and the establishment of dedicated youth spaces – all of these co-developed with young people – to enable better participation. See http://www.youthgoals.eu/

being recognized by policymakers.[96] Yet, this does not go far enough. Access for young people themselves to initiate participation projects in KA3, addressing the topics that are of concern to them and following processes that reflect their own approach to participation, remains difficult because of bureaucracy, strict format prescriptions and too little funding.

The work of Roholt, Baizerman and Hilderath at the Universities of Minnesota and Illinois on the concept of 'civic youth work', although originating in the United States, is highly instructive in regard to the differences between youth participation practices typical for youth work projects funded by the European support programmes, and what they call the 'engaging' approach, which is at the core of their Civic Youth Work model. The following table sums up their analysis of the differences and similarities on a number of key aspects regarding the quality and meaningfulness of participation in youth work practice:

Table 1: Comparing engagement and engaging-oriented youth work[97]

Questions	Youth engagement approach	Youth engaging approach
Who are young people?	Citizens of the future Students 'Not ready for prime time' 'Going through a stage'	Civic actors Community change agents Citizens now Public workers
Why are we concerned?	Youth are apathetic, disinterested and uneducated They lack important civic knowledge, skills and attitudes	Youth are disenfranchised and disconnected by existing structures
What should we do?	Train and educate Structure experiences to maximise the attainment of civic indicators	Provide opportunities to experience democracy and to live as a democratic citizen
How should it be done?	Focus on youth outcomes	Focus on democratic process and real change in the community, programme or issues

Another important question around participation, and key to this discussion, is that of the 'target group' of European youth work. A central objective of European youth work programmes is to offer those traditionally excluded from international youth work opportunities, or who are least advantaged in the society concerned, equitable access to participation in international youth work. With some success, ever more effort and resources are going into promoting the programmes to these young people with fewer opportunities. For example, the evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme shows that approximately 30% of participating young people are young people who, according to their own self-assessment, have fewer opportunities than their peers, which in comparison to other parts of the programme is quite a high proportion.[98]

It is politically salient for European youth work to take a strong stance on social inclusion – governments are very concerned about youth unemployment and young people not being in any form of education, training or employment. Concerns in this regard have always been present in thinking about the role of European youth work programmes, but they have become more prominent because of the economic crisis whose effects are still being struggled with a decade after its onset. There are concerns about the negative consequences of the social exclusion of large cohorts of young people all over Europe for social peace in the present and future, prominently the radicalisation of

young people.[99] The causes of radicalisation are hotly debated, but there is some consensus that the level of opportunity, sense of inclusion/exclusion, actual social status and experiences of discrimination/disadvantage all play an important role in the sense of investment a young person has in a society, and that without that sense of investment, young people can be prone to the narratives offered by radical and extremist ideologies.[100] Many politicians and high-level functionaries are looking to (European) youth work to make a contribution to the prevention of radicalisation. Without a doubt, European youth work does offer young people positive experiences of participation and social integration, as well as opportunities to improve their personal effectiveness, to broaden their horizons and to experience the diversity of Europe in a positive way.

And yet, some very fundamental problems with this rationale and approach to participation and inclusion in the context of European youth programmes are obvious. First, and certainly not intentionally, the implicit associations made between inclusion as a social practice in youth work and the prevention of radicalisation actually stigmatise young people with fewer opportunities who are members of a religious or ethnic minority or have a migrant background as radicals in waiting. Inevitably, this is because the wider political

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98   European Commission, evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en

99   Important to note here is that the term 'radicalisation' does not refer to any particular form of extremism (political, religious, left, right, Islamic, white supremacist, etc.). It refers exclusively to the process of becoming more radical

100   For resources on the pull factors of radicalisation of young people, see https://www.radicalisationresearch.org/ and https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/7110668/YW-against-radicalisation-web.pdf/90a7569d-182d-0b0c-ce5d-9a0fe111ec91

48

and systemic conditions that create the discrimination and exclusion of racialized young people are not part of the discussion. Second, the European discourse has developed a tendency to discuss radicalisation as if it were exclusively an Islamic phenomenon, which constitutes a racialisation of the problem. While this is slowly changing as a result of the political gains made by the far-right, which is raising awareness for the fact that radicalisation can occur in any ideological camp, this has somewhat biased the direction of European youth work priorities. Third, with the limitations on the way in which their resources can be put to use, and with the current competence they can marshal, European programmes are not well placed to engage directly and over the long term with the specific target groups and communities concerned, i.e. the ones already on the road to radicalisation and the ones who are on the road out of it. This kind of youth work is highly specialised and would require the engagement of another kind of support than is currently available from European programmes – longer-term financial commitments, a clearer position regarding the nature of radicalisation (i.e. the fact that it can be associated with any ideological position and is culture-neutral), structural cooperation with specialised communities of practice and support organisations, and specialised training support for staffers of projects, etc.

A further challenge to participation in regard relates to the majority of young people who are not involved in the programmes. According to the fact sheet '30 years of Erasmus+', of the 9 million people who have benefited from the programmes, approximately 1.4 million young people have had the opportunity to participate in youth exchanges, approximately

100,000 have done European Voluntary Service, and approximately 1.8 million education staff and youth workers have had the opportunity to engage in some kind of learning mobility. These figures are impressive and are proof of the significant efforts the National Agencies are making to bring the programme to young people. Nevertheless, it is estimated that only 1 in 20 young people are in a position to become involved and use the programmes. The 'silent majority' of young people are either not well enough informed about the programmes, have no way to engage with the programmes as they lack access to organisations that are participating or are not sufficiently interested in what the programmes offer. It is becoming clearer that the messages that the programmes wish to transmit are not reaching a very great number of young people, despite all the opportunities offered by digital communication. [101]

In his 2018 input to the TCA meeting of National Agencies in Budapest, Goran Buldioski of the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE) challenged the assembled Erasmus+ youth community of practice to take a good look at their outreach strategies and to question who they are actually talking to, about what and how. If the accumulated experience of the OSIFE has taught the community of practice one thing, it is that effective strategies for societal change through

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101 There is increasing interest in this question, at least in some countries. In Germany, for example, a so-called 'Zugangsstudie' (access study) on what fosters and what hinders young people's access to programmes of international youth work has been initiated and should come on stream in 2019. More information: http://zugangsstudie.de/; In Youth Goal 11, young people ask for more visibility, accessibility, youth friendly administration processes, support systems and quality information for all young people, and especially those with fewer opportunities. See: http://www.youthgoals.eu/

civil society action are those that are based on the simplest, everyday interests of groups of people to change things in their common lives and social contexts that they feel are not working for them or society as a whole. He proposed that if there is a perspective for such issues to be addressed or solved, it will even motivate people who do not agree on other fundamental issues to act in solidarity with each other.[102] This dovetails with the ideas presented by the SALTO Think Tank on Youth Participation, which proposes that soft power values are more effective in motivating youth participation today.[103]

It goes without saying that any discussion of youth participation and its place in European youth work must also consider the digital revolution. As can be understood from the graphic comparing old power to new power values, youth participation has been radically changed by new information and communication technologies and social media. Not only has technology disrupted how young people view democracy, it is also disrupting how they engage with its structures. In some very real respects, a young YouTube influencer with over a million followers globally has more 'power' than many world leaders and politicians. Take the example of the German YouTube star Rezo, who, through a series of videos and coordinated actions with other YouTubers, created huge media

attention and poltical debate ahead of the 2019 EU elections.[104] At the same time, young people are also making it clear that as much as virtual social activism is attractive to them, online is not 'all-important', and that face-to-face participation remains key to young people's engagement.

The new EU Youth Strategy gives some attention to the digitalisation of youth work, acknowledging that digital communication, learning and outreach tools can help to improve the reach and quality of participation of young people. Still, European youth work is playing catch up with these developments, and readily admits that it is not yet fully able to use the potential of digital media for improving youth participation.[105] There are some serious competence issues to be resolved for European youth work programmes to effectively engage with young people's digital personas.[106] There are also some hard questions to be asked: are European youth work programmes and the people working in them engaging with young people on their

49

102 Goran Buldioski of the Open Society Foundations speaking at the TCA meeting for Erasmus+ Youth in Action NA staff, European Youth Centre Budapest, June 2018. Video online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rRjBTzZYNs&feature=youtu.be

103 Alex Farrow for the SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre, SALTO Think Tank on Youth Participation: Closer to the edge of participation and activism, 2018. Online at: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3830/Raport_210x210mm_sm.pdf

104 https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/heute/was-die-wahlergebnisse-von-bremen-und-europa-fuer-groko-in-berlin-bedeuten-100.html

105 Michael Stognienko interview with Thomas Krüger, Präsident der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung,'Wir müssen unsere Formate komplett neu erfinden', 19 April 2016. Online at: https://www.boell.de/de/2016/04/19/die-rolle-der-politischen-bildung-bei-der-aus-einandersetzung-mit-den-ideologien-der, https://vimeo.com/245876043, https://opin.me/en/, https://www.euthproject.eu/summit/, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-part-nership/issue-4, https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/developing-digi-tal-youth-work-%E2%80%93-agile-mindset-crucial_en, https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/toolbox_tool_download-file-1744/NC0218021ENN.en.pdf, http://www.bpb.de/lernen/digitale-bildung/werkstatt/

106 In EU Youth Goal 4, young people also express the need for support in the development of critical media literacy. Needless to say, the community of practice would first need to bring itself up to speed in this field. See: http://www.youthgoals.eu/

50

terms or only their own? How well programmes and youth workers manage to address such questions and dilemmas will be absolutely crucial for the relevance of European youth work as a platform for meaningful youth participation going forward. Without significant further work on this agenda, and the adaptation of the offers of European youth work to this reality, it risks becoming ever more distanced from young people.

A 'political' response to the challenges European youth work experiences in living up to its participation mission would be to elaborate a participation and inclusion concept that supports young people to act in solidarity with each other through participation in European youth work and helps communities of peers to critically engage with and act on the absence of participation and inclusion in society – whether that is caused by economic disadvantage, state and social racism and discrimination, structural and cultural exclusion, or any combination of these.

The European Solidarity Corps, launched in 2018, proposes itself as such a response. Clearly, the allocation of significant funds to solidarity projects by young people is a good start. The announcement of this additional EU youth programme, together with its title, came as rather a surprise to the community of practice. A European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre has since been founded in Austria[107] with the objective of providing the network of National Agencies, SALTOs, the Commission and beneficiaries with support for programme implementation. One of the

first initiatives of the Resource Centre has been to undertake a much needed study on the meaning and understanding of the term 'solidarity' in the context of the programme. The report, to be published in mid-November 2019, will develop four different angles on the solidarity definition: policy, practice, research[108] and young people. Based on this report, tools, methodologies and training formats will be developed for the community of practice in order to better engage with and further explore the concept of solidarity. The Youth Chapter of the new Erasmus programme, beginning in 2021, is also expected to propose opportunities for this kind of activity. Although participation, inclusiveness, accessibility, support of grass-roots initiatives and projects that support European identity and citizenship are written all over the proposal of the Council of the EU[109] (at the time of writing, still under negotiation), it remains unclear as to how this is going to work in practice. Despite the fact that it is foreseen that the budget will double, questions must still be posed on how the significant increase in youth and youth worker mobilities that this will be funding[110] can be reconciled with more and better support for young people experiencing fewer opportunities and a stronger civic dimension of funded projects. The latter two aspects require willingness, competence and resilient infrastructure within the community of practice. In addition, a major chunk of the Key Action 1 budget

107 https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/

108 European University Institute, Solidarity in Europe: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/db3d580c-b248-11e8-99ee-01aa75ed71a1

109 http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14797-2018-INIT/en/pdf

110 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190321IPR32121/erasmus-2021-2027-more-people-to-experience-learning-exchanges-in-europe

that could be used to supplement quantity development with quality support measures is foreseen for DiscoverEU, which itself lacks a convincing educational, let alone civic, dimension.

