

Europe in transition: Diversity, Identity and Youth Work

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Preface

Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport. It runs from 2014 to 2020 and has a budget of €14.7 billion.

Erasmus+ aims to modernise education, training and youth work across Europe, by developing knowledge and skills, and increasing the quality and relevance of qualifications.

It is open to organisations across the spectrum of lifelong learning: adult education, higher education, schools education, vocational education and training, youth and sport.

Erasmus+ will enable more than four million people to study, train, volunteer or work in another country. Access to international experience not only benefits the individuals involved, but also their organisations – enabling them to develop policy and practice, and so offer improved opportunities for learners.

Erasmus+ has responded to changing circumstances in Europe, and the growing concern for social inclusion, by encouraging new project applications which emphasise the following:

- Reaching out to marginalised young people, promoting diversity, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, common values of freedom, tolerance and respect of human rights;
- Enhancing media literacy, critical thinking and sense of initiative among young people;
- Equipping youth workers with competences and methods needed for transferring the common fundamental values of our society, particularly to young people who are hard to reach;
- Preventing violent radicalisation of young people.

Given the current context in Europe regarding migration, Erasmus+ also encourages youth mobility projects involving – or focusing on – refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.

Cultural Diversity

SALTO Cultural Diversity (SALTO CD) is one of eight resource centres in the SALTO-Youth network (Support Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth). These support the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter by providing non-formal training and networking opportunities for youth workers across Europe.

SALTO CD is concerned with topics such as culture, ethnicity, faith and identity, in order to promote cultural diversity. It has a keen interest in contributing to new approaches in youth work and young people's non-formal learning, and in promoting international partnerships in these areas.

What is this publication about?

This publication aims to encourage and inform dialogue among those working with and for young people across Europe. In addition, it intends to:

- **Provide insight** on issues and approaches relating to cultural diversity
- **Engage and encourage** readers in critical reflection
- **Challenge** readers in their assumptions and inspire action
- **Contribute to policy** by stimulating discussion and recommendations
- **Promote diversity and inclusion** in countries across Europe.

Two types of contributions are included: think-pieces and practice examples. Think-pieces present an in-depth analysis of or a reflection on a situation, theory or policy; practice examples are brief descriptions of services or initiatives designed with and for young people – such as, community or school-based projects. Contributors consider both successful initiatives and those which have had limited success, but from which valuable lessons can be learned.

Both types of contribution vary in their style and analytical depth, ranging from activist perspectives to critical in-depth discussions. Editorial choices have been guided by the belief that different approaches and perspectives are needed in order to convey the rich diversity of Europe and its people. This applies in youth work and young people's non-formal learning no less than in any other field. In summary, the publication does not set out to provide definitive answers – nor even to encompass the most pressing questions, but it does bring together thinking and practice of clear relevance to cultural diversity and the situation of young people in Europe today.

Readers are invited to make their own selection, downloading individual articles or the whole publication, according to their needs and interests.

Structure and content of the publication

This publication is divided into five sections. The first one explores different processes of identity construction, particularly among young people. Sections two and three focus on specific groups of young people and their situation within Europe in transition: people with disabilities and refugees.

The next section looks at some of the major changes now underway in youth work and young people's non-formal learning in Europe. In the final section, two articles written from very different perspectives suggest new approaches that can make a positive difference to some of the issues highlighted in the publication and bring real benefits to young people's lives in the future.

The sections on Identity and Youth Work provide insights into the broader social processes and institutional arrangements that affect young people.

Other sections look at specific areas from the perspective of current practice, providing examples from across Europe. The final section puts forward possible solutions – based on differing approaches and underlying philosophies.

Most articles end with a list of recommended further reading. Other materials suggested by the authors are collated in a general reading list at the end of the publication.

I wish you a rewarding journey across Europe in Transition.

Sever Dzigurski

Identity in Transition



This section focuses on the processes of identity construction among young people. It opens with reflections on regional identity in the Balkans. Barbara Lovrinić explores the interplay between regional specificities, national identity and masculinity, and calls for place-based policies and action. In *Talking 'bout my generation*, András Déri and Zsófia Hangyál argue that the *celebrate diversity* story is neither powerful, nor accurate enough to depict identity-formations or to foster inclusion. They advocate an approach which is not focused on cultural difference, but on the inequalities and subordinations that occur between the different generations.

Reflections on regional identity in the Balkans

Barbara Lovrinić

Summary

‘If the Balkans hadn’t existed, they would have been invented’, said Count Hermann Keyserling in his work, *Europe*, back in 1928. Not every region provokes such strong images and identity-based associations in our minds, as the Balkans. In order to better understand how regions and identities are linked, it is important to consider how various social groups define themselves and their political objectives. Regions, flexible as they are, shape territories and spaces and influence people’s social identification. In the case of the Balkans, this has clearly had very mixed results. National identities continue to be influential in conflict and violence, as opposed to positive change. Young men especially are expected to behave in ways that are seen as brave, autonomous and strong. This article assesses what it means to be a ‘Balkan boy’ today. In considering the related problems, it focuses on the Young Men Initiative (YMI), a place-based learning project, which aims to reduce violence and build gender equitable attitudes among young men aged 15 to 25 in the Balkans.

Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to draw attention to problems of violence involving young people and to reflect on regional identity as a source of positive approaches to resolving such problems in the Balkan countries. In doing so, it refers to the influence of the Ottoman legacy in the region, noting how this persists in spite of efforts to adopt what are seen as Western values. The resulting tension is clearly hampering efforts to build a new regional identity.

Results from Eurobarometer surveys point to a relatively strong sense of European identification among citizens of EU Member States. It is not clear, however, if citizens share a consistent definition of what it means to be European. For most, it is likely that this includes a commitment to democratic governance - together with the rights and responsibilities this implies for individual citizens.

Regions and regional identity

Many different perspectives have been used to better understand regionalism and regional identity. In the classical (or traditional) approach, geographical boundaries are of paramount importance. More recent approaches have considered a wider range of tangible and intangible influences – including: culture, history, politics and economy.

Such influences combine in complex and unpredictable ways over time, giving rise to territorial boundaries, national institutions and symbols – all essential components in regional identity.

In Europe, different concepts of regions and regional identity were once again prominent in the second half of the twentieth century – in line with the profound changes in the world order. The main drivers in the formation of new regional groupings (such as, the European Coal and Steel Community) were the ambitions for peace and development. In the latter part of the century, identity was recognised as an additional – and powerful – motivating force. As a result, a distinct regional identity is now seen as an important tool for resolving and preventing conflicts. This is especially relevant in the Balkans region, where risks of inter- and intra-state violence are extremely high.

Regional identity in the Balkans

Many commentators link recent and current circumstances in the Balkans to the struggle to achieve political power – and to impose particular definitions and divisions in the social sphere. Since the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the overwhelming policy priority for national leaders has been to establish separate national identities.

In turn, this has helped create and consolidate political movements with a strong emphasis on heritage and tradition – and sometimes including a perceived uniqueness of ethnic origin.

Recent years have seen the growth of a kind of ethnic nationalism, committed to defending a particular national identity (usually one based on myths from an imagined heroic past) and disposed to think of people from other countries (including neighbouring countries) as enemies.

Balkan regional identity in the context of social space

Regional identity is unarguably critical to the process of shaping political and social space in the Balkans. With many countries in the region still coming to terms with past conflicts, violence is ever-present in social space. The concept of *safe* social spaces implies both objective physical safety and subjective psychological and emotional safety. This is especially important for young people – as the source of positive change in the future.

A key factor associated with the use of violence, but often neglected when speaking about identity in the Balkans, is the notion of masculinity. Traditional gender norms, emphasising subservient roles for women and roles as providers / protectors for men, have been strengthened by factors such as war, obligatory military service and ongoing political tensions.

Challenges facing young Balkan men today and the Young Men Initiative (YMI)

Numerous studies, including the data taken from the International Men and Gender Equality (IMAGES) survey in 2010, have highlighted the challenges faced by young men in the region. The overall findings point to a strong adherence to rigid, violent and homophobic norms; these are often exacerbated by ethno-centric attitudes. For instance, almost 40% of young men in Bosnia and Herzegovina showed prejudice towards people of ethnicities different from their own, while almost half of all men surveyed in the region said they would not marry a person of another ethnicity.

The high youth unemployment rate presents additional challenges to young men in the region. According to IMAGES, many unemployed or underemployed young men in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina feel a sense of social stigma and isolation – even from close family members. Many suffer from depression, abuse alcohol and are violent towards their female partners. Rigid cultural and social norms often prevent men from seeking the help and support they need.

The statistics clearly show that behaviour based on male dominance is still significantly present in the Balkans. This creates a very dangerous environment for young people. Young men tend to base their ideal notion of manhood on physical strength, heterosexuality and consumption of alcohol. The same survey also shows that young men aged from 15 to 29 are also especially likely to be victims and perpetrators of violence involving small and light weapons.

At the same time, the IMAGES survey found evidence of positive – if gradual – change in people's behaviours and attitudes.

One of the most important recent initiatives, led by CARE International, was the Western Balkan Gender-Based Violence Prevention programme, Young Men Initiative (YMI). This started in 2007 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, and was expanded into Albania and Kosovo from 2010. Its aim is to decrease violence and build gender equitable attitudes among young men aged 15 to 25 in the Balkans. Trained facilitators delivered eight to ten hours of participatory learning and action, integrated in to the regular timetable in selected secondary-level schools over a year.

The sessions covered:

1. gender attitudes
2. violence
3. sex, health, and wellbeing
4. alcohol and drug use.

A lifestyle campaign, Be A Man (Budi muško), ran in parallel.

For the second phase (2011-2013), focussing on four schools in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Zagreb (Croatia), Belgrade (Serbia), and Priština (Kosovo), changes included:-

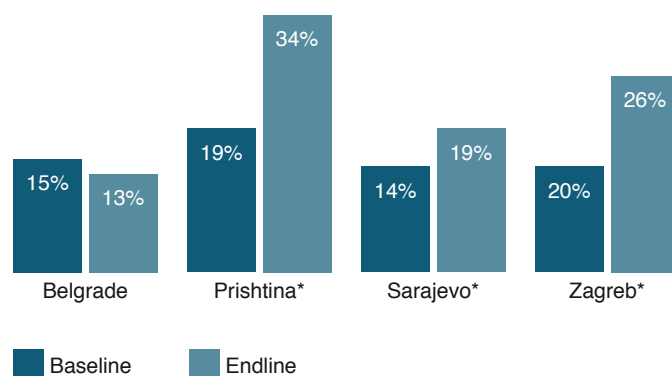
- basic YMI sessions becoming a compulsory part of the curriculum in participating schools.
- voluntary participation in off-site retreats being added for more intensive training and engagement.

The programme has shown that young men in the Balkans face higher risk of injury and early death from violence than elsewhere in Europe – with 37% to 55% of participants reporting that they have kicked, punched, or beaten another boy in their lifetime.

The evaluation of YMI has confirmed the pressing need to promote alternative, non-violent versions of manhood – and pointed to the effectiveness of interactive techniques and off-site retreats in this regard.

It is also clear that the regional character of the programme brought added benefits. For instance, the Young Men's Forum was created as an advisory board, made up of 10 young men from all participating countries, providing detailed input and strategic guidance. Be a Man clubs were also formed to support outreach and advocacy.

Figure 1. Changes in YMI participant responses (Theme 1: attitudes towards men and women)



A star (*) denotes statistically significant changes at $p < .05$

Regional identity and place-based projects: supporting young people

As noted at the beginning of this article, regional identities are constructed by a long process, drawing on many disparate elements. This means it may not be readily apparent to citizens when regional identities have incorporated notions of dominance, exclusion or aggression.

The Young Men Initiative is one example of new approaches in supporting young people to develop a critical approach and to be able to shape their own sense of regional identity. YMI shows how a place-based approach can successfully balance unity and diversity.

YMI's emphasis on involving young people in the design and implementation of research should also be emphasised. Participatory research consolidates safe social spaces, encourages connections between young people from different backgrounds and communities, and helps bring about the individual-level changes which are essential for any collective action.

Conclusion

Regions are never static. Their borders, citizens and influences (external and internal) are continually interacting and prompting further change. In the case of the Balkans, however, notions of identity tend to be deep-rooted and resistant to change.

The Young Men Initiative shows that change is possible, when notions of identity are broken down and their components analysed and – where appropriate – challenged. Young people can be encouraged to consider identities – especially national and regional identities – not as fixed attributes, but as resources to be used. In this way, identity for young people can be a source of empowerment rather than limitation.

Recommendations

Youth workers and others with responsibility for young people's non-formal learning should consider:-

- observing and researching how regional identity is perceived by young people;
- raising awareness of the role of shared, social spaces;
- encouraging place-based approaches in education;
- developing and analysing education programmes and activities (formal and non-formal) which have a regional dimension.

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European Network of Cultural Administration Training Centres (ENCATC): <https://www.encatc.org/en/about-us/>

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Talking 'bout my generation: new approaches to understanding identity-formation among young people

András Déri and Zsófia Hangyál

Summary

Current theories about the characteristics of young people are often based on the generational approach. Discussion tends to be either pessimistic (often focusing on the presumed negative impact of young people's use of digital media on feelings of identity and solidarity), or optimistic in nature. Our study offers a critical overview of such theories and suggests *age cohorts* as a more appropriate term. Based on an understanding (as far as possible, neutral) of young people's situation, we propose alternative ways to approach contemporary identity-constructions. In doing so, we offer recent examples of how young people in Hungary, in different age cohorts, have assumed clearly distinct social identities. We also note how recent political events and national movements have provided ideological frameworks which directly influence young people's sense of identity and belonging. In this context, new approaches to diversity (such as, *intersectionality*) can help us better understand issues related to the diverse nature of contemporary societies and the influences on young people's identities. Our analytical think-piece is addressed to youth workers and educators in the hope that it can inform their non-formal learning practices.

Introduction

Awareness of changes in society often leads to discussion of the situation of young people. In contemporary Europe, this is increasingly bound up with ideas of social *acceleration* – as reflected in multi-tasking, for example (a trend directly supported by digital media).

This article considers the effects of using a generational approach in relation to young people. We show how such an approach can lead to overly simple and sometimes misleading conclusions – and propose an alternative approach to discussing young people's situation and the processes of identity formation.

Cohorts or generations?

Generational theories are usually very generalised and leave many aspects of social inequalities unexamined.

The concept of digital *natives* and digital *immigrants* involves two debatable basic assumptions. The first is that people who were born in the digital era (the *natives*) are all equally well-skilled in terms of technology use. The second is that people who have not had life-long familiarity with digital technology (the *immigrants*) are in an unalterably disadvantageous position. This seems to disregard all other experiences and lifestyles that pre-date the digital age.

It is surely preferable to consider and study the shift in learning processes – without over-generalisation. The notion of digital *inequalities* is helpful, since it incorporates differences in habits, skills and types of knowledge.

The use of term, *Millennials*, is also significant in this context. Referring to people born in the last two decades of the twentieth century, Millennials often denotes generalised and questionable assertions around individual motivation, educational achievement, and employment / entrepreneurship. The findings from empirical studies suggest that more context-specific approaches – taking account of circumstances locally and nationally – are needed as the basis for successful policy-making in relation to young people.

The neo-nationalist narrative

Instead of further analysing generational theories, this article will offer an alternative approach to understanding the processes of identity formation among young people. The approach uses the notion of *age cohorts*.

It must be emphasised that young people in the same age cohort can demonstrate striking levels of dissimilarity in many different areas, including feelings of identity and belonging.

In this context, what is the influence of neo-nationalist ideologies and movements – of the kind that has become widespread in many parts of Europe in recent years? It is significant that all offer a clear narrative – a story to identify with. For many people – including young people – this is seen as a source of empowerment.

The example of Hungary: Youth political tribes

Empirical research carried out on Hungarian university students around 2010 identified two groups of politically committed youth:-

- Kuruc.info: a neo-Nazi website, affiliated with Jobbik, Hungary's largest far-right political party
- Critical Mass: a campaign group, in support of promotion of cycling and improvements in cycling infrastructure.

In general terms, the main features of these two groups were: radical nationalism (Kuruc.info) and social / international solidarity (Critical Mass).

These became the two most powerful sources of influence on political ideas and concepts of identity among tertiary-level students in Hungary.

There is no doubt that, in an environment of heightened change and uncertainty, a clear and consistent story (with a supportive community) directly influences processes of identity formation among young people.

In recent years, the most powerful story available to young people in Central and East Europe has been the neo-nationalist one.

The authors of this article take the view that the interests of young people are most likely to be fulfilled in an inclusive society, that responds positively to diversity. In this context, a more precise understanding is needed of the different ways in which identity is formed among young people.

Towards context-specific approaches in youth policy

Attempts to explain identity formation increasingly acknowledge the importance of context and the complex, fragmented nature of contemporary society. In line with modern (and post-modern) thinking, identity is often seen as a means of asserting difference and of excluding others – rather than as acceptance of all-encompassing and shared characteristics.

Some commentators have put forward a model of European identity comprising,

- *membership* (in preference to territoriality);
- *openness to counter-arguments* (instead of identities with fixed contents);
- *future-orientation* (where identity is expressed in common goals and objectives, rather than affiliation to unchanging principles or values).

Others have added the concept of *multiculturalism* (in order to reconcile national solidarity with diversity).

There is now general acceptance that in-depth consideration of diversity is complex and needs a more flexible, nuanced approach to terminology. For instance, categories of ethnicity also hide many other differences – such as class, gender and education.

The authors of this article believe that both individual and contextual factors must be considered. The concept of *intersectionality* – as a means to interpret multiple aspects of diversity and inequality – is useful in this regard. It goes beyond earlier notions of (simply) celebrating diversity and can play an important part in countering the prevailing influences of neo-nationalism.

Concluding remarks

The authors' main arguments can be summed up as follows: framing is critical. While generation-based approaches can prove to be simplistic – and prompt the wrong questions – the shift to evidence-based policy-making can also have the effect of limiting or distorting discussion. Alternative approaches – including intersectionality – can help to ensure overlapping and less visible aspects of identity are also considered.

The authors believe that youth work and non-formal learning should be supported by more ambitious advocacy. This should include highlighting their role in influencing institutions, structures and other aspects of context – alongside their established role in influencing individuals.

Resonance – to mention one further positive development in critical discussion in this area – is attracting increasing interest as a way to describe a non-instrumental relationship to the world, including people, the natural environment and made objects. Resonance refers to the kind of relationship children and young people have with the world around them.

Reflection questions

Further reflection is needed (supported by access to new empirical evidence) in order to address the following questions:-

- How can diversity (including new approaches, such as intersectionality) be promoted within youth work and young people's non-formal learning?
- What is the role of youth policy in facilitating positive (non-exclusionary) identities at national and regional levels in Europe?

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Di(ver)sability



This section focuses on the process of change, which takes us away from disability and towards *diversability*. Anastasiia Shevchenko provides us with an analysis of the current circumstances and legal frameworks for people with disabilities across Europe. In doing so, she finds evidence of a gradual change in the way people with disabilities are perceived and approached. Writing on issues of mental health, Nicholas Morgan recognises the great work being done in this field across Europe, but argues for further clarity and coherence in the terminology and language used.

Finally, Gabi Steinprinz introduces her personal experience and professional reflections on how we conceptualise diversity, again emphasising the need to move beyond disability and towards diversability.

Diversity, discrimination and disability

Anastasiia Shevchenko

Summary

Living with poor health or a disability is not a choice, however discriminating against those with a disability is a choice. It is a common belief in society that discrimination is a relic of the past, that today's economic development and increased democracy guarantee equality. Unfortunately, statistics reveal a very different picture. This article provides information about current levels of discrimination and about the areas where people with disabilities feel they are most exposed to discrimination. I believe that knowing the real picture is as important as taking action. To explain discrimination in a diverse society, I use the concept of social identity, together with the we / they duality. My analysis draws on the European Social Survey data (2012 and 2016), together with other Eurostat reports.

Introduction: Diversity and discrimination – theoretical concept

There are widely accepted concepts of group discrimination and social division, which can support a clearer understanding of discrimination and serves as a sound basis for future analysis. They both use the following cognitive scheme to interpret discrimination in society:

- 1) People use social categorisation to systemise and compartmentalise our social circles. This means that we label people, attributing to them certain qualities and placing them in different categories. There are many determinants used for social categorisation including appearance, ability, social status and personal preferences. Take, for example, someone who uses a wheelchair or someone who uses sign language to communicate – we recognise that they do not act like us, so we automatically put them in to a category and label them as someone with a disability.
- 2) Social identification is used to put ourselves in a particular social group according to predefined categories. We recognise that we are different from people with disabilities and we cannot identify with them, so we identify ourselves with people who don't have disabilities.
- 3) People use social comparison to differentiate between a group that we call *We* and the group that we call *Them*. Using social comparison we form our understanding of what is normal and what is an anomaly and which group is better. Using health criteria, we determine that people with disabilities cannot function in society as we do.
- 4) Finally, there is social discrimination but this doesn't mean that it must necessarily happen. After categorising, identifying and comparing different social groups, individuals tend to create a positive image of their group by antagonising and discriminating against another group. The *We* group will always be considered better, so the *They* group can be discriminated against.

This is a basic analysis of how people understand diversity in society and how discrimination happens on an individual level and can deteriorate into a group level. The concept is not perfect, but you can see the logic. People use health as the main criterion. We place people with disabilities in to a special category, and then we see that we cannot identify with them. We then compare *Us* with *Them* and try to find ways in which our social group is superior. Lastly, a manifestation of these feelings of difference and division can develop in to a form of discrimination.

Stereotypes about people with disability

As I have explained above, discrimination is based on categorisation and comparison. The use of stereotypes is another way that helps us to categorise, compare and separate other people from ourselves.

Whether it is a stereotype about our own group or about a different group it simplifies the world for us, so we don't have to think more. Our mind jumps to conclusions about a specific group of people. People don't often acknowledge that by doing so they stigmatise other groups and perpetuate negative stereotypes about them. This reveals people's attitude to other specific groups.

There still exist some very widespread stereotypes about people with disabilities. Negative attitudes are sometimes viewed as a legitimisation of barriers to education, employment, and healthcare. Negative stereotypes which can be manifested in negative attitudes towards people with disabilities have historical roots. During much of human history, people with disabilities were viewed as different and sometimes even dangerous and needing to be segregated. Even though in modern times we make declarations about equality, we still view people with disabilities as a separate social group. Another stereotype that is rooted in the first one is that disability means incapacity. Many believe that people with disabilities, especially with mental disabilities are not able to lead a normal life and cannot successfully function in society. This stereotype is rooted in a lack of understanding of the abilities of people with different kinds of impairments. Studies have shown this health-related stigma to be present in different countries worldwide.

People with mental health conditions and intellectual disabilities have been particularly stigmatised. They are often labelled as deviants and perceived as socially dangerous – people that cannot be successful.

Studies on attitudes towards people with disabilities show that even teachers, who spend significant time with their students, have many negative stereotypes towards students with intellectual disabilities. People with mental health conditions are discriminated against in the healthcare setting, where they are supposed to feel safe. Negative attitudes and stereotypes can result in negative treatment towards people with disabilities and lead to discrimination. Evidence of the negative treatment of people with disabilities is present in every sphere of our society.

Whilst these stereotypes seem to be more or less universal, it is clear that each country has its own specific and negative stereotypes, which must be challenged separately. Unfortunately, society is not always welcoming towards people, who look or act differently; we tend to separate them from us. Today we have a chance to learn from our mistakes as tolerance is a skill that needs to be promoted, acquired, taught and developed.

People with disabilities in Europe

According to statistics of Eurostat in 2012, there were over 70 million people with a disability in the 28 countries of the European Union.

The European Social Survey in 2012, which is conducted in European countries every two years, shows that 25.5% of people living in Europe are hampered in daily activities by illness, disability or mental health. Ukraine has the highest level of people who are hampered by disability or mental health – 39.5%.

Other countries where a large proportion of the population experiences difficulties arising from physical or mental disability are: the Russian Federation (30.8 %),

Lithuania (32.3%) and economically developed countries like Germany (33%) and Finland (32.8%). This proves that sometimes equality does not depend on economic success.

Hampered in everyday life can be manifested in many areas of life. An analysis of Eurostat data, which determines discrimination in society based on accessibility in ten specified areas (including: leisure pursuits, mobility, employment, accessing buildings, transport, paying for essential things in life, perceived discrimination, usage of the internet and social contact) includes the following characteristics of discrimination in Europe:

- There are two areas where more than half of people with disabilities are restricted: leisure pursuit and mobility.
- People with disabilities are most likely to report discrimination in such areas like employment, education and training, usage of the internet and discrimination in interpersonal relationship and general unfair treatment. What is also evident is that the younger cohort of people (aged 15 – 44) feel more discriminated during first social contact and are most likely to report a disability barrier. Even though young people feel discrimination in other areas of life, they value social contact more than other areas compared with people of older age groups.
- Young people in Europe feel their disability mostly in areas like (other than leisure pursuit and mobility) employment (45%), perceived discrimination (35%) and education and training (28%). Young people feel perceived discrimination more than any other age group.

- Young people with disabilities in the UK experience the most discrimination among EU countries. 44.1% of young people feel discriminated in four or more areas, where disabilities are reported.
- People who have a disability are more likely to drop out of school. This tendency is common in all EU countries. 31% of people who did not finish their education experience difficulty in basic activities compared to 15%, who have no difficulties.
- People with disabilities are more likely to work from home than people who don't have any limitation or disability. Also, people with disabilities are less likely to have supervisory responsibilities than people without disabilities.
- People with disabilities are more likely to work as skilled manual workers in certain countries.
- People with disabilities face more barriers to employment than people without disabilities due to environmental limitations.
- The main issue regarding employment among people with disabilities is the lack of suitable job opportunities. Over 30% of people in the EU cited the lack of suitable jobs as the biggest problem. Lack of qualification and experience is the main barrier to employment among people aged between 15 and 24, while by the age of 44 family responsibilities and lack of appropriate job opportunities become more important as barriers to people with disabilities.
- 30% of people in the EU cite disability as the main reason why they left their last job. 19% of people with some form of disability were dismissed. Moreover, 45% of people cite that their disability is becoming the main reason for not seeking further employment.
- People with disabilities are not only subjected to stereotypes in society, but also experience social injustice in everyday life.

How can this be changed?

The ways in which stigmatisation can be challenged vary. The World Psychiatric Association which campaigns against the stigmatisation of mental health issues has shown that a broad, cross-sectoral approach and long-term involvement is important in challenging stigma and stereotypes. The World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons adopted by UN General Assembly in 1982 is a global strategy that among other commitments regarding people with disabilities, sets goals of full participation in social life and development. This programme sets basic rules for all countries, regardless of their level of development. Full participation by a person with a disability can be attained through three basic principles: equalisation of opportunities, equal access to education and equal employment opportunities.

Equalisation of opportunities

It is clear that people with disabilities have difficulties in participation in social life. The environment and negative attitudes toward people with disabilities affect people's everyday life and their inclusion in society. People with disabilities who experience discrimination in more than one area of their lives tend to become distanced from society, making them a silent minority. This should not be happening in the modern world, where we claim to value human dignity and human rights above all.

Equality of people with disabilities can be achieved primarily through political action. Legislation is one of the main tools and the first steps that can guarantee equal rights to people with disabilities. Equality and anti-discrimination laws must be adopted by every government, which will open opportunities for schooling, employment and access to facilities.

In most European countries, according to The World Policy Analysis Center, national constitutions unfortunately don't guarantee protection from discrimination for people with disabilities. Spain, Portugal, Romania, Hungary, Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom guarantee rights for disabled persons. But most European countries have no protections specifically addressing disability. This however doesn't necessarily mean that people with disabilities are discriminated the most in these countries. What it means is that while some countries (such as, Denmark, Iceland or Norway) are successful in the equalisation of opportunities today, it might not be guaranteed in the future. The main problem with legislation is that many countries have good legislation but the implementation of these policies has lagged behind.

The successful implementation of policy into practice strongly depends on collaboration between government and civil society. For example, according to The World Report on disability, during government reform of mental health in Italy in 1978, it was the social psychiatrist Franco Basaglia, who rejected the assumption that people with mental illness were a danger to society. He, alongside with his colleagues, insisted on closing psychiatric institutions, which later led to the development of community mental health and rehabilitation centres – and wider measures in support of social inclusion, supported by central and regional government. Civil society organisations can not only trigger changes in state policy, but can also help in implementing it.

Education

Education is essential in a diverse society and should be accessible to all people. Good education means better job opportunities and, as a consequence, a higher standard of living. Inclusive education systems seek to meet the needs of all children equally; for people with disabilities, they give opportunities to be included in wider society from early on in their lives. It seeks to serve all children equally. Only nine countries in Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Moldova) guarantee educational rights in their legislation. Two (Finland and Ireland) prohibit discrimination broadly. Other European countries have no protections specifically addressing disability.

Across European countries, 2.3% of pupils are educated in a segregated setting either in a special school or in a separate class.

Belgium and Germany adopted so-called Special Schools, where children with special needs are separated from their peers. Some countries like Portugal, Cyprus, Lithuania, Malta and Norway include a majority of their students in regular classes. Studies show that students with learning disabilities who were placed in special educational settings had slightly better educational outcomes. There were also better social outcomes for students with severe intellectual impairments who were taught in general education classes. 85% of students with a disability in the U.S., who were involved in the inclusive educational system, were engaged in employment, post-secondary education or job training. But the study also showed that students experiencing emotional or psychological difficulties who were placed in general education had higher dropout rates. This proves that a flexible approach is important as educational needs must be assessed from the perspective of what is best for the individual, so it is hard to judge which system of inclusive education preferable.

Employment

As always, anti-discrimination laws are the starting point for promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities. While inequities in education provision can negatively impact on employment opportunities, discrimination based on disability in employment can create long-term problems for people's economic participation. Besides laws, a variety of mechanisms are used around the world to address this issue – including: tailored interventions, vocational rehabilitation and training, self-employment initiatives, social protection and work on changing attitudes.

However, such mechanisms are not always effective. According to the World Report on Disability, Germany has a 5% quota for the employment of people with disabilities in firms employing more than 20 people. But quotas can be unpopular among employers, who would sometimes rather pay a fine than attempt to fill their quota. There is a visible shift of attention from sheltered employment that provides employment in separate facilities in segregated parts of a regular enterprise to employment agencies, which support people with a disability to find a regular job rather than place a person in a special service. Two examples of this are: ONCE, the Spanish national foundation for visually impaired people which promotes training and employment for people with disabilities, and the Manchester based organisation, Breakthrough UK, which is a user controlled employment service that works with people with disabilities and employers, helping them to find employment and suitable training.

There are many other initiatives in Europe designed to change perceptions of disability. For example, the Employer's Forum on Disability (EFD), rather than helping people with a disability directly, makes it easier to employ people with a disability – by promoting people with disabilities as sources of potential prosperity to the business. The EFD played a huge role in the UK's anti-discrimination laws and played a significant part in increasing the employment rate in the UK. These examples prove that the success of the anti-discrimination inclusive initiative is highly dependent collaboration between civil society and the government.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, discrimination exists in a diverse society. The effect of historically rooted stereotypes, that claim that people with disabilities are not able to lead a normal life and cannot be successful, is to reduce educational and employment opportunities, as well as opportunities to become an integrated member of society.

Data proves that no developed economy has yet been able to fully eradicate discrimination. Levels of difficulty arising from disabilities are increasing each year in several European countries. Even though most of European countries' constitutions do not guarantee equality to people with disabilities, every year more countries are making commitments to build better legislation concerning this issue. There is also a shift in approach towards people with disabilities. More countries are adopting programmes that challenge stereotypes and stigma rather than segregate people with disabilities.

People with disabilities are most likely to report discrimination in such areas as employment, education, and discrimination in interpersonal relationships. Leisure pursuits and mobility are the two areas of life where the largest proportion of people with disabilities reported barriers to participation. People with disabilities are more likely to drop out of school because of their disability and less likely to get a highly paid job.

There are three main areas where we can help people with disabilities. They are equalisation of opportunities, education, and employment. Constitutional guarantees, inclusive education and the development of employment agencies are all effective tools that are based mainly on changing the perception of disability and prove to be more successful than those policies which are treat people with disabilities as a separate group.

The main task for youth workers and youth organisations is to create an inclusive environment – since young people with disabilities, more than any other age-group, feel discrimination during their early social experiences. There is also an important role for education programmes and campaigns that give more information about different types of disability and how these affect people's daily lives, as well as encouraging direct participation by people with disabilities. Improving our knowledge and improving our understanding through personal contact are basic steps on the way to a more equal society.