In conclusion, change for a more just and integrated Europe requires youth work in which the political and civic dimensions are both explicit and intertwined with the personal development and social dimensions, i.e. they are interdependent and complementary, not alternatives to one another. Like the image of citizenship as a chair that can only stand if its legs are all the same height, this tells us that for young people, learning to read and travel through their own lives and through the societies they live in (because these are plural) are not mutually exclusive, but happen at one and the same time, and must be seen as mutually enhancing.[111]

5/ Power and agency

European youth work sees itself as a contribution to the development of the political agency and capacity of young people for social action, and not without reason. It has been proven by research that young people's motivation and competences for social action and their civic and political acumen can be improved by participation in European youth work. Knowledge, skills and attitudes that are politically relevant and useful are developed as a result of participating in such projects, and it is uncontested that young people gain confidence and motivation to engage in socially beneficial pursuits as a result of participation.[112]

51

And yet, a recurrent issue for the community of practice is the question of what level of political agency and action European youth work can be expected to deliver. As discussed in relation to change, some of the expectations placed on European youth work are not particularly realistic.

The capacity of European youth work to deliver political agency and action is mediated by a number of factors. One of them is competence, which operates at two interdependent levels – at the level of the young people participating in European youth work activities, and at the level of the youth workers/leaders that facilitate the projects and activities in which they participate. Another is the space and opportunity that

111 T-kit 7: European Citizenship, Revised Edition: https://pjp-eu.coe. int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-7-under-construction...citizen-ship-youth-and-europe

112 RAY Factsheet, 'Youth in Action promotes active citizenship and participation'. Online at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/eras-mus-youth-in-action-promotes-active-citizenship-and-participation

52

young people have to act through the medium of the projects. A third is the support, including resources, which is available to young people who have participated in projects or have organised projects to continue and develop new lines of action using the experience gained during their participation in the initial project, as well as the relevance of those of the realities of the contexts in which they take place.

If we first look at the question of the competence that young people acquire through European youth work, then ongoing discussions with practitioners and research reveal that projects supported by European youth work programmes can only go so far in establishing political agency and conditions under which young people are able to act for social change. At the root of this question is the idea of youth empowerment. Although evidence remains largely anecdotal, there is no practitioner working in European youth work projects that has not experienced the disappointment of the participant who, equipped with a variety of new competences and a huge dose of enthusiasm resulting from participation in a European project, arrives back in their home context with plans to do something relevant and concrete on political issues of concern to them and their peers, only to find out that a) they have no power at all, b) that no measure of motivation and enthusiasm will help them gain influence and make changes if they cannot access power and c) that the work they did in the European project did not prepare them for the extent to which 'reality bites'.

The power dynamics (i.e. the politics) involved in the real-life situations of youth that participants would like to change are not always adequately represented or tackled in European youth work. Nor does it seem to be common for broader questions of 'power', how it functions and what young people (whether individually or in groups) need to be able to engage with it, to be a theme of European youth work projects. When this happens, the result is that there is an inherent contradiction between what European youth work tells young people they should be doing and is possible for them to do (i.e. about political agency and action), and what they experience as possible when trying to implement what they have learned and planned. This is a significantly disempowering experience. If this is a widespread phenomenon, and admittedly this cannot be known because there is too little research on this specific dimension, then European youth work has a serious credibility challenge to contend with.

Regarding the competence of those working with young people and conducting/facilitating European youth work projects, there is no longer any shortage of knowledge about what staffers would need to be able to do. As outlined above, there have been myriad initiatives to develop competence profiles for youth work of different kinds, and many of these do include a reflection on what it takes to effectively facilitate the development of the political and civic acumen, and even action, on the part of project participants and young people in general. A quick look at some of the more prominent ones – the SALTO European Training Strategy Competence Model[113] and the Council

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113 Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio: https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio and European Training Strategy Competence Model for Trainers: https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/trainercompetencedevelopment/trainercompetences/

of European Youth Work Portfolio – make it clear that there is already a certain level of consensus on the kind of competences that are important and necessary. Points of convergence relate to facilitating young people's critical thinking and being able to engage in it with them through projects; working with young people's values and beliefs, and keeping appropriate distance from one's own; applying human rights and democratic principles in and through youth work; facilitating young people's efforts to engage in social and political change in line with those principles by supporting them to develop their own projects and strategies; and the practice of democratic and emancipatory pedagogy.[114] Convergence with the underlying approach suggested by Roholt, Baizerman and Hilderath in their Civic Youth Work model introduced above is obvious.

At the same time, there is also growing awareness of the fact that those working with young people in such projects do not feel confident to work on issues that they experience as politically sensitive and that they lack agency for engaging young people in political processes. European youth work practitioners often feel intimidated or put off by the use of the term 'political' in relation to their work. They fear being associated with politicians and political parties, which are mostly considered corrupt by young people and lack

legitimacy. They also fear the increasingly negative consequences that they or the sustainability of their work can face if they are identified as having a specific 'political agenda' that does not align with that of the political powers that be in the place they are active or of the funders that provide the resources for their project work, and even their employment.[115]

53

Furthermore, practitioners active in European youth work projects are not always familiar or do not feel at ease with the kind of critical emancipatory pedagogy that was typical for the youth work conducted locally and internationally in the early days of international youth exchange in Europe. In the 1990s and early 2000s, significant European institutional investment went into training for intercultural political education, anti-racism activism and European citizenship education. This is not the case any longer. Even training for human rights education has become less prominent and less available in recent years, although various developments in the Erasmus+ programme (notably one large-scale Key Action 3 project on mainstream human rights education through the work of National Agencies and national youth worker training and qualification formats) may indicate that interest

114 Council of Europe, Youth Work Portfolio: Function 3. Support and empower young people in making sense of the society they live in and in engaging with it. See: https://rm.coe.int/CoERM-PublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680699d85 and SALTO European Training Strategy Competence Model: Competence area: Being civically engaged. See the complete breakdown of indicators here: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3753/180320_SALTO-CompetenceModel_Trainer_07_0.pdf

115 Interview with Tobias Burdukat, Jugendsozialarbeiter in Sachsen in Germany 'Jugendarbeiter über Rechtsextremismus: "Wir sind nicht mehr"', TAZ, 11 September 2018: See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAVrEgzXaVM

54

is again on the rise.[116] This is not to say that there is no training available, but that which is available can hardly be said to be working at scale, and other forms of youth work(er) training have taken precedence. Without explicit knowledge that a political dimension is inherently part and parcel of European youth work, youth workers/leaders will not seek any such training or competence development. And almost none of the training that is available is explicit regarding the political dimension of European youth work, with one recent exception: the COMETS Course Series that was developed to operationalise the European Training Strategy's (ETS) Competence Model for Trainers developed by the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre.

The COMETS Training Series included one course that explored working on and with 'Integrating a political dimension into the trainers' work'. Note that since this training course took place in 2017, the competence area has been further developed and renamed 'Being civically engaged'. The report of the training prepared by the trainer team reveals that the overall competence area was interpreted as mostly related to the personal attitudes and ethical stance of the trainer, rather than as related to the more structural – politically determined – dimensions.[117]

In fairness, this may result from the nature of CO-METS as a training concept, in which attitudes and behaviour are the core entry points for all courses in all areas of the competence model, of which there are seven. To be fair, this was not a course on 'political education' for youth workers or young people. Nevertheless, the needs identified by the participants in the run-up to their participation and communicated to the team indicate that, as much as personal and collective reflection on the ethos of trainers was important to them, they were also concerned about very practical ways that youth work trainers can support others to engage constructively, effectively and with confidence on issues like structural disenfranchisement of young people, their desire to change something in society and how to go about this, and their questions about the politics and how to interact with it. The evaluation by participants indicates they felt human rights was not addressed sufficiently.[118]

If we compare this to the Civic Youth Work model from the United States, or even to methodologies of

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116 2017 saw the initiation of a large-scale project to mainstream a human rights education approach through the work of a consortium of National Agencies with funding from the European Commission under Key Action 3 of Erasmus+. 'Youth for Human Rights' is an ambitious initiative that is producing a lot of knowledge and clarity on how human rights education is being conducted through youth work in the participating countries. Furthermore, it is mapping how youth workers are being trained and educated to conduct human rights education. In principle, it will culminate in policy recommendations to improve the extent to which human rights education is being supported through Erasmus+, and will develop recommendations for how policy can support its integration into formal qualification pathways for youth workers. More information about the Youth for Human Rights project can be found at: https://noored.ee/human-rights-education/

117 SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre and Jugend für EUROPA, COMETS – Integrating a political dimension into the trainers' work Team report Training Course 26 April–2 May 2017, Dresden, Germany. Online at: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3615/COMETS-DE%2C%20April%2017%2C%20report.pdf

118 Summary of evaluations contained in SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre and Jugend für EUROPA, COMETS – Integrating a political dimension into the trainers' work, Team report, Training Course 26 April–2 May 2017, Dresden, Germany. Online at: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3615/COMETS-DE%2C%20April%2017%2C%20report.pdf

human rights and citizenship education that have been developed in Europe that take a 'critical pedagogy' approach, it is clear these would conceptualise training priorities for competence development among youth workers differently. Indeed, and as a framework placing emphasis on the personal and individual ethics and attitudes of the trainers themselves, the Competence Model also relates the necessity of understanding and being able to work within the political and policy context that surrounds youth work.

Although isolated, the case of this particular training course raises the question of where the emphasis in competence development for the staffers of European youth work projects should be placed and what the institutional promoters of European youth work should be offering as training and competence development opportunities. The ideas presented by Roholt, Baizerman and Hilderath in the Civic Youth Work concept are particularly relevant and instructive. In their concept, there are two key priorities for competence development: how to work with young people's own conceptions of the democracy they want to be part of and how to work with their ideas and plans for bringing their vision to fruition. In other words, to help young people experience democracy and influence its development in their own communities and societies or to give young people the chance to democratise democracy.

In the context of European youth work, this means putting spaces in place in which young people have the opportunity to engage in developmental and co-creative activities around the narrative of the European democracy they want to see. These activities

must facilitate young people's reflection and their active engagement in consensus-building with their peers, especially around controversial, politically-charged current issues that are reflected in their daily life realities and policies which are unjust and require redress. The ETS Competence Model for Trainers explicitly includes this competence area, but to train for it in view of the approach and focus as described in Roholt, Baizerman and Hilderath's Civic Youth Work concept would require a different kind of operationalisation than appears to have been achieved till now.

The European Training Strategy, and other initiatives taking place within the European youth work agenda, should be the place for detailed debates on the necessary approach and content of such training.