Reflection questions

- Can society become resistant to stereotypes, discrimination, and stigmatisation?
- What is the best way to guarantee equality in a diverse society?
- Should there be special services that support economic and social integration by people who have a disability?

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About the author

I am currently enrolled in a sociology graduate programme at V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine. My interest towards discrimination and diversity developed when I was an exchange student in the U.S. Since then my commitment to this topic has only grown stronger. Currently, I am interested in researching the situation of under-represented groups and their participation in politics. But my biggest passion in life is to help people in any possible way.

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Further readings

Inclusive strategies for development:
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Social inclusion of young people with mental health conditions: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/IYD2014/reportsocialinclusionofyouthwithmentalhealth.pdf>

Employment for young people with disabilities:
<http://cyc.brandeis.edu/pdfs/EnoughisKnownforAction-folder/EmploymentforYouthwithDisabilities07.02.15.pdf>

Tipping point for our mental health: You. Me. Everyone

Nicholas Morgan

Summary

According to the World Health Organisation, depression is now the largest disability in the world. When we add the fact that suicide is the second biggest killer of young adults aged 15-29 in high income countries across Europe, and that half of all mental illness begins by the age of 14 and three quarters by the mid-20's – it feels as if we are at a tipping point. Never before have mental health promotion and prevention had such an impact on young people's lives.

In this think-piece, I will review current talking points, touch on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and my own experience as a Mental Health Youth Worker, to make a case that now is the time to address young people's mental health. As the importance of mental health becomes increasingly recognised, in a world of growing uncertainty and social change, young people are becoming used to thinking carefully not only about their physical health but also about their mental health.

Recognising the diversity that exists in Europe, I will consider good practice, collaborative ideas and potential challenges, including briefly the impact on refugees and migrants and a link to some policy level work being undertaken across Europe. In addition, I will look into the role of youth workers in creating opportunities for young people to speak up about mental health and have a voice in developing mental health support.

My perspective

I have been a Youth Mental Health Worker, working with young people and youth organisations in the field of mental health since 2006. In 2014, I prepared a Master's thesis, comparing two mental health NGO projects (one in London, UK, the other in Zagreb, Croatia), which included researching initiatives across Europe.

In both my personal life and my professional career I have seen mental health grow as an issue of concern – from a small topic of conversation only among psychiatrists and doctors, to the loud and proud subject of discussion it is today, especially among young people. However, it still needs more prominence if it is to take its rightful place – as something of equal importance to youth workers, doctors and other professionals.

Overview

People with disabilities have the right to: income support from the state, that ensures they can live in dignity; services that enable them to participate in the labour market and society; a work environment adapted to their needs.

For many years, mental health has mostly come under legislation related to disability and is often obscured by concerns around physical health, plus the fact that it tends to be less visible. As a result, it often fails to get the same recognition and support. Mental Health Europe (MHE), a European NGO, recognises the recently adopted European Pillar on Social Rights as an opportunity for MHE and its members to further advocate for the rights of persons with psycho-social disabilities, as well as for the better investment in people and healthcare.

The thrust of legislation and policy in this area is to ensure that young people with mental health problems are included in overarching policies and are offered the support they need to contribute to society and have happy and fulfilling lives. However, it is often unclear how this manifests itself at local level.

A 30-country comparison of mental health services across Europe by The Economist (2014) concluded that Europe has for a long time faced a substantial burden from mental illness, but that it is only now that the epidemiological data – incomplete as it is – has made the issue impossible to ignore.

The main obstacle to ensuring mental health issues among young people in Europe are recognised and supported effectively is widespread stigmatisation. There is no doubt that while awareness of mental health issues has improved over the last decade, especially amongst the young, the associated stigma and discrimination faced by people with mental health problems face remain unacceptably high.

Attitudes to mental health have been a recurrent theme at workshops and conferences I have attended over the past year. In many parts of Europe, mental health is simply not talked about enough. The present article will discuss this in more detail.

Good Practice

What does Good Practice mean and how is this translated across such a wide variety of nationalities and cultures? According to a booklet produced by the EU Health Programme in 2014, the following should be taken into consideration in identifying good practice.

- Good practice in terms of mental health services across Europe can be interpreted very differently across Europe
- There are distinct criteria for recognising good practice in health services; many of these overlap with their equivalents in social care. This is emphasised by three out of the six categories used in the booklet for good practice, which talks about the importance of inclusion, participation and community engagement with the service user in mental health services.

Young people's mental health has a direct impact on their ability to engage with society. It should therefore be a central consideration in the policies and services that support children's rights.

Implications for youth work and youth policy

This topic is increasingly more prominent in our everyday lives – as services are moved from institutions to the community, needing more non-formal methods, different from those typically used by psychotherapists in hospitals, and more in keeping with the approach followed by most youth workers

From my experience of working for many years with young people showing early signs of mental illness, I realise that mental health issues can be just as devastating as drug habits and gang activities, but have a much lower profile.

It is widely accepted that the nature of good youth work is to be accessible to young people, whenever they want or need it. The same could also be said of good mental health support – though the burden of responsibility in this area often seems to rest with youth workers. The idea of a blended approach, which combines youth work skills with mental health training, is being championed as the basis for positive practice in various places across Europe. This approach recognises that young people often already have a relationship with a youth worker and so feel at ease in talking to them about difficulties they may be facing.

In Youth policy, mental health is often seen as the preserve of people who have formal responsibility for health services. As a result, the services provided are often inaccessible to many young people – who find themselves unsupported in coping with mental health issues.

In many cases, the statistics are tragic. Health services clearly need support from other fields – including Youth work and young people's non-formal learning. Is this now recognised – in health policy and in youth policy – in your country?

Personal Reflections

Mental health was repeatedly highlighted at the 2017 Symposium on youth policy responses to the contemporary challenges faced by young people (Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union in the field of youth). In a conference address, one young advocate urged policy makers to address mental health as a priority alongside technology and addiction. Another presentation drew attention to challenging employment conditions (such as, lack of opportunities in the local area and lack of internships) as causative factors in worsening levels of mental health among young people. In addition to this observation, mental health was repeatedly highlighted at the event as significant in discussions covering the other main thematic areas: belonging, agency and empowerment, participation and expression, volunteering, and learning and training. As a participant at the symposium, I reflected that we can all relate to mental health difficulties and that we can all find opportunities to support and listen to one another.

As Director of the NGO, Euro Youth Mental Health, I had come to the symposium with a slightly biased agenda. From hearing others speaking from a similar perspective, I realised that mental health issues as they affect young people – and the need for closer links between mental health services and youth work – were beginning to receive the attention they deserve.

‘The youth sector must play a bigger role in young people’s physical and mental health from body image, obesity, self-esteem, and health inequality, in particular the impact of social media on young people’s health.’

John Muir, 2017

Another area emerging from the symposium and other recent professional networking events is how young people self-identify with issues of mental health and disability. As has been alluded to throughout this article, mental health in law, policy and training is generally linked to the term, *disability*. In practice, many young people in the UK facing difficulties with their mental health would not necessarily think of themselves as having disabilities. Questions of terminology urgently need to be addressed, through dialogue between practitioners in health and youth work, and with young people.

Conclusions for moving forward

There is a lot of positive work going on with young people in this field across Europe at different levels and this is slowly changing the perception of mental health, which will lead to improved services.

However, there are still many terms in common use to refer to mental health that can stigmatise or be misinterpreted. This highlights the need for further clarity and coherence across Europe on terminology and understanding. If mental health labels and descriptions are more consistent across Europe, I believe that the results will be better dialogue and communications and thus better services, especially for young people. While carrying out my Masters-level research, I searched for organisations in Europe working with young people aged 16-21 suffering from depression. My search was unsuccessful, largely due to differences in terminology. Through dialogue of this kind, recognition of mental health issues among young people will be improved; they will come to be discussed in the same way that we talk about our physical health.

It is also important to consider Europe’s responsibility to young migrants and refugees. In many cases, the experience of travel, separation and isolation has a clear impact on the young person’s mental health. This is not always acknowledged by organisations providing support to the welfare of young migrants and refugees.

This shows that while there is a way to go, mental health is now being brought out of the shadows and into the bright light of young people’s front doors. For mental health to become a recognised field, mental health to become a recognised field - and the focus of attention from standard-setting bodies such as the Council of Europe - young people themselves, as well as forward-looking practitioners, should raise these issues at events and try to make safe spaces for discussion. A simple first step is to reflect on our own practice and preconceptions. Why not take a minute to ask yourself (and anyone else you choose) the following questions:-

1. Do you always give an honest answer to the question, How are you?
2. If not, why not?
3. What is needed, in order to change this pattern?

Lastly, my advice to young people and professionals would be this: Look for platforms to use your voice; encourage your friends to use their voices – to state clearly in all European countries that mental health is something that affects everyone. It is not simply okay to raise issues of mental health, it is critical - in order to save lives and to support young people in having positive experiences.

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About the Author

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From Disability to Diversability

Gabi Steinprinz

Summary

The world is changing and so is the way we see people with disabilities. We can hardly compare the situation of today with the situation of 50 years ago, but is this change matching the needs of today's Europe? As far as I am aware, terms such as people with disabilities, or people with a physical handicap, are still widely used. Such terms characterise people by their limitations – and refer to a single group, rather than many different individuals; they expose limitations in our own thinking. This is of course unfair – since we all have our own limitations – or disabilities – which we ignore. If we want to make any real progress in thinking about diversity, we have to change our thinking from disability to *diversability*.

This article is not intended to be objective; it is based on many years of personal experience. Since the age of fourteen, I have provided occasional support for a young boy with Down's syndrome. For the last 23 years, I have supported for children of my own, who were born with various complex multiple disabilities – and whom I prefer to think about as people with more complex life challenges and special or *divers(e) abilities*. It has been a continuous thread throughout my personal and professional life. In my work as coordinator of a community centre, as a volunteer youth worker and as board member of an NGO that provides specially adapted homes, I work a lot with a wide range of people without and with disabilities.

This process of change in my thinking – from disability to *diversability* – has not been an easy one. It took many years, filled with doubts and insecurity, to let go of caring and develop a different role in supporting. My work as an educator and freelance trainer in the Erasmus+ Programme helped me to change my views – and to shift my focus from limitations to learning.

Who are we talking about?

We are talking about people, not any people, but people with a special disability or disabilities. Disability is described (in Wikipedia) as *an impairment that may be cognitive, developmental, intellectual, mental, physical, sensory, or some combination of these. It substantially affects a person's life activities and may be present from birth or occur during a person's lifetime*. We also come across terms like *handicapped* people or people with special needs. It is clear that we are talking about people who have grown or developed in different ways to the majority of people and have their own peculiarities.

Being unique in their combination makes the group of people with *disabilities* highly diverse. Sometimes people with and without physical, intellectual or behavioural challenges are more alike than two people with different kinds of disabilities. So where does this need to collect people in a box and group them according to their limitations come from?

Furthermore, is merely emphasising someone's disability helping us to support inclusive thinking and diversity?

Diversability of young people

In my experience, young people who have more complex life challenges are often very creative in dealing with their boundaries or challenges and overcoming obstacles. As a result of this, I have seen very interesting and unusual solutions to put ideas into action and make these actions work. I have seen more than once that these young people don't take things for granted, which creates determination and perseverance to reach their goals. Their goals are clear, they know what they want. If reaching their goals does not work the first time, they try another time, and a third time and many more times if needed and they do that with a varied approach. Not giving up and not aiming for perfection, makes many of them experts in *failing forward*. They are aware of their limitations, but they don't limit themselves by them. Instead, they try to go beyond their borders more often than others by developing other abilities and competences. To be honest, often better than many youngsters that don't have these physical, behavioural or cognitive challenges. Therefore, I think it is unfair to categorise and label them by their disabilities. Without ignoring the fact that they face difficulties and sometimes limitations due to their disabilities, it is time to recognise their diverse abilities.

By acknowledging this *diversability*, we are more likely to look at individuals' learning opportunities and their personal development as human beings.

Diversity in youth projects

Within the Erasmus+ Programme, diversity and inclusion of all young people are priorities as they contribute to the quality of youth work. For many years NGO's, youth workers and trainers have been developing projects that focus on inclusion and diversity. Numerous wonderful projects for young people with physical, intellectual and behavioural challenges have been created within Erasmus+. These projects have been set up to create new learning experiences and give this target group the same opportunities that people without these disabilities have. Unfortunately, many of them are only for this target group and do not include those without disabilities. With these projects, we give them opportunities, but do we really? The question is whether supporting their special needs by creating special and adapted experiences is the best way of improving inclusion and the most effective approach to diversity.

For many years, my colleagues and I have been developing projects for diverse target groups, both locally and internationally. Our starting point was the idea of diversity bringing more and diverse learning opportunities for all participants. With diversity in our projects we meant diversity in the broad sense; cultural, religious, socio-economical, gender identity and expression as well as sexual orientation related, educational, intellectual, behavioural, and more. The learning outcomes have been high as a result of this diversity; young people get out of their routine, *their comfort zone*, their often *closed* networks, their groups and their neighbourhoods.

For many this is a conscious step, but not for everyone. Anyhow, there is always a need behind it. Stepping out of their world means having the opportunity to see things in a different way and from a different angle, in a natural way. We create learning environments where young people can learn with each other and from each other, no matter where they come from, how they are raised, what they think, feel, understand, or can and can't do.

From limits to opportunities

My 23-year old daughter has various complex life challenges: she is spastic, which means that she has strong hypertension in her right hand and arm, almost deaf, hyperactive, she has significant learning difficulties and her language is at the level of three years old. Separately none of them I would call severe, but the multiple combination makes it complex and challenging for her and for us as parents.

The funny thing is that as a child many people in our neighbourhood did not recognise all her limitations and often described her as smart and creative. She is! She is, because she developed her visual abilities and she has an eye for detail; once she has been somewhere, she will always find her way to a place, just by remembering streets, houses and surroundings and by developing strong visual memories. She can't read and write, but she can type and copy texts from her mobile, computer or magazines and with this she surfs the internet and has visited a larger diversity of pages than I did, or anyone else I know. As she almost has no developed language, she did not develop any expectations or fear for making mistakes in her language either. For her, communicating with a foreigner is not easier or more difficult than communicating in her own language.

Watching an Indian or Mexican children's TV series is not more difficult than a Dutch one. Suddenly and surprisingly, her limit in communication becomes an opportunity in communication and intercultural learning. So, she surfs the net and finds her way to watch the most peculiar YouTube videos, series and movies from all around the world.

She also rides her bike on her own for 10 kilometres to her work and back. – on a normal bike in the usual traffic, despite her physical limitations, hearing problems and learning difficulties. Yes, the Netherlands is a bike-friendly country, but still challenging enough for her. She wanted to and she does. She even went beyond the challenge of cycling to work and back and she set herself new learning goals. During several Erasmus+ youth exchanges - such as, art2B(Included) - she has even learned to ride a monocycle and climb walls, using her perseverance and creative solutions. Not only did she learn to do these things, but she has also managed to teach people without disabilities how to do these things, on subsequent youth exchanges. All in all, an impressive result of learning with and from each other!

My colleagues and I, both in the community centre 't Stadsplein¹ where I worked as a coordinator, and in our NGO called Youth Exchange Service² where we develop international youth projects with initiatives of young people, have seen many other examples where youngsters developed new abilities to deal with their limitations. Naturally, the experience in itself to participate in an international youth exchange or any local activity is already a learning opportunity, but the best results we got from projects were where mixed groups took part.

¹ Social-cultural centre 't Stadsplein: www.tstadsplein.nl

² Youth Exchange Service: www.yesnow.nl

In a local project called Villa Oigenwois, a group of parents is developing a home in the centre of the community in a village named Lutjebroek. We are creating 16 independent apartments and some collective spaces for 16 young people with multiple complex challenges. In this project, we managed to look beyond the disabilities and focus also on learning spaces. In the kitchen, they will be challenged to cook for themselves and for others. In the outdoors, we will create a vegetable garden for some of them to learn how to grow herbs and vegetables. Next to some practical special rooms which focus on the physical limitations, like a sensory room and a jacuzzi to ease the muscle tension, we have designed and integrated a creative learning room in the design. This room is meant to give space to any learning need of the residents; whether it is about learning a language as preparation for a holiday, making music or painting, learning sewing and making their own cloths – whatever their learning need is at any given moment, this room should be adaptable and ready for being a creative learning space.