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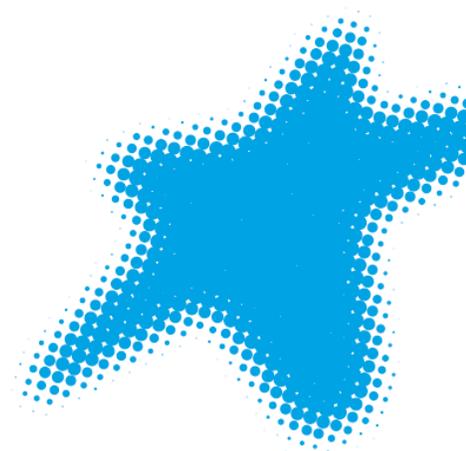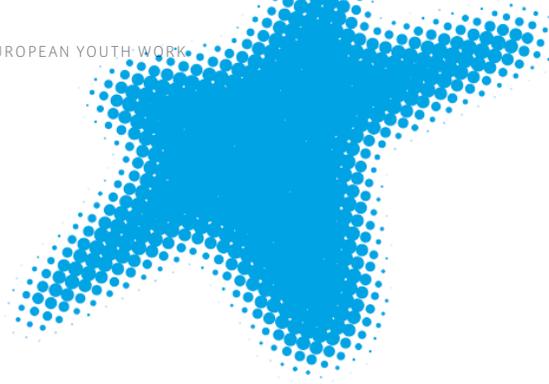
6/ Pedagogy

This brings us to what is probably the most challenging aspect of the 'political' in European youth work – that of the actual methodological practice and the pedagogy in application in European youth work projects, and how these approaches are conceptualised and designed to be political or not.

From the outset, it is important to state clearly that any accurate empirical assessment of this aspect is practically impossible. There has been relatively little analysis of the educational practice that is conducted during such projects and on how this practice contributes to the outcomes identified, even though a good number of such projects involve copious documentation on the methods used. Of course, this is a structural challenge for large-scale grant-making of any kind. Although the National Agencies of the Erasmus+ programme and the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe do have some possibilities to find out more about the pedagogical approaches in use during projects, their capacity to observe these, and even to receive and review reporting on this aspect of projects, is relatively limited.

Helpfully for this reflection, there is a large amount of literature describing transformative/emancipatory/critical/democratic pedagogy, in both in-school and out-of-school education and its conceptual roots are well documented.

There is also a lot of reporting on the pilot and standard setting of educational work conducted by the European support structures, such as the SALTOs, the Partnership on Youth between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, and the Council of Europe European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest. Although the work being done tends to be more specialised, it has important trickle down effects for the broader community of practice through the multipliers and through the open-source educational resources made available free of charge. The activities included in manuals such as the 'all different – all equal' Education Pack, the Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education, Gender Matters and Bookmarks are based on concepts of critical pedagogy.[119] This literature describes approaches and methods in use, and sometimes even provides conceptual justifications for their choice and for when they should be used.[120] Large-scale events and meetings of practitioners take up methodological and pedagogical dilemmas, work on them and then report on them.[121] Nevertheless, no systematic and targeted mapping and analysis of the pedagogical underpinnings of youth

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119 Education Pack: http://www.eycb.coe.int/edupack/; Compass: https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass; Gender Matters: Manual on gender-based violence affecting young people: http://www.eycb.coe.int/gendermatters/; Bookmarks: A manual for combating hate speech through online human rights education: https://rm.coe.int/168065dac7

120 Youth for Human Rights project, Mappings of Human Rights Education in Europe: https://noored.ee/human-rights-education/mapping/; Young people's citizenship and Europe: which ways forward? Seminar on the role of youth work in citizenship education with a focus on its European dimension, European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, May 3–4 May 2018. Presentation and report online at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/seminar-yw-in-citizenship-education

121 For example, at the Human Rights Education Forums organised by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. See: https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-education-youth/-/human-rights-education-youth-forum-2016-video?desktop=true

activities supported by European youth programmes has been conducted. And certainly none of those undertaken have been made specifically in regard to the political in European youth work.

Available documentation reveals two quite divergent ways of 'operationalizing' the political in methodological and pedagogical terms. Somewhat paradoxically, because they are quite divergent, these different operationalisations are often present at one and the same time.

The first proposes curricula, activities and methods that in their educational logic and construction have many of the critical, reflexive and democratic characteristics that Roholt and colleagues refer to as the 'youth engaging approach' presented in the earlier section on participation. At the very least, one can find many references to the practice of experiential learning and democratic group work. Although also practiced to some extent, there are certainly fewer references to community-based learning, youth participatory action research and evaluation, and more 'critical' educational approaches. It is possible to observe aspects of this 'youth engaging approach' in documentation published by the European-level institutional support instruments for youth work development, notably the European Youth Centres, the Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission and the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre as well as by some of the older, 'professionalised' European youth organisations and platforms, such as the European Youth Forum and some of its members (mainly course presentations, educational manuals, community of practice magazines, etc.).

Youth workers with formal education qualifications in social pedagogy and social work also commonly speak about their work as flowing from the tradition of critical pedagogy and emancipatory education, first introduced to youth work during the late 1960s and early 1970s in response to the 1968 student and youth uprisings, notably in countries like the UK, France and Germany.[122]

57

Interestingly, the characteristic that these references have in common is the positioning of the 'youth worker' in relation to the young people they seek to engage with – the young people lead the process from the very beginning – the whole practice concept is participatory, rather than participation or learning outcome oriented. Young people's own experiences and challenges are the starting point for reflections on wider societal realities and analyses of the politics that have caused these to emerge, as a basis for the elaboration of youth-led strategies for action and change, which speak to the priorities of the young people themselves and how they see the needs and concerns of their peers. The key point on the political dimension appears to be the contextualisation of this entire process of reflection in a consensually developed analysis of the political drivers that have brought about the current situation. As outlined above in relation to Europe, an often missing aspect is the relationship between the local or even personal situation, the analysis of

122 Interview with Tobias Burdukat, Jugendsozialarbeiter in Sachsen in Germany 'Jugendarbeiter über Rechtsextremismus: 'Wir sind nicht mehr'', TAZ, 11 September 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAVrEgzXaVM and the Enter! project of the Council of Europe, 'Access to Social Rights for Young People': https://www.coe.int/en/web/enter?desktop=true

that situation, how these relate to Europe and how Europe can be a platform for addressing them in a more just manner, as well as skill-building for how to engage on that platform.

The second approach to operationalisation is identifiable in three ways:

a. The hegemony of certain 'schools' of pedagogical thinking which, although informed by a certain philosophical and ethical position against discrimination, nevertheless fall into the trap of conveying stereotypes, prejudices und bias, and can even go as far as labelling and stigmatising because of an overbearing emphasis on static notions of culture.

b. The application of established methodologies (i.e. education for democratic citizenship, human rights education, intercultural learning, global education) to a wide variety of objectives or target groups without there being a clear justificatory argumentation for why this methodology is appropriate – a little bit like these could be 'recipes'. This is often referred to as the 'toolbox' approach.

c. The random choosing of methods because participants will enjoy them or because they have been recently developed and are 'trendy', irrespective of whether they are really able to deliver on objectives or whether they are able to challenge boundaries. In this kind of situation, the practitioner's 'performance' ends up being the centre of attention – the educator as entertainer, 'guru', starlet – rather than the young people, their issues and their ideas on how to work on them.

Although it would be going too far to say that contemporary European youth work practice is devoid of reflection, or is used without any reference to solid conceptual foundations, anecdotal evidence reveals that many contemporary European youth work projects, even those that have specific civic education objectives, treat the work they are conducting with young people as if they occur in a power and politics vacuum.

Gavan Titley relates an absolutely seminal example of how this plays out in practice in relation to the theme of 'culture' and 'intercultural learning', a mainstay theme of training and youth work in European youth work. Writing in 2005 already, Titley points out that the uses made of culture in the context of European youth work have tended to obscure the real politics they sought to reveal and engage with:

‘Working through the prism of culture rarely recognises the ways in which our cultural environments are becoming more diffuse, nor is there much awareness of how dominant interpretations of culture are becoming re-romanticised and heavily politicised. These terminal inadequacies are worsened by the ways in which activities, theories and methodologies that deal with 'culture' are often presented as interchangeable and widely applicable, instead of as products of particular discourses and histories of development and usage. *This results in a potentially ironic situation; as more people turn to training for ways of reflecting on and acting in complex realities, there is a wider potential distribution of methods fixated on models and ideas*

58

incommensurable with the realities faced by young people […].[123] (*This author's emphasis*).

The key points here in relation to pedagogy are that:

a. While some of the approaches used may trigger thinking on society, any pedagogical approach that essentializes culture in a way that 'racializes' the challenges of the European multicultural society, in actual fact implicitly blames those who are 'culturally different' for those challenges, and has to be questioned and in the long run, rejected.

b. It is problematic when no link is established between the discussions triggered by intercultural learning and the young people's own positioning in society, i.e. the power dynamics governing young people's situations and life experiences in society.

The following scheme is useful for understanding the 'character' of pedagogical practice that can be observed by practitioners directly involved in face-to-face practice taking place in European youth work projects.
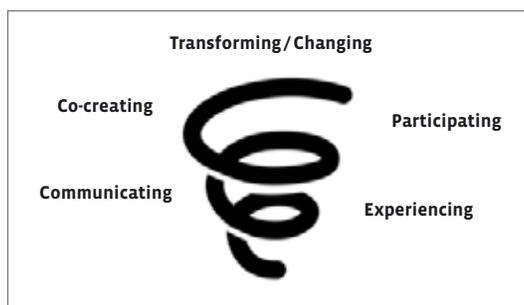
Figure 3: Stages in an ideal-typical youth work process

59

Based on their contact with activities, practitioners and stakeholders active in the programmes are confident that the 'experiencing' and 'communicating' stages are well covered by the majority of European youth work projects that they are involved with. However, regarding 'participating', 'co-creating' and 'transforming/changing', they are less sure. Notably, sociopolitical developments taking place around young people and the impacts they have on their lives, the controversies and contradictions they identify in these developments, the power relations and structures that they identify, experience, and are subject to, the questions they have for power holders and each other, and the kind of change they want to see and contribute to themselves, as well as how any or all of this relates to Europe and European integration, are much less visible.

Another framework for analysis of pedagogical practice is offered by Roholt, Baizerman and Hilderath in their book Civic Youth Work. They make the following comparison between 'classical' youth work on offer and the civic youth work they have observed and documented in the United States, explicitly

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123 Gavan Titley, 'Plastic, Political and Contingent: Culture and Intercultural Learning in Directorate of Youth and Sport Activities', in Ramberg, Ingrid (2009) Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work - Which Ways Forward, Strasbourg, Council of Europe. Online at: https://rm.coe.int/16807037de

addressing the necessity of positioning young people within the pedagogical concept.

The 'classical' youth work approach as described here is remarkably close to definitions of youth work that are current at the European level. This comparison provides an interesting basis on which to assess the presence of the political dimension from a methodological perspective when evidence of actual practice is available.

Closer to home, many will recognise the principles enshrined in the Beutelsbacher Consensus of 1976 even if they do not recognise its name. This document established Germany's Politische Bildung as a truly democratic educational practice.

The three principles are as follows:

a. Educators must never impose their opinions but rather facilitate participants to find their own citizen positions and voice.

b. Controversy is an important part of the learning process, and the educator should be competent to

Table 2: Comparing classical youth work with civic youth work[124]

	Classical youth work approach	Civic youth work approach
Philosophy	Youth-centred and youth-involved	Young people are citizens now
Purpose/Outcomes	Supports personal and social development	Invites and supports young people's civic and political development, as well as community and societal change
Value nexus	Accepting and valuing young people	Co-creating, community change and social justice
Method	Informal and non-formal learning, experiential education, conversation and relationship-building	Experiential and community-based learning, democratic group work, youth participatory action research and evaluation and critical education
Skills	Animating, facilitating	Co-creating, co-sustaining, reflecting on the effectiveness of social action, reading the external socio-political environment

124 Ross VeLure Roholt, Michael Baizerman, and R.W. Hildreth (Eds.), Civic Youth Work: Cocreating Democratic Youth Spaces, Oxford University Press, July 2013.

develop discussion dynamics that constructively reflect on controversies in real life and political discourse.

c. Participants should be at the centre of a process that enables them to act on what they are learning, and to influence the political dynamics they are learning about.