Diversability in youth projects

Creating learning environments for groups of mixed abilities is rewarding. The impact of this diversity has been impressive for all participants. Participants expressed how much they learned from each other, no matter their intellectual (dis)abilities. One highly intellectual girl, participating in a youth exchange (Seeyou@nature) on personal development using nature and outdoor education, expressed the following in her evaluation. 'I am used to setting my goals high, but I am not always able to reach my goals, as it feels like a lot of pressure on myself. That creates tension.

Spending 10 days together with people with disabilities, I learned from them that setting high goals can work, if you are just determined and creative in finding solutions. I have never seen this in my own surrounding. This change in my mind-set will help me to realise my dream to be a surgeon.'

In another youth exchange, Chi sono (Who am I?), on identity and personal development, participants with mixed abilities learned from each other. People with significant disabilities had to take into account other people's limitations. This was completely new for them. At home, most of them had always been the centre of attention and all family life has been constructed around the care and the disability. In the exchange, it was different as suddenly, every participant *had something*. This project was about understanding this *having something*, taking it into consideration and working with it. One of the participants described the most important learning outcome as, 'We became friends with people who are very different from us; we accepted each other for who we are and this was very new to me. I haven't met many people before who accept me for who I am'.

In a Strategic Partnership project called Looking at Learning³ we worked on the topic of Creative Learning Environments. In this project, many different educational settings participated as a partner or stakeholder, such as schools, youth centres, youth organisations, circus schools, pre-schools and even a respite and day-care centre. During this long-term project, the involvement of educators working with the target group enriched the whole learning process. Schools and NGO's from Spain and Latvia learned and used sensory methods introduced by Dutch respite centre, and caretakers of the respite centre were transformed to being educators and using methods from other partners.

³ Looking at Learning [L@L] project: www.lookingatlearning.eu

This resulted in creating a *choosing* or *deciding* system for children and young people who have very restricted physical and intellectual abilities. A few months later they learned how to make decisions and educators learned to *read* the signals of the decision making process.

These children and youngsters are now able to make their own decisions on what they want to eat or drink, what activity they would like to do, or which clothes they want to wear. This resulted in a life-changing outcome of a diversability project for both learners as educators.

Conclusions

People with disabilities carry a heavier burden than the majority of people. Not only do they have physical, intellectual or behavioural limitations, but they are surrounded with people who are limited in their thinking; limited in the sense of only being able to look at boundaries and obstacles, and feeling sorry for them. People with disabilities are very much aware of their limitations and although these frustrate them and they struggle with them, they step beyond their limitations and start to look for ways to deal with them and develop new abilities and create solutions to reach their own goals. Nothing to feel sorry for, rather something to recognise and value.

In modern Europe or the modern world, it is time for us to, apart from recognising limitations, step beyond those limitations and look at the opportunities to grow and to learn. We don't need to entirely focus on caring and helping; it is time to support young people in further failing forward and to focus on learning and growth. It seems fair enough that every young person should get an equal opportunity to develop themselves, their identity, their competences and their diverse abilities.

Developing projects in Erasmus+ Programme with mixed ability groups will enrich the lives of all participants and educators. I encourage youth workers to take this into account and go beyond making projects for people with disabilities. I plead for integration instead of segregation. I advocate for taking steps to combine the ability of participants and the diversity of the group and making your educational approach based on diversability.

Reflection questions

Are you ready to change your projects into a more *diversable* project? Can you challenge yourself to create special and adapted experiences in order to ensure that your target group is more diverse? If you were to dream about this, how would it look – and what would need to change in order to make it happen in your organisation, in your practice as a professional, in the support provided by the families, and in the wider community?

To bring about real change, you could start by looking at your own thinking and attitudes. Take an honest look at your own practice and reflect on how much you limit this target group by your own limitations in thinking?

To what extent do you collect people *in a box* and group them according to their disabilities? Even though we all have our limitations, is emphasising only the disabilities of one group of people helping you to support inclusive thinking and diversity? What are the consequences of this way of thinking for these young people, their families, the community they live in and your work as an educator?

Using this as a base you might think about what could be the best way for you to deal with inclusion, and what would make your approach to diversity more effective? I very much hope you will make the most of this opportunity and take the step towards diversability in your youth work. Enjoy this enriching process!

About the author

My name is Gabi Steinprinz. I live in Venhuizen, a small village in the Netherlands, 60 km north of Amsterdam. I currently work as freelance trainer in my company UNSQUARE- playful learning and training. I work mainly in Erasmus+ Programme; I am part of the Dutch Trainers Pool and SALTO team for Training of Trainers. I have 25 years of experience in non-formal education in Erasmus+ (and predecessor programmes), with a special focus on (the combination of) diversity, social inclusion, learning and creativity. I have organised many youth exchanges, EVS hosting and sending, coached youth initiatives, organised seminars and training courses. I have also co-created long-term projects – such as Looking at Learning (Strategic partnership on creative learning environments; www.lookingatlearning.eu) and Social Inclusion – Out of the box (Capacity-building project; <https://graziaraimondo.wixsite.com/siob>). In almost all my projects people with fewer opportunities and/or special needs have been consciously included in mixed diverse groups.

I am president of Youth Exchange Service [YES], a small NGO in the Netherlands that works with young people's initiatives (www.yesnow.nl). I am board member in a local project called [Villa Oigenwois](#)⁴, an organisation that develops housing for 16 young people who need supported living.

As a mother of two children with complex multiple disabilities and as educator, I feel that emancipation of people with disability has made a good start, but still has many more steps to take. I advocate diversability as an enriching process, with a focus on learning and development instead of on limitations and obstacles.

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⁴ <http://www.villaoigenwois.nl/>

Refugees (and hate speech)



This section comprises practice examples only. It focuses on the pressing issues related to the situation of refugees across Europe. These are addressed mostly through activities preventing or responding to hate speech. In the contribution from the NGO, 35mm, Ajša Hadžibegović describes the project, Balkan without hate. Katerina Boutsia then presents experience in combining formal and non-formal education, through a series of workshops in which students explored issues of intolerance and hate speech towards refugees.

The next two examples focus on more structural approaches. OBESSU describes the Seeds for Integration grant scheme, which supports initiatives to improve inclusion of young people from a migrant or refugee background. Finally, Eleri Williams shares experience from the Advocacy Forum, a self-initiative by people seeking sanctuary in Swansea, Wales.

Balkan Without Hate

Ajša Hadžibegović

Introduction

There are many reasons for pursuing increased inclusion of young people. Since young people are participants in community life, approaches to community development which do not include their views or provide opportunities to contribute may end in failure. Furthermore, where young people are excluded, they are less able to develop political awareness or to realise their leadership potential. In this way, exclusion of young people also deprives adults of the ideas and insights that sometimes only young people possess.

In Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro there are two main ethnic communities: Albanian and Montenegrin – which have a history of lack of understanding of each other's culture and religion. In response, the NGO 35mm developed the project, Podgorica without hate, with support from the European Youth Foundation in 2014-15. This included a series of workshops to enable young people to meet and learn about each other's history and daily lives. The last phase of the project was the production of a short movie, through which all 30 participants presented a story to reflect their experience of learning about others' identities and beliefs.

The movie, *Za(o)tvoreni um* (Closed mind / Open mind) was broadcast on public service TV and was very well received.

Project rationale

Over many years, the Balkans has been known for frequent conflicts – especially between ethnic and religious groups. More recently – prompted by the arrival of large numbers of refugees, there has been a rise in the incidence of hatred and xenophobia.

35mm's project, Podgorica without hate became the basis for developing a new project, Balkan without hate– in order to involve more youth workers from a wider range of countries in the region, and to create more creative and innovative responses to hate speech (in particular, young people's direct involvement in video production and media).

Project implementation

The project was implemented over 12 months in three phases:

1. Preparation: each partner organisation selected their participants and worked with them to research and record positive examples of no hate in their local community;
- 2 Training: youth workers' training followed by support to young people in scripting, recording and editing the movie, SEGEMBR (premiered at local cinema, Kotor);
3. Follow-up: dissemination and promotion of the film – and of the educational tool (developed by the trainers).

The main aim of this project was to explore the benefits to young people from the process of creating films by young people about the kind of society they would like to live in. It was also designed to show how young people from identity groups normally considered to be in conflict can work together on shared tasks and objectives. At the same time, the project gave reminders that young people are not a homogenous group. While some may behave violently, there are others ready to put forward ideas on how the Balkans region – and Europe more broadly – can function without hate.

Project achievements

The final output from the project, Balkans without hate, was the film, SIGEMBR. This 10-minute film was made by youth workers, as a tool to solicit the reactions and ideas from young people on the issue of hate towards others. It was a collaboration between youth workers from seven European countries, during a Balkans without hate training event in Prcanj (August 2016).

The film presented xenophobia as Xeno-virus, with potential to spread as in an epidemic.

Outcomes from the Balkan without hate project can be summarised as follows:-

- 30 youth workers have created a short film, as an example of how video production can be used to strengthen young people's voice and to support their active citizenship;
- 30 youth workers have reflected on different approaches to encouraging community development, especially those which make use of video and other new media techniques;
- Over 19,000 young people have had opportunities to take part in workshops and other follow-up activities on aspects on culture and identity;
- All direct and indirect participants have been encouraged to develop positive attitudes towards people they may see as different from themselves – and to work collaboratively to resolve issues affecting their local communities.

This was achieved through a coordinated effort between participants, the project team and partner organisations. Partner and lead organisations provided activities and projects for young people and supported their youth workers/trainers/facilitators; participants implemented newly gained approaches and methods; and the project team supported them in this initial process, both through online means as well as individual mentoring and support.

The project stimulated exchange of good practice on how to deal with hate and conflict, while also encouraging positive appreciation for diversity and community solidarity.

Among people reached by this project, sensitivity towards physical and verbal expressions of hate has increased, along with recognition of the value of intercultural dialogue and social inclusion. Finally, the project increased awareness of and interest in non-formal learning and opportunities for learning mobility under the Erasmus+ Programme.

In summary, project participants increased their intercultural competence, their knowledge of the dynamics within society in countries of the Balkans region, their skills in audio-visual production, as well as transferable skills in areas such as, conflict resolution, critical thinking, flexibility and team work.

Youth organisations involved in the project increased their ability to approach global issues affecting society in general and young people in particular. They increased their ability to use video and photography to address issues of conflict and hate with young people and to involve young people in developing solutions. The project also highlighted the value of long-term international co-operation. Approaches and tools developed under Balkan without hate can be used in future projects, to address other topics, such as the inclusion of migrants and refugees.

All of the organisations involved rated the impact of the project highly and confirmed their continuing commitment to the overall No hate speech campaign. In addition, the project had lasting impact on teachers, students and volunteers – as a demonstration of the importance of challenging hate speech, and of supporting knowledge and understanding of our common human rights.

Conclusions

The project supported an extended period of mutual learning among peers. Partner organisations applied co-operative, inclusive and perceptive approaches in order to enable participants to share knowledge, ideas and reflections on topics such as conflict resolution, Balkan and European society, No hate speech and video production.

The main lessons learnt were that there are many similarities and shared experiences in how hate and negative misperceptions are being spread and how these affect us all. At the same time, differences were observed in the way we respond to conflict – both at the individual level and in wider society.

In the course of the Balkan without hate project, we deliberately challenged ourselves – as well as the young people we were working with – to recognise and to avoid repeating negative patterns of behaviour.

Reflection questions

One of the project's objectives was to show that video can be a powerful tool in communications and campaigning. We were able to make a meaningful video with an international group of people who hadn't known one another before. Can you see possibilities to incorporate video (and video production) in your work with young people - especially in contexts of widespread mistrust, hatred and xenophobia?

About the author

Ajša Hadžibegović is a youth worker and a long-time volunteer with an MA in Applied Conflict Transformation. She was the Vice President of the Advisory Council for the Youth Directorate of Sports and Youth of the Council of Europe and a member of the Expert Working Group of the Council of Europe for development and preliminary evaluation of the European Portfolio for youth workers and youth leaders (2004-2006). She participated in developing the first National Plan of Action for Youth in Montenegro (2005-2006), drafting the Strategy for development of NGOs in Montenegro (2013) and drafting the Law on Youth (2012-2013). Additionally, she has extensive experience in implementing training for individuals and groups. Ajša's interests also include hiking and photography.

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35mm is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation whose vision is to promote universal democratic values, respect of human rights and the rule of law – in order to contribute to Montenegro's access to the European Union and other integration processes. Since 2011, 35mm has been part of the non-governmental foundation, Civic Alliance.

35mm was established with the aim of creating a strong network for co-operation and critical dialogue in Montenegro and the wider region. Its work is based on three pillars: Citizens and Civil Society, Media, Public and governmental institutions. 35mm's activities are designed to facilitate debate and help shape public opinion.

<http://nvo35mm.org/>

Further reading

SIGEMBR teaser – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iN14-6bIGZI>

Social media

<https://www.facebook.com/balkanwithouthate/>

<https://twitter.com/NoHateBalkan>

<https://www.instagram.com/balkanwithouthate/>

Challenging Hate Speech and Building Tolerance towards Refugees

Katerina Boutsia

Summary

This case study will present a series of training workshops that took place in a school setting in Athens, Greece, in spring 2017. These workshops aimed to find some common ground that would allow students to explore intolerance against refugees in the form of hate speech and to bridge formal with non-formal education. This case study could be helpful to youth workers as it is easily transferable to the field of youth work, where the aim is to explore relevant issues with young people.

The current situation in the globalised world evolved from the financial crisis, but seems to be becoming a crisis in human values and dignity. During the past ten years, the financial crisis has been on the doorstep of the countries of the European Union. Greece in particular has been suffering for years from recession and extensive austerity measures in an effort to address its fiscal problems. At the same time it serves as a major hub that receives refugees and migrants from around the world who wish to enter the EU. The increasing number of those refugees and migrants – combined with the lack of effective migration policy – leads to frequent tensions between refugees and locals, resulting in a favourable climate for the rise of populism and hate speech.

Hate speech can be a contentious and vague term. It is useful to refer to the Council of Europe's definition of hate speech as *covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.*

As an educator myself, alarmed by the escalation in the use of hate speech and xenophobic rhetoric, as well as the rise of the far right, I decided to work with my students on the topic of hate speech and refugees. It was a particularly interesting topic for our school to explore since a refugee camp had recently opened in the area. This caused some apprehension in the local community, especially when refugee students began to enrol in the local schools. In response to this, I designed a series of workshops with the main aim being to sensitise my students about hate speech and cultivate empathy for refugees.

The intervention involved participation by two classes of 20 children, aged 11, in a 10-week course. Each week, we would run a two-hour experiential workshop embedded in the school curriculum. All workshops were based on non-formal learning principles.

Activities were selected from educational resources such as Bookmarks and Compass published by the Council of Europe, as well as resources of the UNHCR and other international organisations that promote human rights education.

The first five workshops were dedicated to the topic of hate speech. We started by exploring the right to freedom of expression – along with the responsibilities it brings and the limitations it may have. We explored forms of hate speech, different groups it may affect, such as people with disabilities, Roma, Muslims, as well as consequences hate speech might have for both individuals and society. Activities were experiential in nature, mainly taking the form of group work, simulations, role-plays, narration and games.

The following five workshops focused on the group of refugees as a social group likely to encounter hate speech in the Greek context. We explored misconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices about refugees through storytelling and role plays. Since the best way to deconstruct hate speech and challenge stereotypes about a group is to actually get to know people from this group, I enabled my students to get in touch with refugee students from the nearby camp. They exchanged letters and drawings regarding their favourite neighbourhood games.

The communication between the two groups offered the opportunity to students to have direct experience of the *Other* and test in practice their assumptions about that group.

The outcome of the workshops was very encouraging. Students showed great motivation and interest to participate in them. They were eager to explore issues of relevance to their everyday lives and make connections between local realities and the global setting. Moreover, at the end of the workshops, participants expressed greater tolerance towards the group of refugees and showed more readiness to welcome refugee students in their class in the future.

The workshops were evaluated by students through questionnaires that all participants were asked to complete. Moreover, targeted interviews took place with a sub group of participants in order to explore certain aspects of the learning procedure.

Here, I'd like to share three main lessons learnt that could serve as tips for youth workers when they wish to implement relevant workshops. First, activities involving theatre and role-play are more likely to engage participants emotionally. As children mentioned more often in their evaluations, the activity they enjoyed the most was a theatrical play where they had the chance to play the roles themselves and also change the plot. The next most popular activities were those which included games and role-play.