A recent re-working of the Beutelsbach Consensus, published under the title 'Frankfurt Declaration: For a critical-emancipatory Political Education', was signed by almost 40 professors and academics actively engaged in Politische Bildung in Germany in June 2015.

This initiative seeks renewal in this field in Germany and Europe. It proposes a revised set of principles for what the 'political' in any educational initiative could/should aspire to.[125] The Frankfurt Declaration proposes six key characteristics of any political education process, the long-term aim of which is to democratically recast social relations (to democratise democracy) and to redress injustice.

61

Much of what is practiced today as European youth work does take the original Beutelsbach principles into account. It is less certain that the 6 Cs enshrined in the Frankfurt Declaration are respected. Notably, the dimensions of 'confrontation', 'critique' and even 'controversy' are less evident in the literature and anecdotal evidence emerging from projects.

Table 3: Principles of emancipatory political education (based on the Frankfurt Declaration of 2015)

Confrontation	With the radical changes and multiple crises of the current time
Controversy	So that conflicts and dissent are revealed and creativity is used in searching for alternatives and negotiating solutions that consider even entrenched differences
Critique	Of established power relations and structures as manifest in learners lives and the wider society
Critical thinking	Reflexivity regarding the power dynamics within the educational process itself
Confidence-building	So that learners are empowered to scrutinise and challenge power and powerlessness, to claim rights and seek redress for injustices
Change	At the level of the individual, the group, the community and towards a more democratic and just society

125 Frankfurt Declaration: For a critical-emancipatory Political Education, June 2015, Journal of Social Science Education Volume 15, Number 1, Spring 2016 DOI 10.4119/UNIBI/jsse-v15-i1-1520. Online at: https://sozarb.h-da.de/fileadmin/documents/Fachbereiche/Soziale_Arbeit/Politische_Jugendbildung/Dokumente/Frankfurt_Declaration_2016.pdf

62

Theoretical literature and the history of youth work tell us that to be politically relevant, European youth work actually needs to work on political issues and processes as well as current socio-political arrangements, contradictions, dilemmas and resulting power imbalances – both with a local/national and a European perspective – taking a critical, emancipatory, and transformational approach.[126] This includes power-sharing with young people inside projects so that they have the opportunity to live out their agency as citizens now, and not just consumers of learning experiences.[127] It includes critical engagement with difficult themes that are uncomfortable and controversial – 'European' values and how they are being constructed and instrumentalized by different political formations and factions, the democratic deficit in the European institutions, EU member states and the EU political architecture, the cognitive dissonance between European-level policies and the declared values of the integration project, the role of young people, youth work, youth organisations and others, in changing these realities and the policies of governments in this regard. Precisely this critical engagement is what young people demand in Youth Goal 1, 'Connecting EU with Youth'. This states that *an increasing number of young people lack trust in the EU, encounter difficulties in understanding its principles, values, and functioning. Democratic deficits in EU processes have also been identified as one of the reasons for rising euroscepticism among*

young people', and requests policymakers to 'build young people's trust in the EU project by addressing the democratic deficit, lack of transparency and visibility.'[128]

Henry A. Giroux writes:

'… We live in an historic moment of both crisis and possibility, one that presents educators […] with the opportunity to take up the challenging task of re-imagining civic engagement and social transformation, but these activities only have a chance of succeeding if we defend and reinvigorate the pedagogical conditions that enable the current generation of young people to nurture thoughtfulness, critical agency, compassion and democracy itself.'[129]

European youth work struggles with this. In fact, this is the essence of the debate about, and the challenge of, the 'political' in European youth work as a pedagogical practice. The question is really a fundamental one of the identity of European youth work and how those who do this work see their role and the role of their work in a European reality in flux. To quote the input from Allessio Surian at the Council of Europe's Symposium on Intercultural Learning that took place in December 2018: if you are an educationalist 'your comfort zone will kill you'.[130]

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126 Yael Ohana and Hendrik Otten, 'Where do you Stand: Intercultural Learning and Political Education in Contemporary Europe', VS Verlag Fur Sozialwissenschaften, 2012.

127 Goran Buldioski of the Open Society Foundations speaking at the TCA meeting for Erasmus+ Youth in Action NA staff, European Youth Centre Budapest, June 2018. Video online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rRjBTzZYNs&feature=youtu.be

128 http://www.youthgoals.eu/

129 Henry Giroux, Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability? Palgrave McMillan, 2009.

130 Prof. Allessio Surian (University of Padova), speaking to the Consultative Meeting in Intercultural Learning, organised at the European Youth Centre Budapest by the Council of Europe, Youth Department, 4–6 December 2019. For more information: https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/-/call-for-applications-consultative-meeting-intercultural-learning-in-the-educational-approaches-and-practices-of-the-european-youth-centre-

Following on from previous work on political intercultural education with Hendrik Otten, it is this author's conviction that European youth work needs to renew its commitment to three things to make a qualitative leap in the direction of a more critical, democratic, emancipatory and empowering pedagogical practice, that can push the bar on the 'participating', 'co-creating' 'changing/transforming' elements of the model above as follows:

_ The '… *"obligation to be intolerant", in the sense of active intervention if human rights, as the ethical-political foundation of a European concept of justice, are violated'*.

_ The *'democratisation of European democracy as an ongoing process of "imagining the impossible"'* and co-creating alternative European narratives together with other members of the 'political' community (which implies that young people become aware of their position as members of a political community, i.e. as citizens).

_ The effort to *'go beyond "personhood" and become social actors'*, which implies *'the movement from being an ethical, but nevertheless passive and self-interested individual to being an interested and informed stakeholder in society that expresses solidarity through action in everyday life with others'*.[131]

In essence, this requires European youth work to adopt an approach and pedagogy that re-positions young people in youth work from the current 'learners' consuming learning experiences to 'citizens' co-constructing their European realities, on the basis of a fluid consensus about what those realities should be like. This also requires a 'rebranding' of European youth work and relevant support programmes in the public sphere from a pleasurable learning opportunity, to a way to learn how to dialogue and disagree again, to go beyond stating one's opinion and being open to change. These are prerequisites for any contribution to the achievement of justice and human rights.

And while methodological and pedagogical adaptations are a necessary condition for an approach that takes into serious account the three requirements outlined above, they will never be sufficient because there are overarching structural issues that impact extensively on the chances for youth work projects to offer these kinds of opportunities, and not least, to effectively channel the results of young people's self-organised consensus-building and democratically developed alternative European narratives into 'real' European (and other) decision-making processes with influence.

The next part of our reflection will address both structural and pedagogical adaptations that could support European youth work to become more politically relevant.

63

131 Christine Doddington (2007), quoted in Yael Ohana and Hendrik Otten, 'Where do you Stand: Intercultural Learning and Political Education in Contemporary Europe', VS Verlag Fur Sozialwissenschaften, 2012.

Part III:
In the end, a new beginning?
Starting points for the political renewal of European youth work

Already some 15 years ago, Gavan Titley proposed that intercultural learning undertaken in European youth work, as a form of political education, was increasingly something of a

'… rehearsal of the values we value (author's own emphasis) […] There is a tendency for youth work discussions to progress from an assertion of valuable values to questions of their operationalization, without lingering in the realms of ideology. Ideology is a dirty word in contemporary discussion, but its importance lies in reminding us that values sound similar until they are activated within intersubjective dialogue. Everyone agrees with empathy, but not everyone agrees with euthanasia'.[132]

Whatever the extent of excellent European youth work practice, and there is plenty to be proud of, there is also plenty of anecdotal evidence in research and evaluation material about the European youth work programmes for the retreat from the political, ranging from the absence of politically sensitive themes, to the uncoupling of methods from their original activist or social change logics and use for any generic purpose at all. As the saying goes, 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'. The standard European-level mantra, 'European youth encounters = tolerance, peace and harmony', may be true in some cases, but it is also in as many cases not true, even when participation has had a significant impact on young people's lives.[133]

Not all forms of European youth work as practiced today inherently address political objectives or politicised target groups. Not all of them should be expected to. As noted at the outset, European youth work is highly diverse. Nothing speaks against European youth work programmes supporting constructive leisure time activities, out-of-school education directed at personal development with no political or civic objective or even second-chance education for young people currently outside education and training systems. Yet, any claims to credibility that the community of practice may have evaporate when such activities are presented as contributing to the implementation or execution of political objectives, to the civic and political education of young people or to the democratic development of the European project. At the same time, if European youth work says it does political and civic education, then it should be able to say so with confidence, and in a clear understanding of why and how. This requires a much more critical and self-reflective stance on the part of those running the programmes and those staffing the projects regarding their policies, practices and results, and how these flow from and into each other.

132 Gavan Titley, 'Plastic, Political and Contingent: Culture and Intercultural Learning in Directorate of Youth and Sport Activities', in Ramberg, Ingrid (2009) Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work - Which Ways Forward, Strasbourg, Council of Europe. Online at: https://rm.coe.int/16807037de

133 Yael Ohana and Hendrik Otten, 'Where do you Stand: Intercultural Learning and Political Education in Contemporary Europe', VS Verlag Fur Sozialwissenschaften, 2012 and Thomas, Chang and Abt, 'Long-term effects on the participation in international youth exchange programmes on the participants' personality development'. Summary of 'Erlebnisse, die verändern: Langzeitwirkungen der Teilnahme an internationalen Jugendbegegnungen', Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007, available online at https://www.ijgd.de/fileadmin/content/ijgd/dokumente/07_download/Langzeitwirkungen_Zusammenfassung_deutsch.pdf

It is this author's conviction that to push the bar on the political and civic mission in European youth work, which, as we have discussed, is both implicit and explicit, its conceptual foundations and its real political positioning need to be acknowledged much more strongly, and strategically considered in both policies and programmes. To be politically relevant to the European integration process and for its democratic development, youth work must contribute to positioning young people as actors and influencers in these processes, both at the formal institutional level and in the less formal 'socialisation' process that takes place through the work itself.

This implies a radical overhaul in the way the community of practice (here referring to all three corners of the triangle and not only the practitioners) thinks and acts in relation to the political in youth work, and this at two interlinked levels. The first relates to the renewal of European youth work as an educational and engaging practice, in the direction of a more critical, democratic and emancipatory processes. The second relates to the role of European youth work in the renewal of Europe's civil society, politics and democracy.

Below are a number of 'starting points' that stakeholders of the European youth sector could consider. These are not recommendations per se. This paper has no political mandate to make such recommendation. But the analysis contained here does imply certain possible courses of action. There is no 'invisible hand' directing European youth work, nor should there ever be, lest we find ourselves in the pages of 1984.[134] The ideal scenario, from this author's perspective, would be that multiple actors and stakeholders would consider all of these courses of action, and, in forming partnerships and coalitions around them, a number would be pursued, in both parallel and concert. In time, these could become a more coherent 'strategy' or 'agenda'.

Renewal can start anywhere.

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134 Nineteen Eighty-Four, often published as 1984, is a dystopian novel by English author George Orwell published in June 1949. The novel is set in the year 1984 when most of the world population have become victims of perpetual war, omnipresent government surveillance and propaganda. More information at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteen_Eighty-Four

1/ A Transparent and joined up debate

There are already many rich debates taking place about and around this theme in the European youth sector. However, these currently take place in institutional and national silos, at the initiative of some, ignored by others, involving trainers, youth workers and project staffers, but not policymakers and researchers, or vice versa. In the long run, this issue has to be recognised and spoken out as an actual issue relevant to the field, and should also receive an institutional mandate. This means getting this theme on the agenda of key youth work development events that are already planned and which are recognised by the youth work community of practice as important for them and their professional development.

There are plenty of forthcoming and ongoing opportunities for developing a more inclusive European/international debate on the political and civic mission of European youth work and how policy can support it.

Each of the institutions has its own take on this issue, but there are some key actors, notably the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, which have the remit to develop standard-setting initiatives that could represent the European consensus. A follow-up to the May 2018 consultative meeting on 'European Citizenship' could

be important.[135] The Youth Department of the Council of Europe is currently revising its strategy.[136] The work in that direction has taken note of the need for more attention to be given to the closing space for civil society and the renewal of democratic systems where elites are fast ageing and has raised the need for rethinking regarding the perennial theme of youth participation. The 3rd European Youth Work Convention in 2020, bringing together around 600 members of the community of practice, including all the European institutional actors as well as a wide range of non-governmental and professional partners, would be an opportunity to kick-start a transparent and democratic debate on how political renewal can become an intrinsic part of the emerging European youth work agenda – both at the level of pedagogical practice and at the level of policy. Immediate opportunities lie in the degree of freedom that the network of National Agencies of Erasmus+ has to dedicate resources to experimentation with new formats and ideas for training, and in the work to implement the new European Solidarity Corps.

Clearly, opportunities abound for further discussion. A past mistake not to be repeated is that these many parallel processes become closed, self-referential and

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135 Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union in the field of youth, 'Young people's citizenship and Europe: which ways forward? Seminar on the role of youth work in citizenship education with young people, with a focus on its European dimension', 3–4 May 2018, Strasbourg, France. Report available: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/seminar-yw-in-citizenship-education Follow-up plans include an online course for youth workers about 'bringing Europe closer to young people' and an annual forum on European democratic citizenship.

136 Council of Europe Youth Sector, Youth Strategy: https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/youth-strategy

inward-looking. It is most important to foster a permanent, porous, ongoing debate and a culture of dialogue around this issue, which, as we have established, can be controversial, sensitive and uncomfortable. In the long run, this debate could be institutionalised as a platform for conceptual, political and educational development that involves dynamic constellations of actors and stakeholders in the sector, that take a political approach to its themes and its own positioning. The inherent and asymmetric power relations governing the decision-making in and around the European youth work programmes need to be as much 'fair game' for discussion, critical questioning and debate, as the pedagogical approaches and the results of the youth work conducted – and this needs to be an inherent part of the development of the engaging educational practice (enabled, designed and implemented). From an institutional perspective, it is becoming more important to engage seriously with the problem of the closing space for civil society, and to keep up to speed with debates and initiatives on this in other philanthropic communities (i.e. the private international/national philanthropy community) which have been thinking about what funding programmes can do to support the emergence of strong and viable civil society initiatives to foster and defend democracy in spaces where government actions seek to roll it back.[137] This, apparently, has begun, with at least one

consultative meeting having been organised specifically on this theme by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe in 2018.[138] Absolutely key will be to discuss not only the repoliticisation of youth work (what, how, in which directions), but approaches for ensuring this kind of youth work 'gets where it needs to be'. The community of practice has plenty of knowledge about working with different institutional, civil society and associative partners and with public and private initiatives. This experience must be shared.

Finally, and probably most difficult and challenging of all, there must be ways for the results produced in the context of such debates to find their way into mainstream European and national policy-making forums that are important for youth work development in and between the European institutions, and at other levels, from national through to local. This is a matter for youth policy and its stakeholders. The community of practice concerned with this issue needs to think up ways of getting this issue onto the agendas of these policymakers and engaging them in more binding ways. A start has been made with the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers recommendation on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe.[139]

However, for this debate to gain any traction at all, more advocacy and political championship will be

137 In the context of European Foundation Centre cooperation, the institutional donor community and private philanthropic actors have been engaging with this issue for some time. See: European Funders for Social Change for Human Rights (ARIADNE), European Foundation Centre (EFC) and the International Human Rights Funders Group (IHRFG), 'Challenging the Closing Space for Civil Society: A practical starting point for funders', 2015. Online at: http://www.ariadne-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Ariadne_ClosingSpaceReport-Final-Version.pdf

138 Council of Europe Youth Department, Consultative meeting on shrinking space for civil society (7–8 November 2018, Strasbourg) thematic website and conference documentation online: https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/shrinking-space

139 https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/-/recommendation-cm-rec-2018-11-of-the-committee-of-ministers-to-member-states-on-the-need-to-strengthen-the-protection-and-promotion-of-civil-society-s

required. The community of practice is not necessarily using all the advocacy tools at its disposal, notably the specific political documents that form the normative framework for political renewal, but this can be easily rectified. The Paris Declaration, the new EU Youth Strategy, the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work are all useful in this regard, as will be concrete funding opportunities available under Key Action 2 of Erasmus+ and its successor to strengthen civil society (actors) at national, regional and local levels as well as the National Agencies of the programmes, to use these policy strategies and decisions more effectively for advocacy purposes.

2/ Facilitated peer learning

There are also plenty of peer learning and networking opportunities where practitioners can talk to each other about their practices of youth work. Trainer's pools and guilds have been founded: 'Bridges for Trainers' has been running at regular intervals of 2–3 years and SALTO and Council of Europe seminars and consultative meetings take place all the time. However, and again, very few of these opportunities a) focus on the political and civic mission of youth work and the most interesting and innovative practices for its effective implementation under today's political, cultural, social and economic conditions; b) are interdisciplinary, i.e. involve stakeholders from all three corners of youth policy and c) refer to each other and engage with the content produced in another context. It goes without saying that educational practitioners need their own peer learning and networking opportunities, but they also need to hear from other disciplines (policy, research) and to learn from other sectors (school, private philanthropy, etc.) about their experiences.

Key Action 3 (KA3) under Erasmus+, which offers consortia of National Agencies opportunities to develop large-scale partnership projects could foster the kind of peer learning and networking that the sector would need to make better and more strategic use of

69

70

its experience and knowledge.[140] However, adaptations to the funding and project format would be necessary, notably to foster sustainability dynamics after the project life cycle is over. Currently, these are heavily focused on outputs and products, with too little attention, time and funding to really ensure the emergence of networking and cooperation platforms and peer learning within them. Second, the new format of a European Acadamy on Youth Work (first edition: May 2019[141]), might have potential if it could be institutionalised into both a face-to-face and virtual platform that is effectively moderated, providing regular opportunities for professionals of the sector to engage with each other, and acting as a clearing house for the latest developments and knowledge in regard to youth work generally, and its political and civic manifesta-

tions. Initiatives to develop platforms for peer learning and cooperation in the youth sector are starting to proliferate, and some of them are effectively using the potential of technology. The question remains on how to ensure that they are interacting with each other and do not become siloed, can be sustained in the long-term (many are developed within projects and have to shut down when the project is overdue to lack of sustained funding) and represent a safe space for the community to develop its self-knowledge. With these aims in mind, there are examples of more 'generic' platforms in other sectors, which it could be useful to study and eventually emulate, notably the 'apolitical' platform for professionals working in public service worldwide.[142]

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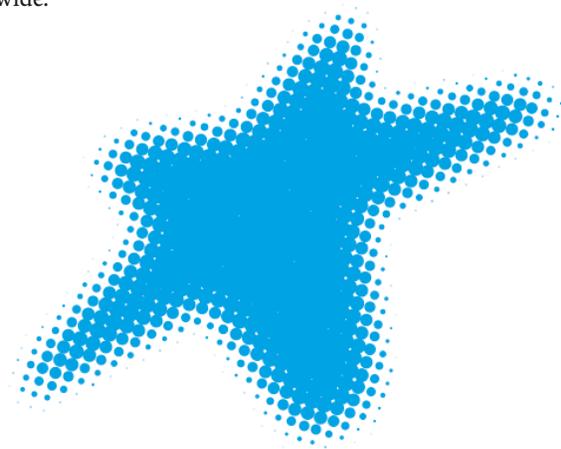
140 Youth for Human Rights project: https://noored.ee/human-rights-education/, the Aware and Active! project: https://www.iz.or.at/de/projekte/aware-and-active, the Becoming a part of Europe Project: http://www.bpe-project.eu/home/

141 European Academy on Youth Work website: https://www.eayw.net/

142 Apolitical: https://apolitical.co/

3/ More and better competence development opportunities and offers

It goes without saying that youth workers and leaders need appropriate education and opportunities to develop the requisite skills to be able to contribute actively and constructively to that process. However, a review of the training available from the European institutional youth work programmes indicates that what is on offer is either completely generic (for example, project management for youth workers) or focuses on specific themes and approaches (for example, human rights education). More often than not it does not explicitly address critical pedagogy, even if in the end it uses some of its methods.

In previous writing going back to 2012, this author and Hendrik Otten identified four competences that are not given enough attention in the offers that have traditionally been made available at the European level. These are critical thinking, social analysis, political literacy and psycho-emotional competence.[143] In the meantime, digital literacy could also be added.

Specific training would be required equipping youth workers and project staffers with these competences so that they can a) work on political issues with young people with confidence, b) develop the civic and political acumen of young people and c) take their own stand on relevant political issues and processes contextualising their work.

Furthermore, and even if a number of relevant competence profiles exist, and in theory they push all the right buttons, there are almost no corresponding training opportunities. Two of these – The Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio and the European Training Strategy (ETS) Competence Model for Trainers[144] – are of specific relevance because they explicitly address the political dimension of youth work. A welcome initiative in this regard is the Democracy Reloading project, a cooperation project between the National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth in Action that will offer training and tools for youth workers to support youth engagement in policymaking. Generally, a good starting point would be to operationalise the competences contained in these into specialised training offers. A further challenge is that those training offers that have been tried out have a sustainability problem – they only offer 25 or 30 places for every edition of experimental courses that may or may not be offered again, meaning that new approaches are never taken to scale. Any new training offers would need to be offered on a regular basis and consider larger cohorts of

71

143 Yael Ohana and Hendrik Otten, 'Where do you Stand: Intercultural Learning and Political Education in Contemporary Europe', VS Verlag Fur Sozialwissenschaften, 2012, pp. 233–237.

144 European Training Strategy, 'Competence Model for Trainers'. Online at: https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/trainercompetencedevelopment/trainercompetences/ and Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio. Online at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio

participants than is currently the case. The format of massive open online courses (MOOCs) could be instrumental to upscale training courses with the use of digital media.[145]

The reintroduction of regular 'standardised' training courses for youth workers and leaders using the European programmes to learn the basics of critical pedagogy would be a useful next step. Current initiatives experimenting with training could address critical pedagogy and make links with contemporary developments. For example, how does the context in which Paulo Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed' emerged relate to contemporary social and political developments in which European youth work has become a de facto actor? What kind of links does European youth work need to have with the 'global' to be an effective tool for critical citizenship of young people, and where do ideas of European citizenship fit in? Such questions would have to be at the centre of discussions to conceptualise the training and education of youth workers/leaders, even that which is of a more general nature, and at the centre of the training content themselves. Rather than a specialist niche, the political needs to again become a fundamental framework consideration and content for European youth work, and of the operationalisation of competence development concepts/frameworks into training offers.

In this particular case, the question really boils down to political and institutional will. It is within the discretionary power of National Agencies, the SALTO Resource Centres, the European Youth Centres of the Council of Europe and the Partnership on Youth between the Council of Europe and the European Commission to decide whether resources should be put into this kind of realisation, and a collaborative effort should not be impossible. There are even common agendas that can support such initiatives, notably the implementation of the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work, the development of a 'European Youth Work Agenda', the establishment of the European Academy on Youth Work as a regular platform and the European Youth Work Convention in 2020. Yet there remains too little awareness of the need to involve others – not the usual suspects – to learn from more than the usual practice.