Secondly, I would like to highlight the need for effective time management. Time proved scarce in some workshops. This meant that some activities had to be cut short – at the expense of debriefings – with negative consequences for the learning process.

In all experiential activities, ensure there is some time at the end for debriefing and unpacking of the issues. It is critical for trainers to devote ample time to rounding up lessons learnt from the activity and creating a safe space where participants may share their opinions or vent their feelings about the learning process. Interrupting – or dispensing with – a debriefing can lead to distress or give rise to distorted and misleading messages. Where there will not be enough time to include a debriefing, it may be preferable to postpone or cancel the activity.

Last but not least, in trainings where empathy and development of intercultural competence is crucial, communicating with the *Other* is essential in helping to bridge the gap. The task where students were invited to exchange letters and drawings with refugee children seems to have had a vivid impact on them. Most of the students were eager to participate, and impatient to receive replies from their counterparts. They were particularly interested to see how the native language of the refugee children differed from their own, but they were also surprised to discover similarities in their favourite games. Receiving material from their refugee peers prompted more interest and questions about their everyday lives, their families and living conditions. Overall, getting to know the other creates space for human connections and helps dismantle prejudice.

To sum up, hate speech and other forms of injustice directed at refugees and migrants have become matters of concern in many European countries; in this context, there is a growing need for training. To ensure such developments are reflected in their practice, youth workers are urged to consider the following:–

- How can I ensure my training addresses real needs in my community?
- How can I link aspects of the training to real-life situations?
- How can I encourage participants to take practical action as a result of the training?
- How can I enable refugees to be directly involved in the training?

About the author

I am a trainer in non-formal education, with diverse experience in both formal and non-formal fields, as well as in educational policy. I am currently pursuing doctoral studies at UCL (University College London) Institute of Education. Having expertise in intercultural education, I love delivering training related to the themes of intercultural learning, global education, migration, human rights and democratic youth participation. I have studied, worked and volunteered in Europe, Asia and America.

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Empowering school students to build inclusive societies

OBESSU

Summary

In September 2016 OBESSU (the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions) launched a grant programme, Seeds for Integration. The programme provides funding to general and vocational secondary school students (in informal groups or associations) active at grassroots, regional or national level, with the aim of enhancing the inclusion of young people from a migrant and refugee background. These positive activities are led by students for students. They ensure that those at the centre of secondary education (ie. young people) are empowered to take an active role in bringing about inclusion in school environments, local communities and education systems.

Since November 2017, Seeds for Integration has supported more than 30 projects in more than 10 European countries. Projects have included awareness-raising and community-building events (an ethnic food festival in Volos, Greece; a school festival of inclusion in Hagen, Germany), educational activities (a summer school on re-integration in Kosovo) and advocacy activities (development of a charter for inclusive schools in Ireland). All have had considerable impact at local, regional and national levels.

Since the programme is still in progress, we do not have a full impact assessment. However, it is also clear that the programme has contributed to policy reform at national level, while also prompting improvements in inclusion at regional and local levels. For example, individual schools have become more accessible and welcoming; different groups within schools and their local communities have initiated new collaborative projects.

Initiatives at grassroots level

To date, 11 grassroots initiatives have been supported, with grants of up to €500.

Example: Training course for multipliers – Raising awareness of hate speech and to challenge it.

20 students at the Mons-Tabor Gymnasium, Montabaur, Germany, formed the group, Schule ohne Rassismus, Schule mit Courage (School without racism, School with courage) and planned and carried out a training event to support the integration of students from a migrant background. Using simulations and case-studies, the training gave opportunities to explore the nature of hate speech and its effects on individuals and communities, and to explore practical responses.

‘They practiced how to respond to verbal attacks in a responsible, non-violent way, using an argumentative approach and the right kind of body language, enabling them to stand up for democratic values and human rights.’

Pam Thelen & Franziska Nimmler,
SoR Team

Initiatives at regional level

To date, eight regional initiatives have been supported, with grants of up to €1,000.

Example: Ethnic food festival

Second Chance Schools in Greece provide intensive learning support to young adults, including those from a migrant or refugee background, who have not completed their compulsory education. The Student Council at the Second Chance Schools in Volos, Larisa and Karditsa linked with the NGO for marginalised young people, ARSIS, to organise a festival of food from different countries and cultures. As well as taking responsibility for preparation of the food, students organised music and other activities. The students' initiative helped to challenge misconceptions and encourage communication among people from different cultural backgrounds.

“The activity will certainly serve as a good practice example for the educational inclusion of migrant and refugee students.”

Volos project team member

Initiatives at national level

To date, 13 national initiatives have been supported, with grants of up to €2,500.

Example: Tools for Inclusive Schools – Student Charter

Tools for Inclusive Schools was a national event organised by Irish Second-level Students Union (ISSU), with participation by over 60 students and from organisations with experience of working with young people from a minority background. Through workshop discussions, the event focussed on preparing a document that would represent students' own vision of truly inclusive schools. The resulting charter covers five different areas, as identified by the students: schools, curriculum, governance, rights and responsibilities.

ISSU's Student Charter on Inclusive Schools was launched in March 2017 by the Minister for Equality, Integration and Immigration.

Key points include:-

- As students, we call on the Government of Ireland to cherish all children of the nation equally and remove any barriers in schools admissions policies.
- As students, we call on the government of Ireland to provide increased funding for English as an Additional Language, to ensure that all students who require support receive it at the earliest possible opportunity.
- As students, we want a school that rejects and denounces racism and xenophobia.
- As students, we recognise that it is the responsibility of all students to make everybody feel respected and welcome.
- As students, we do not judge or fear differences in viewpoints.

“We hope that the legacy of the Charter is just the beginning, and hope that it will continue to serve as a reference point to promote inclusion in schools on a local, national and international level.”

Ellen O'Rourke, project leader

¹ The charter is available on ISSU's webpage (www.issu.ie), or by email: studentvoice@issu.ie.

Best practices and a Policy Paper on Migrant and Refugee Education

OBESSU is providing support and follow-up to these initiatives, by gathering best practices and formulating policy proposals. In September 2017, at the University on Youth and Development (organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe), OBESSU brought together student project leaders from all over Europe to create an inclusion tool-box, based on projects supported under the Seeds for Integration grant scheme. The tool-box includes projects idea and practical approaches to support future initiatives by young people in awareness-raising, community-building and advocacy.

As well as promoting these capacity-building initiatives to its member organisations and other bodies, OBESSU is also planning increased advocacy (at European and national levels) in support of inclusion in secondary-level schools.

Evaluation of the Seeds for Integration grant scheme

Points arising from a preliminary evaluation of Seeds for Integration include the challenge of capacity – how many school students can devote time to preparing a grant application and managing a supported project? OBESSU will continue to give priority to initiatives by students. However, OBESSU recognises that in the context of support for inclusion, this can sometimes mean that projects are run by students who are not from a migrant or refugee background, on behalf of (instead of with) students who are from a migrant or refugee background. A more positive finding from experience to date is that projects are being actively supported by the wider school community, including headteachers, subject teachers and parents. Such support is crucial in enabling students to fully realise the potential of their initiatives.

Design of the Seeds for Integration grant scheme was intended to promote accessibility for a relatively young target group (typically aged 16-18). It is being continuously adapted with this in mind. As far as possible, the format is youth-friendly format – with a strong emphasis on visual communication. Consultation with OBESSU national members is underway to increase the range of languages that can be used for grant applications.

Reflection questions

- Is your school community accessible to every group in society?
- Are students given the information and support they need to fully access education in your school community?

About the author

OBESSU (The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions) is the platform for cooperation between European School Student Unions active in general and vocational secondary education. OBESSU brings together Member, Candidate and Affiliate organisations that are run by students for students. All member organisations are national, representative, independent and democratic school student organisations. For more information about OBESSU, visit the website: www.obessu.org and for more information about the grant programme visit www.seeds4integration.org

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Further reading

Migrant and refugee education: <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/interviews/education-talks-newly-arrived.htm>

Migrant and refugee education – current situation: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/current-migration-situation-eu-education>

Reinforcing inclusion, diversity and active citizenship through education: https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/latest/practices/reinforcing_inclusion_diversi.htm

Migrant education and community inclusion - examples of good practice: <http://www.sirius-migrationeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SIRIUS-CommunityInclusion-FINAL.pdf>

Developing school capacity for diversity: http://www.sirius-migrationeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Policy-Brief-3_School-Capacity.pdf

A case-study of self-advocacy initiatives by people seeking sanctuary in Swansea, South Wales

Eleri Williams

Summary

If you are seeking asylum in the UK, many aspects of daily life are removed from your control. This includes, but is not limited to, where you live, who you might live with, and your ability to work or seek employment. These are matters which are decided on your behalf and, in contrast to most adults aged 18+, you are unlikely to possess the right to vote in order to express your opinion about these and many other matters affecting you on a daily basis.

The Swansea Refugee and Asylum Seeker Advocacy Forum (Advocacy Forum) is a recent initiative to promote and inspire voices from people whose ability to act on their own behalf to pursue change has been minimised, often as a result of rigid policies. The Advocacy Forum, which began in July 2017, has already attracted over forty members, a quarter of whom are aged under 30.

The idea behind the Advocacy Forum is not revolutionary. However, it is an innovative project which both allows people seeking sanctuary to express their voices, and equips members to become effective self-advocates.

The Advocacy Forum is an initiative funded by the Welsh Government, as part of the Asylum Rights Programme (ARP) – a partnership of seven Welsh organisations, aiming to promote and ensure the rights of people seeking asylum and living in Wales¹.

It is a safe environment for those seeking or granted asylum to raise issues of concern, and to meet with service-providers to identify ways to make services more accessible to those seeking sanctuary.

Advocacy Forum operations

The long-term aim is for the Advocacy Forum to be led by people seeking sanctuary, for people seeking sanctuary. To ensure this outcome is met, a group of volunteer co-ordinators has been recruited, all of whom have experience of seeking sanctuary in the UK. These volunteer co-ordinators are *experts-by-experience* and have an essential role in ensuring that the monthly advocacy forum meeting takes place successfully. Some of the tasks undertaken by the Advocacy Forum coordinators include deciding which service-providers to invite, planning and setting agendas and contacting other members. Outside of the Advocacy Forum, coordinators assist in compiling organisational responses to consultations from the local authority for example.

A capacity-building programme, incorporating training in transferable skills such as minute-taking, effective communication and time-management has been devised for the volunteer co-ordinators.

This training allows the co-ordinators to take ownership of the Advocacy Forum in the short-term, and in the longer-term, to advocate effectively for themselves, and others who find themselves seeking sanctuary in Wales in the years to come.

Since July 2017, the Advocacy Forum has met for two hours once a month, in a venue that is known by and familiar to people seeking sanctuary. At the time of writing, more than 40 individuals have completed membership forms, with an average of 25 people attending each meeting. The first two Advocacy Forum meetings explored the concept of advocacy, and identified issues of concern to those present. These included housing, education and transport as a priority for consideration.

At the time of writing, the maximum weekly cash allowance for asylum applicants in the UK is £36.95 per person, per week. This equates to £5.28 a day. The high cost of public transport and the ability to have travel costs reimbursed are often deciding factors in whether or not individuals who are seeking asylum feel able to access services and opportunities. Meetings therefore include the reimbursement of travel costs for members, refreshments, and activities for children who are not of school age.

¹ARP is led by the Welsh Refugee Council, and also includes Asylum Justice, BAWSO, City of Sanctuary, Displaced People in Action, Ethnic Youth Support Team and Tros Gynnal Plant.

Our past experience demonstrates that these measures are critical in ensuring attendance and participation during the monthly meeting. These practical measures exemplify steps taken by our organisation to foster a safe, welcoming environment for members, whilst aiming to minimise barriers to participation.

Current Advocacy Forum members communicate in 23 different languages. As a result of funding constraints we are unable to provide translation and interpretation support. However, many individuals who wish to participate in the Forum and have limited English skills, will bring a friend with more advanced language to provide informal interpretation. This aspect of the Advocacy Forum remains challenging. Due to the transient nature of Forum membership and attendance, provision of adequate language support is near impossible to achieve.

Activities and achievements so far

In order to equip members with the skills, knowledge and confidence to challenge service providers effectively one of the early meetings included an awareness session about political systems in the UK and Wales, and how to enact change. This session was fundamental in enabling members to understand the various political systems in place. In Wales, there is a devolved government, responsible for 20 different areas including education, housing, and health amongst others. Immigration remains a non-devolved issue, and policies are made at the UK level. Without this knowledge and understanding of where power lies, it would be difficult for forum members to know how and at which level to approach decision makers to achieve changes in services.

Following participation in the Advocacy Forum, at least two members have engaged with their elected representative within Parliament at Westminster, as well as in their constituency office. We believe this is due in part to the increased confidence and awareness of decision-making processes as a result of their involvement with the Advocacy Forum.

An early success from the Advocacy Forum, relates directly to services provided once an individual seeking asylum has been dispersed to Swansea. Following dispersal, there is limited face-to-face guidance about the asylum process available to applicants. The majority of individuals are expected to use a telephone line, to seek any advice or guidance to assist them through the asylum process.

There are many problems with this system: language barriers, the ability to access a phone, the knowledge and understanding of the system, to name but a few.

This service provider attended the Advocacy Forum, and had an open discussion with members about the difficulties faced when accessing the phone line. Following this, the service has now developed a monthly face-to-face outreach session for those seeking asylum facing additional barriers such as experience of a mental health issue, a disability, a long-term health condition or those who are pregnant. Admittedly, this supplementary provision is limited to those facing additional barriers, however it is representative of improved service provision for some individuals seeking asylum in Swansea.

Conclusions

Whilst the Advocacy Forum is still very new, and subject to further development we believe that the participatory approach we have adopted, which encourages coordinators to take ownership of the Advocacy Forum from an early stage, gives the Forum a solid grounding from which to flourish. Once again, our ultimate aim is that the Advocacy Forum is for people seeking sanctuary, led by seeking sanctuary.

Reflection questions

For those looking to develop similar initiatives, I urge you to consider how your organisation might best support and encourage the voices of those who find themselves deliberately silenced. What practical measures will be required to create a safe environment for those you work with? What behaviours and values must your staff or facilitators demonstrate to get the best from your members? How will you ensure that the voices of all you are aiming to empower are heard?

About the author

Eleri Williams, Wales Cities of Sanctuary Project, Swansea Development Worker, employed by Displaced People in Action.

Eleri has been involved with Swansea City of Sanctuary (<https://swansea.cityofsanctuary.org/>) since 2012, when she was undertaking her MSc in Development & Human Rights, and completing internships with Oxfam Cymru and Wales Africa Community Links.

Eleri works closely with organisational supporters to implement practical actions to make services more accessible to those seeking sanctuary.

She oversees a team of Sanctuary Speakers, who offer free awareness-raising training sessions about the reality of life as someone seeking sanctuary in the UK and has recently developed the Swansea Refugee and Asylum Seeker Advocacy Forum.

In February 2017, Eleri became a trustee of Asylum Justice (<http://asylumjustice.org.uk/>), a charitable trust, providing free legal services to asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. She also features in the Institute of Welsh Affairs' The Next Thirty, a list of individuals who are shaping tomorrow's Wales, today.

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Further Reading

About the advocacy forum – <https://swansea.cityofsanctuary.org/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-advocacy-forum>

National Assembly for Wales (2017). *I used to be someone* – Refugees and asylum-seekers in Wales. Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee. Available at: <https://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11012/cr-ld11012-e.pdf>

Youth Work and Education in Transition



Cohesion, Commonality and Creativity: Youth Work across borders

Dr. Annette Coburn and Dr. Sinéad Gormally

Introduction

On the 1st June 1973, the UK joined the European Economic Community (EEC) and 43 years later, on the 23rd June 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union (EU). Despite the benefits of an economic union that brings cohesion in terms of Human Rights and increased mobility across Europe, this Union does not in itself define continental Europe. Nor does it clarify what it means to be European in the context of changing relationships across the EU and among its closest neighbours.

While the UK situation offers a significant example of exceptional change, our analysis of the impact of Brexit in the youth work sector in Scotland, and the rest of the UK, suggested a need to look at possible alternative responses to the widespread pessimism in the current climate of uncertainty. This think-piece draws on findings from an empirical study on how young people learn about equality in youth work, and from another study conducted across six European countries (Ireland, England, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland) on relationships between youth workers and young people. It explores possibilities for youth workers to use a new, transnational approach in their engagement with young people. This is an approach designed to sustain cohesion, commonality and creativity – and to empower young people to help shape the kind of European society they want.