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145 For example, the Essentials on Youth Policy MOOC, offered by the Youth Partnership, has seen a significant increase since it's launch in 2017, reaching 2,251 enrolments from 99 countries in 2018. See: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/mooc-on-youth-work

4/ Systematic evaluation and research

As noted elsewhere, there is simply too little empirical evidence on the pedagogical practice that is actually being used in projects supported by European programmes, and an effort to map (i.e. identify and describe) key approaches to the political and their effectiveness could be a valuable supplement to what is already being documented in terms of individual and organisational impacts of the European youth work programmes.

The question of whether research and assessment questions currently in use in existing research and evaluation projects are appropriately posed to find out more on this specific point must be asked. In terms of evaluation and research design, it would be important to include explicit enquiries into whether, and subsequently how, youth workers in charge of the face-to-face work in European youth work projects construct their work as political, and how this translates into the choice and/or adaptation of specific practices and methods. The relationship between specific impacts as identified in current research on the programmes, and the pedagogical approaches in use, should be explored to establish the contribution of certain practices to the impacts already researched and observed. This would go a long way to satisfying the need for evidence about 'what works'. It would also provide evidence on the basis of which strategies

to adopt for extending participation, developing the political agency of young people and improving the competence of youth workers/leaders for working on the political in European youth work.

Any such initiative will require the development of new research questions, or even new research projects, so as to focus on specific issues, including among others:

73

_ Manifestations of the political in European youth work, i.e. projects receiving funding from European projects;

_ Formats that appear to be most effective in combining youth competence development and social action/change;

_ Specific pedagogical methods being used and the reasons/justifications for their choice, i.e. those that are experienced as effective in terms of the framing requirements of critical pedagogy as outlined above;

_ Themes being worked on, the justification for the choice of these themes and the ways in which they were chosen;

_ Specific political and civic dimensions of youth worker competence that can be observed or that are considered necessary;

_ Benefits/gains in civic acumen that young people experience as a result of participation in activities;

_ Challenges youth workers and staffers of projects experience in working on political issues and politically (in the sense of with/through critical pedagogy) and the consequences these challenges have for them and for their work;

- Opportunities and obstacles to young people becoming co-creators of political youth work and the contents thereof;
- Ways in which participants translate their experiences in activities into strategies for action or change society in collectives, individually, over time, and the effects of these initiatives;
- Contributions that the work being researched is making to bigger picture objectives as outlined in different political documents.

A variety of typologies of indicators could be used for any such mapping and assessment, which would necessarily have to have quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Most important, however, is not what shall be studied, but how it should be studied. Such research should best be organised as participatory action research directly involving the young people and the youth workers concerned. Taking the 'engaging youth approach', as suggested by Roholt et al. seriously, would mean that young people themselves should be the leaders of evaluation and research within the youth work context. This approach would at one and the same time put young people in the role of active co-creators of European youth work, and would also satisfy some demands for labour market-relevant skills development that continue to be an expectation on youth work.

Some opportunities for the adaptation of existing research and evaluation focusing on European youth work programmes are noteworthy. First, RAY continues and if the experience of the Long Term Effects Study is anything to go by, there is mileage in proposing a special study, initially to conduct the neces-

sary mapping of practice, and thereafter to have the opportunity to develop an appropriate methodological foundation for participatory action research with young people regarding the political dimension. Second, the new European Youth Strategy and the forthcoming Council of Europe Strategy (will) both contain objectives that underscore the political and civic mission of European youth work and that will in time require evaluation. The EU Youth Strategy forsees a periodic monitoring of progress achieved, as well as an evaluation report by the Commission every three years.[146] This represents a further opportunity for research operationalisation. Models that could provide inspiration for the development of evaluation and research indicators already exist, including the Civic Youth Work Model and the Frankfurt Declaration developed upon in more detail in this paper, the recently published by Council of Europe Framework for Competencies for Democratic Culture,[147] the CEDEFOP 'Indicators for monitoring active citizenship', already published in 2009[148] and the 2017 study on 'Citizenship education in school in Europe' conducted by EURYDICE.[149]

Third, there exists at least one pool of (youth) researchers currently active in the youth sector – the Pool

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146 https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en

147 Council of Europe Reference Framework for 'Competences for Democratic Culture': https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/competences-for-democratic-culture

148 CEDEFOP, 'Indicators for monitoring active citizenship', http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/de/news-and-press/news/indicators-monitoring-active-citizenship, 2009.

149 https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6b50c5b0-d651-11e7-a506-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-56573425

of European Youth Researchers. Their agenda is no-
minally youth policy, but youth work development
is a youth policy issue and there might be mileage
in exploring their interest and capacity to engage
with this agenda, notably regarding the mapping of
trickle-down effects from the European level (pilots,
expertise, standards) to the local youth work scene
in member states of the EU and the Council of Euro-
pe. Until now, this pool has not addressed this issue
in the collection of youth policy data for the Youth
Wiki (among other initiatives), but it would be inte-
resting if their remit could be broadened to consider
it. Finally, the new European Solidarity Corps Phase
2 is in the process of being implemented and Phase
3 is in the process of being negotiated. Both Phases
2 and 3 will require evaluation on an ongoing basis.
New monitoring systems will be needed, or old ones
will have to be redeveloped and adapted for this pur-
pose. Herein also lies an interesting inroad into better
understanding how European youth work practices
and programmes can support renewal in civil society,
politics and democratic development in Europe.

However, for such initiatives to be possible, there
needs to be political will and leadership, some instance
has to set the direction, and there must be dedicated
human and financial resources for implementation,
assessment and adaptation based on key learnings.

5/ Fit for purpose funding

Funding policies and approaches have a significant
impact on the results and outcomes of European
youth work. The space for civil society to exercise its
democratic functions is closing all over the world as
well as in Europe. European youth work programmes
could be a space for counteracting the negative effects
of the closing space for civil society by extending op-
portunities for young people to express themselves on
their interests and concerns, by providing them with
platforms to engage in consensus-building on their
own European narratives, and by offering funding
perspectives for long-term work on key issues or stra-
tegies. Achieving the kind of qualitative leap implied
by the discussion in this paper requires structural
changes to the way programmes conduct their fun-
ding operations.

The example of the current format of youth exchanges
under Erasmus+ is informative. Prior preparation and
post-exchange activities of young people taking part
in group exchanges is extremely important for their
impact on young people's political awareness and
motivation to engage further (and therefore for the
achievement of the objectives of youth exchanges),
sometimes as or even more important than their ex-
perience during the mobility itself. Under the current
Erasmus+ youth exchange funding regime, these pre
and post-mobility educational activities are no longer
supported – in other words, the emphasis is on mo-
bilities as such, rather than on mobility projects. The

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76

reasons for why the current programme now has this focus are unclear, but it appears to have something to do with fewer available resources, higher interest on the part of the member states in the possibilities of individual learning mobility and the numerical target of the European Commission for mobilities until the end of the current programme generation (4 million in total). There appears to be political will to upscale the 'youth success story' (the programmes are seen as an example of best practice). The European Commission has announced the intention that 'the future programme should ultimately be targeted towards all young people' (this author's emphasis) and with the goal of tripling the number of participants.[150] Yet again, it remains to be seen if these mobilities will be embedded in a supportive project infrastructure that would enable more co-creation, participation and therefore civic education of young people.

More appropriate and realistic funding opportunities for European youth work are always a matter of political negotiation. In the run-up to the decision-making on the funding for the new programme, the European Youth Forum and its partners campaigned for Erasmus+ x 10,[151] and with some success. At the time of writing, the new programme generation is expected to include at least twice the current funding for the successor programme of Erasmus+ alone (approximately 30 billion Euro),[152] plus a proposed 1,26 billion Euro for the European Solidarity Corps[153]. With Mariya Gabriel, the designated new European Commissioner for Innovation and Youth, supporting this proposition,[154] there is reason to hope the new Multiannual Financial Framework will include this level of funding. However, as every seasoned civil servant working in the social field will tell, throwing money at the issue rarely does the job. The real question is what will the money be used for in practice, and here the question boils down to one of approach. Will the emphasis continue to be on achieving numerical targets for individual mobilities, or will growing awareness around questions of impact and sustainability of youth work push the bar on alignment depth and quality of pedagogical practice? The proposal for the next programme generation implies that continuity is a high priority. It is less clear how qualitative improvement and thematic alignment with political objectives shall be fostered, despite the promising tones emanating from the new EU Youth Strategy.

The level and types of prescription that currently apply to youth work projects receiving European funding, notably from Erasmus+ in which the criteria have come to be rather rigid, must be rethought. More emphasis on the normative framework, and less emphasis on predefined outcomes, could bring about grass-roots innovation. More emphasis on process, and on how the face-to-face work with young people is proposed to take place, would provide project assessors with a better sense of the level of participation

150 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CEL-EX:52018PC0367&qid=1571912045497&from=EN

151 Erasmus+ x 10 Campaign: https://erasmusx10.eu/

152 https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3948_en.htm; https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/com-2018-367_en

153 Ibid.

154 https://www.youthforum.org/new-eu-commission-were-not-there-yet

of young people, and the extent to which a participatory/emancipatory approach is going to be put into practice. This is a far from straightforward process, however, and requires adaptations to application and administrative procedures. Even if this has since been overcome, the transition to Erasmus+ was something of a trauma for many stakeholders running and using the programme, that had necessarily become used to working with Youth in Action procedures. The Commission's proposal to 'boost the tried-and-tested programme',[155] rather than reinventing it, gives assurance to the community of practice that procedures that they have finally mastered and are now part of their routines will remain in place and may even be enhanced through better IT tools and less bureaucracy. At the time of writing, the Council proposal up for discussion indicates that the three Key Actions shall remain in place, with the introduction of youth participation projects (likely under Key Action 1, with the specific objective to foster democratic citizenship), and small-scale strategic partnerships with reduced bureaucracy that ease access for newcomers and grassroots organisations (likely under KA2). Furthermore, the options of (so far not so widely used) cooperation projects between different sectors shall be maintined, the programme shall become more inclusive, allow more flexible learning mobility formats and promote virtual learning.[156]

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155 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CEL-EX:52018PC0367&qid=1571912045497&from=EN

156 Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

Deep change in the culture of communication with project carriers in the run-up to their project submission and in assessing projects is required. First, it would appear that a much higher level of interaction between grant-makers and grantees would be needed to get to the point where the community of practice and the field are presenting projects that correspond well to the normative and pedagogical requirements of more politically-relevant European youth work. Understandably, funders are of the opinion that you can only assess what you get. For their part, youth organisations point out that they are forced into presenting what funders ask for because of financial constraints. So, there is clearly room for improvement on the overall level of contact and communication that funders can offer aspiring grantees, and the level of support and advice these need to actually be able to respond to the priorities of funders. Furthermore, the current framework for assessment pays too little attention to the political aspects as discussed above (notably participatory, democratic and emancipatory pedagogy) and too little attention to innovation (attractive, accessible, modern, youth friendly and even completely new ways of working on the issues that address conditions and needs the project applicants identify). In a highly competitive market, it is a political decision whether funders do or do not put emphasis on this kind of work over other kinds of work. This necessarily requires heavier investment in quality development and assurance measures across the entire grant-making portfolio, from appropriate and regular support for evaluators and their networking, to ensuring consistency in assessments, to quality development work with grantees and assessors having the opportunity to visit 'model' projects to under-

stand how they work first hand, to more peer-learning opportunities amongst grantees for the exchange of good practice and to enhance the quality and impact of their projects. Fostering innovation requires space and opportunity for the free initiative of young people to filter up from the field.