The first part of the article outlines the theoretical concepts that inform our analysis of the current cultural context for young people and youth work. The second discusses findings from two research studies that informed understanding of young people's relations with youth workers – with particular reference to identity formation and transition. The third considers possibilities to create new transitions by means of progressive non-formal learning. The article concludes by outlining a purpose for youth work that is emancipatory: assisting young people to understand shifting landscapes in diverse cultural contexts, in order to shape the kind of Europe they want – complex, multi-cultural and ever-changing; including, but not limited to, the European Union; above all, a place where they can take pride in their own identity.

Theorising Youth Work

The authors of this article believe that, if young people are to thrive and lead a good life, particularly those who have been deprived of love and care, they need emotional support and to experience feelings of solidarity. We also believe that youth work can provide a context and environment for young people to develop their capabilities – in pursuit of a good life.

Youth work's contribution is in supporting young people to become fully conscious in their present surroundings and to think about the world they wish to see in the future.

Youth workers can facilitate consciousness-raising and critical discussions by developing trust-based relationships with young people. In turn, such relationships become the basis for,

- imagination and creativity
- new ideas, learning and understanding
- individual and collective action, in support of positive social change

'It is here that we begin to see youth work's emancipatory potential – co-creating and negotiating new experiences that are empowering for young people'

This is in contrast to traditional – mostly pre-determined or adult-led – approaches. In seeking to include and empower young people – and their communities – the link to social justice cannot be overlooked. We believe that social justice is at the core of youth work.

Learning about equality and understanding relationships in youth work

Research Insights

In *constructionism* people act together to construct a social reality, while in *constructivism*, individuals seek to make sense of the social world they occupy. Constructivist and constructionist perspectives are paralleled in youth work, where there is a focus on the individual – someone who is learning about themselves and their identities, but who is also part of a social group, seeking to challenge stereotypical views and acting together to shape their version of reality.

Our analysis of the contribution of youth work in contemporary European contexts is underpinned by two studies in particular:

Study one: a longitudinal ethnographic case study, that examined young people's experiences of equality in a generic (open access) youth work setting. A total of 29 hours was spent observing young people; 24 interviews were conducted (30–90 minutes each). In addition to generic activity, participants' responses also drew on their experience of international youth exchange, youth council and disability sports.

Study two: based on generic (open access) youth projects in six different countries. It involved at least two hours of observation in each setting, to provide background information, plus semi-structured interviews (20–60 minutes each) focusing on participants' experience of relationships in youth work. Interviews were conducted with 12 youth workers (three of whom were older young people / volunteers) and 16 young people. Posters, programme / project information and other materials from each location were used as contextual information.

All seven locations included a social space, incorporating music, soft furnishings, a café area and personalised decorative wall coverings. In five of the seven locations, young people had been fully involved in decisions about design and physical redevelopment of the space – such as, purchasing equipment, painting walls or building a recording studio. In all locations, young people had some involvement in consultation or dialogue about future developments.

According to the young people in these two studies, their experiences of youth work and non-formal learning were different to those in other settings (such as, in schools or in their families). For example, when asked about their involvement in open-access youth work, three young people said:

- 'With school the teachers see you as kids, but here you are all kinda the same, you are equal.'
- 'You are not told what to do. You have freedom. It's completely different to school.'
- 'It helps you build confidence. I take on responsibilities here that I wouldn't have elsewhere.'

Talking about their experiences of culture and relationships, the young people emphasised the importance of re-assessing their previous understanding of the world. They felt that involvement in youth work had enabled them to see changes in their situations – and in their self-awareness – over time. Furthermore, the social and cultural mix inside the youth work settings was seen as an important factor in the quality of friendships developed there.

Young people reported that the kind of friendliness displayed by youth workers helped them to balance other influences from outside the youth work setting or peer-group.

In **study one**, young people were found to make judgments about themselves and others, and to understand that such judgments shaped their identities and their encounters with people who were not like them. This suggests that their involvement in youth work created possibilities for action in support of social change. Based on other responses, the youth worker's actions had sometimes maintained existing power relations – for example, by deciding or leading on detailed design and organisation of activities.

The young people were motivated – by their level of self-awareness and wider consciousness – to pursue changes in their own lives and their communities. They understood that many different factors contribute to the formation of cultures and identities. When talking about a homeless friend, one young person had suggested:

'Nowadays your friends are your family...My mum says stay away from 'him'... [but]...he's been my friend for years and I would never leave him. Never, it's just, your pals...they're your family'

This showed that peer-group and friendship were as important, or perhaps more so, than family in sustaining relationships of love, care and solidarity. It is widely accepted that such relationships are essential to an understanding and appreciation of equality.

The social and cultural mix that young people experienced in open youth work settings enabled both young people and youth workers to cross perceived boundaries, to create new collaboration – for example, in developing an international youth exchange, or working effectively with counterparts in health or leisure services – and to experience improved well-being. Findings also suggested that boundary-crossing in this setting (in particular, social and cultural boundaries) also helped to improve understanding of difference. In turn, this enabled young people to sustain or develop current or emerging identities – once again highlighting the value of safe spaces in which young people can (re)define themselves.

We believe that an asset-based approach – focusing on young people's capacity and potential, rather than on their deficits in terms of knowledge, skills and experience – enables youth work to make a positive and substantial contribution to equality. There is evidence that youth work increases young people's capacity to share power and responsibility for decision-making and action – by providing opportunities to cross boundaries, challenge traditional hierarchies and explore ideas of difference, solidarity and mutual consideration.

Findings from **study two** revealed greater complexity in youth work relationships. The process of negotiation involved early stage conflicts, though these were almost immediately resolved by youth worker intervention. At this early stage, power was always located with the adult youth workers, which included those older young people who described themselves as youth leaders/helpers. Participation in the project was voluntary – and young people could leave at any time. On this basis, youth workers perceived the young people to be empowered.

The young people themselves, on the other hand, emphatically maintained that power continued to be held by the adults.

Findings suggested that the relationships between young people and youth workers changed over time. There were three main strands in young people's thinking in this area:

'You've got to dig a bit deeper, to get to know them. These are genuine relationships that need to be negotiated with the right attitude.'

'It is about development and mutual respect with young people, I think.'

'Youth workers have to be willing to share experience to show they are a genuine human.'

The first level relates to what is already known about youth work: that relationships are built on trust and respect – which are important to improve confidence among young people and emerging (older young people) youth workers. The second level relates to what is different about youth work: that youth work relationships foster continuity, consistency and coherence in young people's lives – which are important to their sense of well-being (and are often referred to as assets). Notable features of this second level include: being there for young people, being open to approaches, creating a comfortable space for conversation, caring about young people and respecting young people's voices. The third level, relates to how relationships in youth work help young people and youth workers to negotiate and renegotiate boundaries; this is important as the basis for transformation and development among individuals and groups.

We drew three main conclusions from our analysis of these two studies:-

- There is evidence that youth work is adopting practices that contribute directly to health and well-being.
- There is evidence that that youth work has most potential to support transformation and development when it creates opportunities (for young people and youth workers) to cross perceived boundaries.
- More research is needed in to the influence of boundaries in youth work – and how an awareness of boundaries, among young people and youth workers, can be used as a source of benefit.

On this basis, we see a major challenge as the UK prepares for Brexit: how can youth work play a constructive role in maximising young people's input to shaping a future Europe?

Youth work and non-formal learning: transformation and development

Recent years have seen increased emphasis on the need for youth work to create opportunities for young people to understand and challenge cultural assumptions – for example, regarding colonial histories. In the context of Brexit, however, there are very few histories, received ideas or other assumptions. We believe the best response to this situation for youth work in the UK is to pursue opportunities for dialogue and collaboration with counterparts in the countries of the EU and across Europe – in order for young people's voices to be heard and acted upon.

It is also essential to approach the area of young people's participation in decision-making with a commitment to facilitating genuine ownership and empowerment. Since this has generally been lacking in the formal political sphere, youth work has an even more critical role in familiarising young people with processes of co-creation and negotiation.

We recommend that youth workers consider carefully the influence of boundaries in their practice, in order to,

- Create new possibilities for learning where borders are challenged or crossed;
- Question the social construction of ideas and generate new meanings and understandings;
- Increase the potential for action leading to positive social change.

This is especially pressing in the context of Brexit – and the widespread feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty. We believe that youth work can support young people to feel informed and involved in shaping the kind of Europe they want. To this end, youth workers should seek to engage young people in discussions that build on existing cohesion, commonality and creativity, and strengthen our social and cultural ties, even as economic and political conditions are visibly changing.

The research outlined above shows that where youth work has encouraged boundary-crossing, there has been clear and positive impact on young people's experiences and perceptions of the world, and enabled them to begin defining their own autonomous identity as adults.

'Youth work is therefore well-placed to take forward conversations about Brexit at grassroots level, including with counterparts from different European countries, such that young people's own vision of Europe becomes more prominent and more influential.'

Emancipatory youth work at a time of shifting borders

Emancipatory youth work means that power is shared in the relationship between young people and youth workers; action is undertaken jointly, rather than undertaken by or on behalf of one party only.

Study two (above) shows this approach in practice – as evidenced in young people's comments on the youth worker role, such as:

'They are always there to protect us and as a support network.'

Participants in the second study also showed evidence of their own increasing self-awareness and maturity:

'They watch us mature and then they know when the time is right to start talking to us and getting to know us and that builds on our trust and that helps our relationship with them.'

The notion that youth workers have differing relationships, where the young person's maturity is recognised and supported, runs counter to the generally negative approach around interaction with young people. Youth workers can be seen by young people as confidants, people who are willing to share their power and responsibility in order to create new opportunities for young people, in ways which other social institutions would not consider.

This creates a bond of trust and allows for sometimes challenging and difficult conversations; these will rarely be seen as a negative, since they are underpinned by well established, positive relationships.

Conclusion

Our research demonstrates that youth work is in a privileged position to work successfully with young people at a grass roots level at a time of transition. Youth work offers opportunities for collaboration with young people – in ways that enable them to understand their own identity, both within the UK and across Europe.

As we move towards the next phase of Brexit negotiations, we argue that youth work can facilitate this process – thereby helping to build bridges in a changing world. Now more than ever, it is important to galvanise youth workers – encouraging them to take action that will strengthen and sustain our shared European community of practice.

Reflection Questions:

- How can youth work enhance its contribution to supporting progress towards a fairer and more inclusive society in Europe?
- How can young people and youth workers together create opportunities to discuss their vision of a future Europe?
- What action is needed from youth workers to ensure their practice is emancipatory?
- How are relationships – especially between young people and youth workers – negotiated and developed in practice?

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The role of the mediator in mobile social work

Vesela Mareva

Summary

Everywhere in the world, there are children in the streets and those living in marginalised communities who have no access to social services. Their situation is a complex problem whose consequences affect the development and welfare of entire nations. The role of mediators in the interactions between institutions and representatives of vulnerable groups is important for improving the quality of life and personal development of young people.

Introduction

The social worker today fails to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups for a number of reasons – such as, isolation of ethnic representatives, culturally specific customs and practices, language barriers, and others not covered by this analysis. The author of the article aims to analyse the role and effectiveness of the mediator in mobile social work. Field work or even mobile work is a recognised professional approach to social work, social pedagogy and practice. The following terms have been applied to this activity, as noted by the International Society for Mobile Youth Work: Street corner worker, Street gang worker, Area youth worker, Outreach youth worker, Street club worker and Field worker.

By its nature, mobile social work is aimed at individuals and groups with whom it is otherwise difficult to establish contact and who need an easier way to access support. Collaboration between social and educational institutions, in support of marginalised and vulnerable communities and families, is usually problematic and is sometimes lacking altogether. It is in this context that so-called mediators (for example, in education or health, or in general provision of services to people in Roma communities) have emerged in recent years. The role of mediator is not currently represented in separate legal standards.

This article focuses on Roma mediators working with young people from Roma communities, as well as with young people at risk (Roma and non-Roma).

Analysis of the work of mediators indicates that the basic aim of a mediator is *to ensure effective communication between families and educational and social institutions*.

As a result of innovations in the approach to mediation over recent years, we can summarise the mediator's more detailed objectives as,

- Addressing inequalities in access to social services, through the selection and training of representatives of the respective ethnic group;

- Acting as a bridge between majority and minority communities, including contact with influencers and decision-makers;
- Providing a positive model for children and young people.

Efforts to achieve results for young people from ethnic minorities often have wider impact on the family, in that it requires changes in attitude. Typically, a child forms their first impression of the world, and makes their first observations and conclusions while still under the influence of the home environment and while imitating members of the family around them. When the family in question does not share in commonly accepted educational and social norms, the young people are likely to face difficulty in developing their literacy and other basic skills – and to experience economic and social exclusion as a result. This is now a widespread problem in many countries of Europe.

The situation of young Roma people

For a large number of people from vulnerable groups, personal development remains secondary, with day-to-day existence being the priority concern. People at most risk of falling into poverty include: elderly people, large and single-parent families, children, people with disabilities and people from minority ethnic backgrounds (including the 10-12 million people in Europe's Roma community).

Challenges faced by young Roma people include: discrimination, difficulties of cultural and social adaptation, lack of familiarity with formal education, difficulties in accessing and retaining employment, and a lack of confidence in their own capabilities. All these factors hamper social and economic well-being and contribute to social exclusion – sometimes in a continuing cycle, spanning different generations.

The Stara Zagora International Youth Centre, Bulgaria, shows the positive impact from mobile social workers and specialist mediators, working to support families in their contact with educational and social institutions. Their experience suggests that youth work that is not reliant on fixed premises can be especially effective in forming trust-based relationships with young people and their families.

It should be emphasised that this approach requires knowledge, understanding and empathy towards the cultural context – in order for the mediator to be accepted and trusted. It is of course also essential that the practitioners in question have proven competence as mediators, gained from professional training and experience in different contexts.

Case-study: interventions and objectives

Mobile social work is direct work with people in a specific group or community, who face economic and social exclusion. In order to support young Roma people and their families, the mediators at Stara Zagora addressed the following main challenges:

- Discrimination: creating a multi-cultural environment, in order to extend young people's experience and understanding of difference, and to identify prejudices and stereotypes;
- Difficulties of cultural and social adaptation: providing opportunities for young people to work on longer-term projects in areas of shared interest and concern; encouraging young people to address questions of diversity and identity in a safe and supportive environment;
- Lack of familiarity with formal education, difficulties in accessing and retaining employment: introducing young people to positive role models – and promoting participation in the Centre's activities as complementary to more formal, school-based learning;
- Difficulties in accessing and retaining employment: establishing contacts and collaboration with the Labour Office Directorate (including mapping priority localities – rural and urban, identifying specific families not covered by mainstream provision of services and targeting individual young people who are unemployed).
- Lack of confidence in own capabilities: providing opportunities for involvement in a wide range of youth work activities, as the basis for increased self-awareness, self-confidence and sense of purpose; providing ongoing support for individual young people through mentoring arrangements.

Experience at Stara Zagora – where young Roma people are encouraged to identify their priority interests and concerns, and to share in the responsibility for running activities – also shows that young people can be encouraged to understand and value non-formal learning as part of their overall development.

Four main phases of activity contributed to the overall success of this approach

- **Phase one:** identifying and informing (key factor: direct and sustained contact with families in priority localities)
- **Phase two:** supporting young people in their initial and subsequent participation in activities offered by the Centre (key factor: creating a sense of belonging)
- **Phase three:** encouraging young people to take part in a wider range of non-formal learning activities as active citizens (key factor: access to positive role models)
- **Phase four:** promoting access to information, guidance and ongoing support of relevance to individuals' future pathways.

Conclusions

Based on the evidence outlined above, the author believes the mediator in mobile youth work can have significant, positive and sustainable impact on young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, in terms of social inclusion and personal development.

Experience at the Stara Zagora International Youth Centre shows that youth work can play a role in building an active civil society. This includes promoting equal opportunities for young people from a Roma background and encouraging solidarity among young people from different ethnic groups and backgrounds.

In order to build on this experience, the role of mediators should be recognised through new legal and professional standards. These should allow for adaptation to specific circumstances and needs at local level – and also encourage knowledge-sharing and collaboration by professional in related fields, especially education, employment, health and housing

Reflection questions

Important questions for future practice in this area include:-

- Who can act as a mediator?
- What knowledge, skills and experience does the mediator need in order to fully respond to local circumstances?
- Are community leaders / other designated representatives best placed to take on the role of mediator?