78 Rather than telling young people what projects they should be doing and achieving, project applications should require applicants to provide information on how the project engages with young people's own discourse around the normative framework and contributes to young people engaging in issues of public relevance. This approach would provide insight into how projects contribute to the fulfilment of the 'value' mission of European programmes. This might even encourage potential programme users who have, until now, not understood their work as compatible with the logics of European project funding (for example, the youth care and welfare community of practice or local youth work institutions, such as municipal/NGO drop-in youth centres) to get involved, although this likely requires more targeted strategies of outreach and partnership, and, as mentioned above, longer-term commitment and specialised support. It could also promote the development of more democratic and participatory approaches to project design and development among programme users, and a more bottom-up approach in relation to the development of European narratives with young people through the projects supported by European programmes.

Exploring the introduction of whole new lines of action, and new (for the programmes) formats for

projects as well as the reintroduction of some that fell out in the transition from Youth in Action to the current Erasmus+ would also go a long way to fostering renewal. The traditional formats of non-formal education, out-of-school political and civic education and youth work do include mobility – youth exchanges are the prime example. However, the focus of Erasmus+ (the largest European programme) has become concentrated on the combination of mobility and competence development or on structural youth participation (cf. Structured Dialogue), which has de facto limited the different eligibility of projects to those focusing on learning mobility. At least this was the case until the recent introduction of the European Solidarity Corps, which includes one or two new formats similar to those previously offered under the EU Youth Programme. The European Youth Foundation and some private philanthropic institutions are funding other formats, but the scale of funding available is minor, or the main focus is a theme or community, and not youth initiative per se. International and local youth-led initiatives on themes of concern to young people (possibly picking up on the EU Youth Goals), large-scale events, seminars, specialised training activities, living libraries, festivals, conferences, even the development of educational experiences and tools and materials all receive far less attention although they are are extremely valuable contributions of youth work that are politically relevant to the European aspirational project. Even 'no-format' calls for project submissions would be a valuable approach to sourcing more 'grass-roots' youth work.

Finally, it must also be admitted that the bureaucracy surrounding access to European funds, notably

Erasmus+, continues to be extremely onerous and a barrier to participation (even if the main barrier remains too much demand for too little funding).[157] Current procedures favour large-scale professionalised organisations and companies, and this is crowding out small-scale youth-led initiatives and innovation from the grass roots and even from certain more professionalised youth organisations.[158] Even if the newly proposed Erasmus has taken note of such evaluations, it is unclear how the programme will actually address these challenges. Funding arrangements which involve simpler/freer and more youth-friendly application procedures which do not rely on huge narrative application forms, whose selection is determined by simpler assessment/evaluation processes and whose financial and administrative procedures are commensurate with the level of funding received, would encourage youth work project carriers to creatively source project ideas from within the communities of young people on behalf of whom they are applying, and to actively engage young people in the process of project development.

The point here is that even though they are disbursing public money, European youth work programmes do not have to be unnecessarily bureaucratic. This creates barriers to access and participation of exactly those target groups and communities of young people that are least likely to have access and be able to participate,

and who might be understood as most 'needy' of such engagement.[159] In this relation, questions around outreach strategy need to be asked and explored in much more depth. It is well known that opportunity to participate is not enough to ensure participation. 'Bringing' this kind of European youth work to young people, rather than expecting young people to come to European youth work, may be an approach to consider.[160] Mobile, outreaching and digital youth work can all offer interesting experiences and expertise for this endeavour, and projects that support the development of these areas are starting to emerge.[161]

The new EU Youth Strategy could usher in a valuable re-alignment of policy and implementation mechanisms. The new Erasmus programme from 2021 will be one key mechanism for its implementation, but it is not the only one. European Solidarity Corps Phase 3 is another. At the time of writing, negotiations around the actual implementation continue, but obvious gaps have emerged as a result of the development of the

79

157 Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en and Yael Ohana for the European Youth Forum, 'Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter': https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter

158 Ibid.

159 https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/developing-digital-youth-work-%E2%80%93-agile-mindset-crucial_en and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAVrEgzXaVM

160 In EU Youth Goal 11, young people call for better visibility, accessibility, youth-friendly administration processes and participation in the governance of European youth programmes. See: http://www.youthgoals.eu/

161 For example, on the topic of 'outreach': https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/e-youth-activizenship-volume-ii.8336/, https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/take-your-partner-by-the-hand-pba-for-european-solidarity-corps.8376/; on the topic of digital youth work: https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/webinar-young-people-youth-workers-in-online-communities.8353/, https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/conference-youth-work-in-the-digital-era.8125/, https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/exploring-the-digital-dimension-of-youth-workers-competences.8255/

80

Erasmus proposal before the finalisation and adoption of the EU Youth Strategy. Clearly Erasmus is not the only mechanism for implementing this strategy, but it is one of the mainstays. Exemplary of the kind of gap that is problematic is the DiscoverEU initiative as it is implemented at the time of writing, which in a seemingly generous and wise move, offers every 18-year old citizen of the EU an Interrail pass to travel for up to one month, alone or in a group. However, the rationale and the theory of change is folkloristic at best. Over 50 years of international youth exchange shows that 'unprepared' encounters that take place during travel do not lead to intercultural learning, mutual understanding and less prejudice. If anything, they can have the opposite effect. The community of practice has reacted quite vigorously to point out the missing educational and inclusivity dimension of the initiative,[162] and with some success. The second round of calls for applications[163] has already included additional support for youth with fewer opportunities while the third round[164] adds an 'ultra-light' learning component providing travel tips, a voluntary travel journal and 'organized community-building events' during the trips. In some respects, these developments show how feedback by concerned actors can influence policymaking. At a recent DiscoverEU stakeholder meeting,[165] policy recommendations were formulated to further push the project's learning dimension by funding civil society organisations to offer educational activities, to incentivise volunteering opportunities 'on the road', to create more synergies with other Erasmus+ actions and the European Solidarity Corps, and above all to advocate for additional resources so that 700 million Euros does not have to be taken out of the proposed Erasmus+ programme to finance it. It remains to be seen if some of these suggestions, if adopted, can narrow the gap between an original idea and a community of practice that has, over time, developed a vast infrastructure, competence and knowledge on how to effectively work with and for the civic engagement of young people through European mobility projects. Awareness that a largely 'apolitical' approach of such an important European youth initiative is inadequate to the stated objectives of both Erasmus+ and the EU Youth Strategy is growing, including among political decision-makers.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to reconsider the dimension of follow-up and sustainability. For the moment there are few, if any, funding formats that will fund political education work on an ongoing basis, or that will give special consideration to follow-up projects emerging from those previously funded. The recently introduced Future National Action Plans (FNAPs)[166] for the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy have potential for more long-term and targeted collaboration, mutual learning and support amongst member states. While this could be an opportunity for more sustainability, there is also a clear cleavage between those member states that see the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy as an

162 https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0111-18%20-%20Position%20on%20DiscoverEU%20%281%29.pdf

163 https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-302_en.htm

164 https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-2328_en.htm

165 Discover EU stakeholder meeting in Brussels, 21 October 2019, including European Youth Forum, Herr & Speer, representatives from EU institutions and civil society.

166 https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/publication/FNAP

integral part of their national objectives in the youth field, and those that do not. As the reporting on and use of the FNAPs platform is a voluntary undertaking left to the discretion of the member states, it remains to be seen whether the FNAPs can reach their desired objectives.
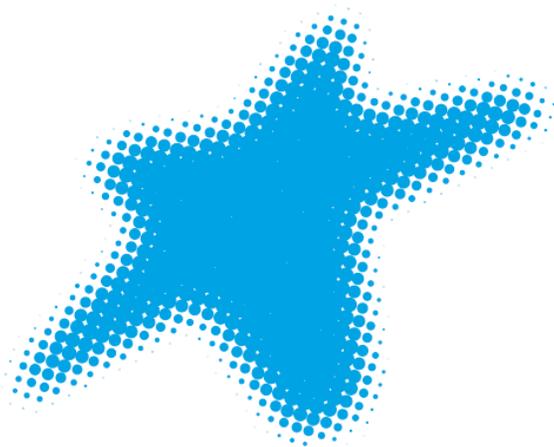
6/ Educational innovation

Previous sections have explored the need for a rethinking and reworking of the pedagogy in use in European youth work projects if they are to become more politically relevant.

Echoing both Gavan Titley and Goran Buldioski, this paper argues that attempting to 'promote' values is the wrong way to go about the development of young people's civic acumen and engagement. Rather, the current context of resurgent nationalism and national populism, fear of racialized others, and democratic backtracking and deficits, requires explicit engagement with what participating young people think about the Europe they experience, their sense of disenfranchisement and their desire for a more just Europe and world, with the ultimate goal of identifying what young people feel is important to change about the current situation, and how they want to contribute to the development of alternative European narratives using the European means and mechanisms that are available to them. The key to a more authentic and politically-relevant practice is not shouting about how we value our values, but in young people having the chance to question how we go about living up to them.

In many youth work contexts, the required shift is not one of method, per se. There is an abundance of excellent reference material in the international youth sector on which methods are most appropriate for different objectives, including educating for democratic

participation and citizenship, and these are also being used in youth work projects. Rather, the shift that is required is one in mentality and mindset among those in positions of authority and power in the context of youth work, i.e. those making decisions about priorities for funding, those managing youth work programmes and the youth workers and youth work managers actually carrying out the projects. This is about the distribution of power between participating young people and those responsible for the projects in which they participate. All too often, participants consume projects. However, participation and learning for democracy require active roles in decision-making, opportunities and support for taking on responsibility, and an active and reflective stance on what is happening, not only in the outside world, but in the worlds of the participants and relational dialogue between all of these and what is happening inside the project itself. Hence, the power positioning of youth workers and project implementers, and the dynamics of their interactions with young people in their projects, are absolutely crucial. These are not being given enough attention as key quality criteria for assessment when it comes to grant-making, and they are not being given enough attention when it comes to the planning of educational work.

Continuing with the theme of 'power', European youth work projects need to embrace it as a key content. All too often, the power dynamics involved in the real-life situations experienced by youth participants, and which they would like to change, are simply not being tackled in European youth work, despite the fact that these situations have something to do with politics inside and between member states of the EU

and European political developments more broadly. Further, how individuals and collectives engage/can engage with power and power dynamics they consider unjust and want to change, needs to be more strongly represented among the themes of youth work projects. There are enough precedents for how this can be done through a variety of formats, from youth exchanges to free initiatives, on the part of groups of young people. This requires a recalibration of pedagogical emphasis and its contextualisation in longer-term processes that foster the sustained participation of young people, not through membership of an association (old power values), but through multiple opportunities for 'making', 'doing' and 'co-creating' (new power values). This kind of approach would go a long way to overcoming the inherently disempowering experience of so many motivated participants who find themselves knowing they should be able to change something when they come back to their home realities, but, beyond reproducing the project they have been involved in with their peers, have no idea how to gain traction for their issue – in the wider community and vis-à-vis power holders.

As already discussed, there must also be more space for certain themes – notably Europe and European integration. Young people need opportunities and support for thinking critically about the current Europe, the European integration process and the European policies that are its result. They need opportunities and support to identify gaps, inadequacies and injustices that are inherent to the current situation. And then they need support to act, so that the Europe they want can become a reality, and so that there is less of a gulf between the results of these policies and the funda-

mental values that the European integration process claims to espouse and defend as 'European'.