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Further reading and sources of information

<http://www.helpyouth-starazagora.com/en/> – official website of International Youth Centre – Stara Zagora

<http://bg06eeagrants.bg/en/content/component-1-0> – official website of programme BG06 *Children and youth at risk*

<https://www.ismo-online.de/logicio/client/ismo/file/downloads/myw.pdf> – the concept of mobile youth work

Intercultural learning in faith-based youth work: a case-study

Aleksandar Trudić

Summary

This article presents a perspective from faith-based youth work, based on experience in Protestant communities in the province of Vojvodina, Serbia. Drawing on theological, sociological, pedagogical and practical guidance, it identifies questions and challenges for the current situation of youth work in Serbia – and more widely in Europe. The article is structured around two main themes: what is faith-based youth work and its relationship to intercultural learning in youth work in Serbia?; and how can a faith-based perspective and intercultural learning support the development of youth work in Europe more widely? The article recommends that more detailed consideration should be given to faith-based youth work, in order to benefit fully from its insights and practical approaches.

Faith-based youth work: a definition

This section is based on the author's book, *Religious youth work – theoretical and practical implications* (2012), which described youth work in small religious communities (of Protestant denominations, distinct from the Orthodox Serbian Church).

Faith-based youth work – as with secular youth work (ie. youth work, undertaken without an explicit religious orientation) – reflects the following main principles and practical techniques:

- interdisciplinary approaches to enable young people to actively participate in the society they are living in;
- creating an environment where young people can choose to take part in activities which support their non-formal learning;
- planned approaches to facilitating young people's personal and social development, and their transition from adolescence to adulthood;
- complementing the learning that takes place in more formal settings (school, college and workplace), using activities to support non-formal learning (including: team work, games and non-competitive sports, group discussions, individual mentoring and supervision).

Faith-based youth work can be defined as youth work which is planned, implemented and evaluated for young people who share a particular religious affiliation or background. In contrast to secular youth work, faith-based youth work seeks to involve young people in detailed and sustained exploration of issues concerning religion and spirituality.

The challenge for intercultural learning

In Serbia, as in the other countries of the former Yugoslavia, there are continuing challenges and sensitivities arising from the history of cultural and ethnic tensions, which led to violent conflict in the 1990s. This creates a difficult context for youth work – where knowledge and understanding of local circumstances, and sensitivity to the differences within groups of young people – are pre-requisites. There are particular demands on youth workers in balancing attempts to draw attention to difference, and attempts to emphasise commonality. The author of this article has found that the most effective approach in support of young people's intercultural learning is to encourage awareness of difference as part of the normal state of affairs.¹

¹ Another approach to combining faith-based learning and intercultural learning is described at: <https://ethicseducationforchildren.org/en/what-we-do/learning-to-live-together>

Examples from Northern Ireland

There are clear similarities between the context for youth work in Northern Ireland and in Serbia – particularly the interplay of religious and cultural factors in generating conflict, and their impact on young people.

The following conclusions emerged from a 2006² survey of faith-based youth work in Northern Ireland:-

- faith-based youth work can be defined as youth work which has been initiated, or motivated by any religion and reflects the values of this religion;
- faith-based youth work does not include the activities of youth groups that focus on evangelising (for example, through prayer meetings);
- faith-based youth work is mostly undertaken by Christian groups, including Catholic and/or Protestant;
- faith-based youth work undertaken by Protestant groups is typically more closely aligned with non-formal learning, while the approach from Catholic groups tends to be more formal;
- faith-based youth work aims to support the development of young people's personal and social skills – through active citizenship and voluntary social action within local communities;
- while some faith-based youth work encourages young people to explore their own faith and values, proselytising is mostly avoided;
- faith-based youth work is often perceived as open only to young people who are considered believers (ie. who demonstrate affiliation to the religion or denomination in question);

- faith-based youth work sometimes faces obstacles in addressing young people's interests and concerns in the area of sex and relationships.

Other organisations bringing together research and practice examples in this area include the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) and the Youth for Christ network.

Case-study: faith-based youth work in the province of Vojvodinian, Serbia

Vojvodinian is a province in the northern part of Serbia, with a population (2011) of 1.9 million. There are six official languages in use among 20 distinct ethnic communities. There 20 different religions and faith groupings – including Orthodox (70%), Catholic (17%) and Protestant (3%).

The academic course, *Introduction to youth work*, was initiated in 2010 for theology students at the Protestant Theological Seminary. The course was offered (as an elective) to a mixed cohort of students, from different ethnic and (Christian) religious backgrounds.

Course assessment included preparing and facilitating a workshop on issues in faith-based youth work, as well as an oral examination.

Students who had completed the course noted the effective, sensitive approach to cultural diversity (including sexual orientation) and the emphasis on shared values underlying different religions and faith traditions. Students also expressed their appreciation for the non-formal learning approaches which characterised the course.

Implications for the development of youth work in Europe

1. The experience of faith-based youth work highlights the importance of giving detailed attention to young people's cultural and social background, as well as to the differences within any group of young people.
2. Faith-based youth work can play a significant role in supporting young people to respond to current and emerging challenges – such as, discrimination, hate-speech, extremism and radicalisation.
3. Practitioners in faith-based and secular youth work should look for opportunities to exchange experience and to collaborate on new research, in order to identify good practice and innovation in support of young people's personal and social development.

These recommendations are made in the hope of contributing to better understand of the changes affecting young people and youth workers in the 21st century. They are based on the belief that we should be open to new approaches and perspectives, and possibilities for our own self-development, if we are to work effectively with diverse groups of young people.

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Aleksandar Trudic is a qualified youth worker, who is currently working in the business and civil society sector as a trainer and a supervisor. His passions are social youth work and religious youth work, with a special focus on mediation and intercultural learning. He loves his family, DC comics, yoga and smoothies. His current position in the organisation called OKO is supervisor for youth work programs.

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Organization for creative grouping OKO is the organization from Belgrade which is working mostly with young people with fewer opportunities using youth work and art methods as tools for personal/social development. OKO has implemented more than 50 different local, national and international projects since its beginning.

For more information visit: <http://www.okoorg.rs>

Learn, think and act! New approaches to youth work in post-conflict societies

Davor Marko

Summary

This article demonstrates that youth work in a post-conflict and divided society, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, can be successful and sustainable, without needing to follow accepted models of reconciliation and trust building. The case of the Institute for Youth Development KULT, Sarajevo, and its certified programme – Learn, Think and Act – will be presented and analysed as an example of effective, grassroots initiative.

Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a war-torn and ethnically divided society, in which religious and ethnic belonging have been misused for political causes. For more than a decade, the country faced political deadlock, economic instability and brain-drain. This had a profound impact on young people – conditioning them to an atmosphere of political and ethnic tension, lowering employment opportunities and contributing to an exodus of skills and professional expertise.

In support of democratisation, international organisations have supported many initiatives and projects aiming to establish a common understanding among citizens from different communities, and fostering peace- and trust-building. It would be unfair to say that such efforts did not achieve progress. On the other hand, young people living in the country do not consider such efforts as being directly relevant or beneficial to their current situation or their future plans. In general terms, young people in BiH do not value reconciliation efforts highly. On the other hand, they are much more interested in initiatives that offer them something tangible and useful - such as, skills training, networking, support for entrepreneurship, etc.

Voices of youth in BiH

Between 2012 and 2015 researchers from the Centre for Empirical Research on Religion and the University of Edinburgh assessed the attitudes of citizens (including young people) in 13 local communities towards the process of reconciliation and trust-building. Main research findings from the 2013 survey suggest that young people appeared to be the least supportive of reconciliation and trust-building processes. Follow up consultation with young people in 2014 and 2015 highlighted the following:

- Young people have heard these stories (about reconciliation and trust-building) before. They are not interested, because they bring no benefit to them.
- Young people may see themselves as already reconciled. On the basis of everyday interaction, they do not feel that further reconciliation efforts are needed.
- Tensions among young people from different group, and instances of conflict, are often the result of conditioning. Young people have grown up in a divided society; this has shaped their attitudes and value-system.
- All young people share common needs for better living conditions (especially in communities outside the big cities), more employment opportunities, and improved preparation (knowledge and skills) to cope with demands of the workplace.

These factors contributed to widespread apathy and disengagement among young people. Whilst formal participation in democratic processes has increased in the past few years, it seems that too few young people have found themselves in a position to influence decision-making as a result.

Learn, Think and Act!

The Institute for Youth Development KULT (Sarajevo) is a non-profit organisation, led by former youth leaders. It provides high quality training for young people (including in entrepreneurship) and support for local initiatives, through capacity-building, grant-funding and mentoring. Learn, Think and Act! (in the local languages: UMiD, Uči, Misli, Djeluj) is a special programme for young people aged up to 30 years, to build the skills for democratic participation. Participants are supported in developing solidarity, creativity, communication, team-working and other skills. The learning is based on a range of issues that correspond with young people's interests and needs: project management, fundraising, gender equality, human rights, self-employment, civic activism, policy advocacy, voluntary social action.

The programme consists of two main phases: learning and practical application. KULT staff and partner representatives provide mentoring and advisory support. Participants are encouraged to write proposals for new projects that will directly address specific challenges faced by young people in their local community. KULT also creates and sustains networks for young people who have completed the Learn, Think and Act! programme.

Results include clear increases in young people's awareness and positive appreciation of difference, proactive approach to conflict resolution and involvement in citizenship activities.

'My story about UMiD is the story of acquiring knowledge I had not received through formal education, developing skills, meeting like-minded people, spending time doing meaningful things.'

Nejra Kadić Meškić, former participant and KULT employee, human rights activist)

Participants also demonstrated changes in their attitude to pursuing positive social change – with many involving themselves in regular and campaign-based activism¹.

The programme also prompted new contacts and collaboration with local authorities and public agencies – with many young people reporting a new level of awareness and appreciation of supportive services and the staff responsible for them. Some local authorities have agreed to allocate resources to ensure that young people's specific recommendations are implemented.

Follow-up

As a war-torn society, with a persistent conflict that continues to shape relations within its society, BiH has been heavily reliant on external funding in support of reconciliation and trust-building. However, such initiatives tend to be short-term – sometimes without visible and sustained impact. For the following reasons, the Learn, Think and Act! initiative may be more widely applicable:-

- it is a local-level initiative, led by young enthusiasts with a shared vision;
- its primary focus is on the needs identified by young people themselves (including young people who may feel their voice is not usually heard);
- it has led to strategic partnership with official and civil society organisations (including private enterprise); in turn, this has increased recognition for the distinctive approaches and benefits of non-formal learning and its future role in youth policy.

¹ Media coverage of Orange Day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDwgf1IUGY>

Concluding remarks

The experience of Learn, Think and Act! shows that it is possible to make progress in long-term objectives in reconciliation and trust-building through programmes which also respond directly to young people's immediate priorities and concerns.

While young people in BiH have little or no interest in reconciliation and trust-building as ends in themselves, they are keenly interested to explore opportunities for a better and more meaningful life (which, implicitly, includes reconciliation and trust-building).

The young participants in Learn, Think and Act! contradict the notion of young people in post-conflict BiH as lacking in creativity, ideas and interest in positive social change. They are active in their local communities, taking action to improve their own situation, creating opportunities for their peers and forming networks for co-operation all across the country. This is co-operation that goes beyond any kind of division: political, ethnic, religious or territorial. This is what reconciliation is about.

Reflection questions

- What are the essential problems of young people in your local communities? How could you support young people to address these?
- Can you identify examples of good practice or innovation in youth work in your country or community that has contributed to cross-cultural and inter-religious co-operation among young people?
- What are the most important challenges for the sustainability of such initiatives? How could they be overcome?

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Videos

Learn, Think and Act!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YboUWSouSpk&t=52s>

Learn, Think and Act! participant testimony
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The circle of trust: Integrating refugees and redefining youth work and intercultural learning in Greece

Mary Drosopulos

Summary

In the aftermath of the EU-Turkey agreement, the road to Western Europe was blocked for a large number of refugees, who found themselves in Greece, a transit-country with which they had no cultural, linguistic or family bonds. The pressing need to provide access to schools and to establish connections between refugees and the local community brought teachers and youth workers together, led to shared projects involving local authorities and NGOs, and highlighted the potential to use non-formal approaches in support of intercultural learning. In turn, this brought greater recognition for the efficiency of youth work and its role in supporting the goals of youth policy in Greece. There are further important steps in this direction now underway.

Introduction: from a country exporting migrants to a host country

In its modern history, Greece has often offered shelter to people who had been struck by war, poverty, natural calamities and extreme socio-political adversities. Large populations from the former USSR and the Balkans have started a new life on Greek territory during the last few decades. There is a big difference, however, with regards to the profile of migrants entering Greece in previous years and the current refugee crisis. In the earlier examples, people

were consciously and willingly moving to Greece in search of jobs or better living standards. They were determined to bring over their families and make a new beginning on a land that they felt as a second home. Furthermore, many of them had cultural or ethnic bonds with Greek society, meaning that they were more or less familiar with the language, mindset, religion and traditions. For today's refugees, Greece is not a final destination; it is a transit country on their way to Western Europe, where economic conditions are less precarious. Most refugees have no bonds with Greek history and culture, making it harder for them to adopt and develop a sense of belonging. In a similar fashion, In this context, Greek society has been divided. Alongside the abundant examples of hospitality and solidarity at local level, there have also been alarmist voices, depicting refugees as a threat to national cohesion and public safety.

The European Commission's Education and Training Monitor published in November 2016 called for Member States *to make their education systems more relevant and inclusive, in particular regarding the integration of newly arrived refugees and migrants*. According to the same source, Greece has been one of the EU Member States to have reduced their education spending. The plan for integrating refugees required the Greek government to invest substantially in education and youth services. The government launched a new approach, requiring not only meaningful coordination

between the main youth sector bodies, but also new investment in intercultural learning.

During the summer of 2016, a call for 800 school teachers was launched. This set out a specific professional profile: teachers with specialist experience in intercultural, communicative teaching approaches, who would be able to work with extremely vulnerable young people. Many had suffered the trauma of loss and separation; they were bewildered and scared. Some were completely unfamiliar with formal education. The fact that they spoke a different language also meant that communication with teachers and other pupils was sometimes challenging; it was often impossible for them to share, trust and open up.

The practitioners working with refugee children were required to have strong interpersonal skills, empathy, cultural awareness and also use a methodology which would go beyond language and could lead to the creation of a safe and friendly environment. These are attributes typically associated with non-formal learning, rather than with the formal learning model which is dominant in Greece. In this way, it became obvious reforms were urgently needed in school-based learning nationwide. Teachers began to collaborate with youth workers, while local authorities started working more closely with civil society organisations.

Intercultural education in Greece

The notion of intercultural learning has existed in Greece since the 1970s, when the country accepted large numbers of immigrants, mainly from the former USSR and the Balkans. Various models and approaches were put forward over time, though there was no agreement to introduce intercultural learning in a systematic way. This would have been seen as controversial and disruptive to many people within the education and training sphere, and more widely.

It could be said that in previous times, there had not been a genuine need in Greece to explore and practice intercultural learning in its true essence and with its potential. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, young migrants tended to bring a cultural background which was similar to that of most people living in Greece and so managed to assimilate quickly. Secondly, where intercultural learning was available, it tended to promote an acquaintance with the local culture, but did not provide for meaningful and equal exchange of practices, values and experiences. Intercultural tools employed from time to time, such as children's books, games, stories and interactive activities, often had the effect of widening this gap. Such tools and approaches appealed to the sense of superiority that is often found in dominant societies, where the largest group accepts minorities out of pity and sympathy. For all these reasons, intercultural learning had never been fully and consciously implemented in the formal educational system of Greece.

Refugees' access to education

With the beginning of the school year 2016/2017, youth workers collaborated with local authorities and head-teachers in order to bring refugee children to schools. The Greek state had made provisions, according to which refugee children would attend schools like any other local students, but would be offered extra tutoring in subjects such as English, Greek and Mathematics. The school that each child would attend would depend on their area or residence. Refugee students entered classrooms with their UNHCR backpacks, notebooks and pencils. Special welcoming classes were set up in order to help them catch up with the rest of the class. There were also provisions for extra intensive classes after school.