By way of example, for the migration topic (a hot potato for some time now) this means not only to engage more young people with migration backgrounds in European youth work projects, but also to work on the reasons why, as a rule, they are less likely to participate, how this analysis reflects on youth work programmes and on youth policies (not only on young people with a migration background), and to work on co-developing inclusion strategies that are based on empowerment rather than on charity/preaching, and that can be adopted by any institutional programme.

The results of this kind of process – new and alternative youth narratives about Europe (as an aspirational project) and about the direction of European integration and strategies for their realisation – then need to be fed into the wider spaces of democratic debate, discourse and decision-making. This is where structural arrangements – of youth participation in institutional decision-making at the European, but also at the national level, and inter and intra-institutional cooperation – need to become more active and open. It is not enough to nominally give some young people's organisations a seat at the table to represent the concerns and interests of young people if the 'real stuff' is happening outside of youth organisations. The ideas and products created in the context of youth work need to be engaged with in an honest and respectful manner by those with political responsibilities, and also taken on board and used in policymaking. This would respect the 'new power values' paradigm that young

people have grasped, but institutionalised politics has not yet copped on to.

European youth work could take many tips and hints from the field of local citizen participation, community organising and grass-roots activism, which in essence shows that any work in the community can be valuable work for the public good, as long as it is conducted in a democratic and participatory manner by people who develop and redevelop their consensus on what they want to achieve together and why. This would go a long way to satisfying the need for more explicit work on the 'participating', 'co-creating' and 'transforming/changing' that currently present themselves as gaps in practice and outcomes, and would push youth work's civic and political mission in the direction of the political socialisation of young people, as opposed to the currently dominant approach of educating for civic and political participation. In this respect, it could represent a 'renewed' theory of change for European youth work projects and programmes, in continuity with established traditions of critical pedagogy and emancipatory education. Here also, it is necessary to take stock of the changing nature of youth participation and the need for youth work to be as close as possible to the spaces where young people meet and self-organise – including in the virtual reality. The digital youth work agenda is important here, not because face-to-face youth work should be replaced by digital youth work or because clicktivism is more effective than face-to-face activism, but because the virtual reality is not virtual for digital natives. While the bulk of the attention still goes to the development of digital youth work infrastructure, more attention would now need to be paid to understanding

83

84

the implications of young people's digital interactions, lives and personas for the pedagogical process, and for the translation of offline critical pedagogy into viable online experiences that are motivating and enhance the quality and impact of virtual participation. At the same time, Hakan Altinay, an academic concerned with political education, and president of the Global Civics Initiative, rightly points out that conversation is an important citizen competence for the health of any democracy, but one which young people do not necessarily acquire automatically in the age of digital communication.[167] Reacquainting ourselves with the role and fundamental functions of conversation for the development of young people's civic and political acumen in the context of European youth work and training for European youth work would appear both necessary and opportune.

In terms of a pedagogical approach, the principles outlined in the Civic Youth Work model presented by Roholt et al., as well as those presented in the Frankfurt Declaration, are essential frameworks for the orientation of pedagogical decision-making. More emphasis on young people's own ideas and concerns, less on those of youth workers, leaders and facilitators; more emphasis on doing and acting and how to ensure learning from that, rather than on learning for doing and skills development; and more emphasis on understanding the socio-political context and how that interacts with young people's lives, less emphasis on filling young people up with information are all necessary. Finally, the radical reinterpretation of typical youth sector terms like 'empowerment' and 'solidarity', in the context of educational planning and in competence development for youth workers/leaders, is urgently necessary to ensure that these are explored, consensually understood and effectively operationalized in pedagogical activities.

It is, therefore, the conviction of this author that the most crucial strategy for the repoliticisation of European youth work is the 'resocialisation' of those responsible for youth work programmes and project carriers into understanding that educational work is never politically-neutral. For this, a specific competence development strategy would be necessary.

167 Hakan Altinay, A Treasure in Plain Sight: The Premise and The Promise of a Good Conversation, Global Policy Journal, 2017. Online at: https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/25/01/2017/treasure-plain-sight-premise-and-promise-good-conversation

7/ Youth work contents

Furthermore, European youth work projects need to embrace political themes like 'power', Europe/European integration, politics and policy, democracy, rule of law and human rights, as well as contemporary domestic and European controversies and dilemmas of contemporary society and history in an open and non-judgemental way. If policies of the European Union or one of its member states are counter to human dignity or will ultimately hollow out democracy or the rule of law, these should be fair game for discussion, debate and the proposition of alternatives. If governments and political elites are not doing enough to address climate change, then there should be space and opportunity in youth work projects for young people to develop their own strategies and to gain competence for engaging these political leaders. If political youth structures are not open and inclusive enough to be representative of all young people's diversity, there should be space in European youth work to challenge that and experiment with new forms of democratic decision-making, including digital ones (as proposed in the new EU Youth Strategy[168]), and support for presenting and implementing these alternatives. This means European youth work programmes must encourage potential users to present projects that take up controversial issues rather than turning them away. Alternative narratives on European identity and on visions for Europe and European integration should be actively sought as results of European youth work projects. There should be opportunities for these ideas to be worked with at the policy level together with support to ensure young people can run with them.

85

168 https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en

8/ Co-creation of youth work with young people

86   Intimately linked to the above is the need for more emphasis to be placed on the co-creation of youth work projects and youth work policy with young people. Young people need to be in the lead and supported by others (professionals, adult volunteers, advisors). Ultimately, this means a recalibration of funding in favour of those projects which can show that the young people themselves are making the decisions and managing the project, not just consuming project activities presented by organisations that work on behalf of young people to perpetuate their own existence. Rather than projects that seek funding and then seek participants, European youth work programmes should favour organisations that run with project ideas that have been sourced from among their youth constituencies (members, volunteer pools, peer groups) and that have been co-developed with them. Furthermore, reduced bureaucracy and innovative support measures for new and inexperienced (youth) applicants in specific project categories could lead to more youth leadership. This might mean the 'de-professionalisation' of the project funding application process, but does not have to mean less quality in terms of process or results. On the contrary, programmes will access new groups of beneficiaries and will become aware of new communities of practice, at the same time as speaking to the core strength of traditional, membership-based organisations and supporting them to develop participation.

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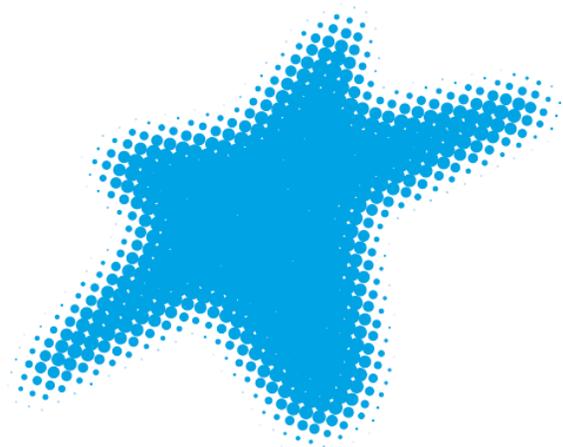
9/ Europeanisation of youth work

If, for a very long time, the European dimension of youth work was the fact that young people from different countries came together and worked/lived together for a time to foster common understanding and peace, times in Europe have moved on, and youth work needs to continue to move with the times. If it is to achieve its mission of critical Europe awareness, European youth work needs to Europeanise itself. So many standards, so many innovative practices and policy approaches are to the largest extent marginalised in relation to national policies because they are the result of European and international cooperation. Increasingly, it is the member states of the European Union that are lagging behind on this point. Their national youth policies and their policies for the support of youth work at

home need modernisation in line with European standards. To authentically support young people to learn about Europe and to be European means to focus on supporting young people to work on what Europe claims are its values – human rights, rule of law, democracy and peace – and to take a position on the deficits and gaps in European integration and cooperation and the position and responsibility of Europe in the world. This cannot be achieved, however, without critical engagement on domestic policies and positions in relation to Europe and global processes, something that many governments, even within the EU, are simply not willing to currently admit. Hence, there is a job of advocacy to be done by European youth work, for a European approach to youth work policy development and implementation – towards the European institutions and towards national governments. This is not something that sits well with the European youth work community of practice's perception of itself. We come full circle to the need for an open and transparent debate.

Conclusion

The European youth sector has already begun some work on all of these 'starting points'. The challenge is how to make them more explicit, visible and accessible to the wider community of practice, and how to bring them into the mainstream agenda, linking them to each other in a way that forms a viable agenda.

In 'The Common Good', Noam Chomsky says:

> 'The smartest way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion but allow very lively debate within that spectrum.'[169]

This paper proposes that unless European youth work reconsiders its own 'politics' and works towards the development of a broad, open and permanently re-evaluated consensus on what it is promoting through its interventions – i.e. unless it develops a principled stance on its own idea of itself – it will be relegated to nothing more than lively debate within a politically predetermined spectrum of acceptable opinion.

With this risk in mind, it would appear to this author that Hendrik Otten's three framing principles introduced above – the obligation to be intolerant, the democratisation of democracy and going beyond personhood – are absolutely urgent at the current impasse.[170]

What is clear, is that for any of the above to become reality, political championship is required. Someone needs to stand up for the political in European youth work.

89

169 Noam Chomsky, The Common Good, Odonian Press, 1998: https://books.google.de/books/about/The_Common_Good.html?id=I1UftB-pLkWgC&redir_esc=y

170 Christine Doddington (2007), quoted in Yael Ohana and Hendrik Otten, 'Where do you Stand: Intercultural Learning and Political Education in Contemporary Europe', VS Verlag Fur Sozialwissenschaften, 2012.

About the author

Yael Ohana is a specialist of intercultural political education, international youth work and youth policy. She is a practitioner of human rights and intercultural political education through international youth work with some 20 years' experience in facilitation, training and non-formal education with young adults, learning the trade at the European Youth Centres of the Council of Europe, where she was an Educational Advisor from 2000–2005. In 2005, Yael founded an independent education and research consultancy called Frankly Speaking – Training, Research, Development (www.frankly-speaking.org). Through Frankly Speaking she conducted projects to assist a variety of clients, ranging from youth organisations to United Nations agencies through to European institutions in their efforts to support youth participation, empowerment and development. Yael has contributed to the development of the youth and social policies of a variety of national institutions, notably in the Western Balkans, through technical assistance and evaluation projects. She further facilitated the development of the strategies of several international institutions working in the youth field. Her clients have included Amnesty International, the Council of Europe, National Agencies of the Erasmus+ Programme, UNFPA, the Roma Education Fund, the European Youth Forum, the European Cultural Foundation and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office for the Western Balkans. In January 2019, Yael joined the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE) at the Open Society Foundations' Berlin Hub Office in the position of Executive Advisor to its Director. Yael is a graduate of Modern Languages, and holds Masters' Degrees in European Studies and Political Science. She hails from Dublin in Ireland, and has lived and worked all over Europe.

90

Acknowledgements

91

European youth work interpreted as political is under threat. It is becoming increasingly difficult to address sensitive and controversial issues of the day without negative consequences for individuals and organisations. In an increasing number of countries, including those in the EU, doing so could result in your organisation being excluded from funding, you yourself being accused of over-stepping your mandate as an educator and people in positions of authority withdrawing their trust. This is a political issue in and of itself. For many in the community of practice, an important element of their professional and vocational identities is engaging young people meaningfully as citizens, impacting not only their civic and political acumen but also their political agency.

In this context, it has become imperative for the European youth work community of practice to question what the political dimension of European youth work is, why it is necessary to think about it and work on it and how it is possible to do this in their day-to-day practice with young people in European projects.