In this context, given the special nature of the situation, the joint work of teachers and youth workers had multiple objectives: to prepare children for entering the local community; to foster intercultural dialogue and to dispel stereotypes and prejudices emerging from cultural differences; to prevent issues of ghettoisation which had started flourishing in refugee camps; to socialise children and alleviate the trauma inflicted by loss, violence and separation.

Bringing refugee children to schools and supporting their learning process was not an easy task. When interviewing both teachers and youth workers about their experience with refugee young people¹, a phrase which was often heard was that of the circle of trust.

Teachers at schools with refugee students needed to gain the trust of children and youth who had suffered the trauma of separation and loss. Interactive and communicative teaching approaches based on learning by doing proved effective with refugee children. Formal education techniques were obviously inappropriate and insufficient in these specific cases. At the same time, educational practitioners played a vital role in refugee students being accepted as equals by the rest of the class.

There was also a need to build trust in wider society. The arrival of refugee children in Greek schools had not always been a peaceful process. A part of the Greek population viewed refugees with suspicion and fear, which was based on ethnic, political or religious attitudes and beliefs. Collaboration between municipalities and NGOs has had positive impact and there is much valuable work still underway to build bridges between local people and refugees, and to counter common stereotypes and prejudices.

¹ From March to September 2016 and from October until November 2016, I conducted research about the access of refugees, the outcomes of which have been presented in two articles, published by Routledge (2018) and the Youth Partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe (2016), respectively. The methodology used involved case studies, visits to camps, schools and NGOs and included silent observation and interviews with teachers and trainers. Please also see references: Drosopulos, 2018 & Drosopulos, 2016.

At a grassroots level, youth workers approaching refugee families had to gain the parents' trust in order to get their children to attend school. A number of refugee families saw no point in their children entering Greek schools and creating bonds with the country, given that for them Greece was not their final destination. The foundations of trust were first laid at the refugee camps, where youth workers reached families in order to ask for their permission to let their children participate in creative activities. When the school year started, youth workers from various NGOs contributed significantly to the children's entry into Greek schools. They reached families with interpreters, facilitated the registration procedures and accommodation in the neighbourhood, accompanied parents and children to school so as to introduce them to the teaching staff. Even today, youth workers accompany young refugee children to school on a daily basis and then make sure that they return back home safely. It came to be recognised that youth workers had a critical role in this context, by supporting people to manage such challenges. In turn, this led to agreement that the status of youth work and non-formal learning in Greece should be reflected in a proper framework, similar to that existing in many European countries.

Steps towards the recognition of youth work in Greece²

The lessons learnt from the management of the social integration of refugees contributed to crucial developments concerning youth work in Greece. The need to revisit youth policy had been vigorously discussed for years, but only the latest social developments called for dynamic actions to take place. Consequently, during the last two years, essential steps have been made. On the one hand, there have been governmental initiatives linked with the guidelines of the European Commission and the Council of Europe. On the other hand, non-governmental bodies have taken important initiatives.

One of the most important achievements was the decision by the Greek government (in 2017) to formally recognise youth work as one of its national priorities. This development triggered a big debate on a national level about the role, the rights and the duties of youth workers in Greece. For the first time, the government was involved in open discussion of the practicalities of youth work – a field which hitherto had only existed unofficially. This included consideration of terminology (such as, how *youth work* and *youth worker* should be translated in to Greek) and of the new processes needed for professional accreditation, in consultation with the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP).

There was one other important initiative, in parallel with these government-level actions. A group of 50 people, self-declared as youth workers, created a professional association in 2016 and agreed on the term, Σύμβουλος Νέων, or youth consultant, as the most appropriate Greek translation of youth worker. This was accepted by the government and has since begun to be used in official documents.

Planned follow-up includes discussion of the new National Youth Strategy (2017-27), the establishment of the National Working-group on Structured Dialogue, participation in *Europe Goes Local* (the long-term co-operation project, developed under Erasmus+, to support youth work at the municipal level) and drafting of a new law on volunteering. Youth work and youth workers are at last well placed to influence the national policy agenda.

² This section has been prepared in consultation with Babis Papaioannou, General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning and Youth, Ministry of Education.

Conclusions

The integration of refugees in Greece has been a complex and challenging process, in which youth work has been called upon to fill the gaps left by formal education and youth policy. There are a number of lessons already emerging.

The system of formal, school-based education can be enhanced by non-formal education. This doesn't necessarily mean that youth work and non-formal learning should be brought in to all schools. Schools provide a particular kind of space for young people's development - and should be respected as such. It does, however, mean that more should be done to connect formal and non-formal education – by improving access to information and highlighting synergies.

The values, skills and competences that characterise youth work have turned out to be extremely relevant to the social integration of refugees in Greece – where many face the trauma of loss and the confusion of finding themselves in a society where they have no pre-existing cultural or linguistic links.

Youth work with young refugees in a country which, for many new arrivals, is seen as a place of transit, is very different from that found in a country more likely to be seen as a final destination. Supporting refugees' educational and social participation, on the one hand, while supporting the local community to welcome newcomers on the other is a huge challenge. Success depends on a relationship of shared trust. With that in mind, youth workers have often taken on the role of mediators, reaching out to groups who are isolated and co-ordinating the response to emergencies.

One of the effects of increased diversity in Greek society has been to create a need for adaptation and change in the country's youth sector. Recognising this, the government has begun to review and re-shape its youth policy. In turn, this has led to renewed discussion of the principles and practices of youth work, and the status of youth workers – including volunteers and others who have hitherto been given no professional recognition.

Food for thought

Given the circumstances described above, it is clear the approach to youth work will be different in different parts of Europe. In countries such as Greece, the role of youth work is often as part of an emergency response, with priorities and methodologies that would probably not apply in other countries. In the context of such diversity, it is appropriate to ask, is there such a thing as European youth work, or youth work in Europe?

The recognition of youth work in Greece has been a topic for debate over many years. Not only in Greece, but in the Balkans generally, youth work has been misunderstood, looked down upon and seen more as a past-time than a profession or vocation. Youth work has often been carried out by people who have not undergone planned training and who have not yet developed the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes. With official recognition, there is a chance that the status of youth workers in Greece will at least be similar to that of peers in neighbouring European countries. It is certainly to be hoped that significant new resources will be allocated to research on youth work and to training youth workers to be able to respond to local needs. There is a paradox here. Currently, intending youth workers in Greece and the Balkans region are being trained by organisations based in Western Europe – in countries where research in to youth work is resourced as any other established academic field. This means the training provided reflects principles, values and practical approaches that may not be applicable in the specific local context. As a result, there are conflicting expectations and confusion among intending youth workers about the orientation and focus for youth work in the region. Is there a right and a wrong way of doing youth work? Or should we instead be making the distinction between mainstream and emergency youth work?

Recent changes at the level of policies and structures are very positive and encouraging for the future of youth work – in Greece and in the wider region. However, it is important that official recognition should not be a paper exercise, nor should it simply replicate the Western European model. It must be based on a holistic approach that considers values, requirements and priorities in an increasingly diverse Europe. Similarly, youth workers in different countries (whether their country's status in relation to refugees can be referred to as: *host, transit or emergency / first response*) should be encouraged to look for opportunities to work together, exchanging good practices, up-dating or re-thinking their methods and priorities, in order to meet new and emerging needs in our pluralistic societies.

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Blended learning in a Multicultural and Multi-ethnic Environment

Isabel S. Carvalho and Zoran Zdravev

Introduction

This paper reports on a blended course, in which a significant amount of the related learning activities took place in an online learning environment, making it possible to optimise the learning and teaching methodologies and the time spent in the classroom for a short and intensive International Summer Course¹ (ISUM2007) held in Macedonia. Twenty-five students from four different countries (Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia) with different ethnic and religious beliefs attended the Online teaching Summer Course. This paper addresses the authors' (co-teachers) experience throughout the course and discusses the success of the methodology and online learning environment as well as the students' activities and feedback. The authors (a visiting professor from Portugal and a co-teacher from Macedonia) have different backgrounds, professional experience and research interests.

Learning Environment

The main concerns related to the delivery of the course were: a) The authors had never experienced co-teaching and were not previously acquainted with each other; b) Both authors were not lecturing in their native language for a multicultural and multi-ethnic group; c) The availability of advanced teaching equipment (namely PC rooms and Internet) was limited; d) There was no prior knowledge of the students' background and level of computer literacy, and; e) There was no prior knowledge of the group size or of the level of proficiency in English.

As a result of these factors, expectations regarding the success of the course were not high. However, the students' positive response to a different course layout was promptly noticed through the discussion board postings, fulfilment of online tasks and the use of the Learning Management System (LMS).

The first contact with students was used to introduce them to what was ahead and to collect more information, with the aim of adapting the course to their average level. Planned activities included: a) Filling in the initial questionnaire; b) Opening an account in the LMS and filling in the personal profiles; c) Photographing students and uploading their photographs to their profile; d) Students sending an initial email to assess their expectations and English knowledge.

Course Technology

The reported course, Online Teaching, was prepared at a distance. Although the co-teachers had never met before, they exchanged several e-mails in order to refine the course theme and the way and conditions of implementation. There was also a one-week visit (in Portugal) for detailed preparations – including: defining the title and course structure, preparing a syllabus, establishing the course level and prerequisites and discussing the teaching and assessment methods. The necessary technical conditions were also defined.

¹ ISUM Student Evaluation Report 2007, http://www.spark-online.org/images/stories/codes_of_conduct/isum_student_evaluation_2007.pdf (Accessed: December 2017).

The final version of the course was made available through a LMS. An online course structure, syllabus, daily topics, and a list of required and suggested readings were provided. A simple and straight forward structure was chosen as there was no prior knowledge of the participants' background, structured in a Menu type layout: Course description, Syllabus, Readings (required and suggested), Links and Activities.

The co-teachers had complete freedom in creating the course. It was an advantage that one had prior experience of this type of course – albeit not in the context of a Summer University, with the added challenges of a mixed student cohort, short preparation time and intensive delivery.

Active learning techniques were used to promote a high level of participation and interaction among all course participants, with assignments allocated to individuals and groups.

In the online classroom there is no place to hide; students are expected to be more self-reliant than in a traditional face-to-face environment. Perhaps one of the most important success factors in the online environment is breaking the barriers between the social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the students and instructors. At all levels, the course participants were requested to bring their own background, cultural experience and multi-lingualism into the discussions.

Learning outcomes and assessment

Planned learning outcomes were that students should be able to:

- i. Start using active learning (on- and off-line)
- ii. Use synchronous and asynchronous communication
- iii. Create and moderate a discussion forum
- iv. Create a Blog
- v. Start the layout of an online or blended learning course

Evaluation was based mainly on in-class and online participation and interaction levels and on the delivery of two course assignments (individual and group work). For each learning activity, the evaluation criteria were based on purposely built rubrics. The course overall was very well received by the students.

Reflections and lessons learned

After the course ended and for a long time thereafter, the authors identified, compared and analysed the teaching materials and methodologies that were used and which enabled them to create effective lectures and high levels of participation from the students, regardless of their background and computer and English level. The students' engagement and the assessment tools were considered a challenge within the proposed teaching and learning environment. The active and collaborative learning as well as the course projects were designed as learning activities: online and offline participation, individual or team, and appropriately designed rubrics for assessments.

As with any online or blended course, the construction of a learning community was essential. From the start, efforts were directed towards the establishment of a learning community mainly through the full integration of in-class and online learning activities, threaded discussions and collaborative assignments. With this approach, a highly motivating working environment was achieved and secured. The students expressed their satisfaction with;

- a) the instructors and the in-class learning environment;
- b) the technology and other resources (including classroom materials) and their prompt availability;
- c) the learning and teaching methodology;
- d) the variety of face-to-face learning and teaching environments;
- e) the out-of-class communication with both instructors and their peers, and;
- f) the learning process outcomes.

It is important to note that students were asked to provide feedback (in class and online) at a very early stage. This enabled the co-teachers to identify and address key issues promptly and to better support the students in meeting their learning goals.

It should also be noted that continuous effort is needed from both students and teachers in order for the blended learning approach to be successful. In this case, around two extra hours were needed each day to review assignments and progress towards planned learning outcomes. In addition, follow-up communication with students (through online forums) extended in to the evening in order to respond promptly to questions and areas of uncertainty. In a more traditional learning environment, such communication would be spread over at least a week.

This experience of facilitating blended learning was certainly challenging, but also very rewarding for the co-teachers.

The following examples of online feedback illustrate the impact on the students themselves:

'I think that the topic was good, useful and it wasn't boring at all. With one word: excellent!'

'I wish I could have that kind of class in my faculty, but anyway, I have learned a lot more than I expected.'

'We were working in a relaxed atmosphere and it was great and I learned it a very interesting way.'

Conclusions

It is important to acknowledge that actual or potential conflicts in society can be a source of risk to blended learning, as with any other form of learning. This must be taken in to account in preparing the composition of the groups. The objective should be to recognise and to minimise obstacles arising from the learners' cultural, ethnic and political circumstances. With this in mind, the co-teachers in this example made use of a wide range of teaching and learning approaches, environments and tools.

With changing patterns in young people's mobility, cross-cultural classrooms are now increasingly common. This calls for corresponding increases in flexibility in supporting young people's learning – by recognising and responding to differences in backgrounds, experience and preferences.

This example, based on experience at the Summer University (Macedonia, 2007) shows that a blended approach can clearly benefit young people's learning. It also shows the importance of assessing, in advance, whether blended learning will meet the specific needs of the individuals in question.

Reflection questions

- Think about the range of learning methodologies, environments and tools that you could use to support young people's learning (eg. PC lab, classroom, cybercafé, hotel); what are the main factors in selecting these?
- What kind of activities would be appropriate for learning in a classroom or online environment?
- How would you include an intercultural dimension on the learning, in order to reflect students' diverse cultural backgrounds?

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Solutions?

Looking for diversity, responding to complexity

Katrin Jaschinski

Introduction

The title of this publication prompts some important questions. First of all, what do we mean by Europe? Which countries and which citizens? Does Europe refer to something more than its constituent countries and the people living in them (more than the sum of its parts)? Then, what does transition mean? When did it start, when will it stop – and how will Europe be changed? Other questions follow, when we start thinking about cultural diversity: what do we mean by culture (or cultures?). Is it something fixed – or is that also *in transition*?¹ Can we say that young people share a culture when they share situations, feelings, style of clothes, music and language – which are not shared by parents, teachers and other adults? And if the answer is yes, then how can we find out more about how young people access, use and shape culture?

¹ These are complex questions, for sure; they deserve further reading and reflection. If you are able to set aside more time, try finding out more about intercultural opening, othering and trans-culturality. You might also want to look in more depth at diversity and / or inclusion.

Case-studies

For this brief account of two initiatives in youth work in Germany (Berlin and Hamburg), agreement is needed on some simple statements (that means, agreement from me – the writer – and you – the reader):-

- We will not use culture (or cultural) as a fixed and closed concept;
- We will keep in mind power imbalances and discrimination, when talking about diversity;
- We will apply a perspective that recognises constant change.

I would also like to suggest that,

- We think about how we want society to be;
- We think about who is in a position to participate fully in society (including being able to influence change) and who is not;
- We read and respond to information and ideas with an open mind.

Having said all this (and assuming you agree!) here are the two examples. The first looks at the role of umbrella organisations in expanding the reach of youth work to all young people in society.

The *Landesjugendring Berlin* (roughly translated as, Federal Youth Ring of Berlin – or LJR) is a network supporting around 30 different youth organisations in Berlin. These are very different in purpose, objectives and structure: some are faith-based, others focus on the natural environment or are affiliated to trade unions. As at February 2016, only three of them included in their formal governance arrangements young people who could be considered as having a migrant background.²

The arrival in Germany (and other European countries) of large numbers of young people who had been forcibly displaced underlined the need for scrutiny of youth organisations' capacity to respond to new issues and challenges in social inclusion. Many organisations identified this as an important aspect of their strategic development, but one in which they had so far been unable to make real progress. This was the starting-point for LJR to develop an action plan to increase the diversity of young people accessing the services and activities offered by member organisations. The initial phase covered assessment of existing structures (and their responsiveness to diversity). LJR then developed a set of transferable approaches and tools – offered to member organisations through training and networking events, and other opportunities for knowledge-sharing.

This became the basis for advocacy to support young people who had been forcibly displaced and who found themselves at risk of economic and social exclusion. LRJ has also devised ways to enable young people to set up their own organisations – and to access small amounts of grant funding in support of local-level initiatives.

The second practice example concerns a very different response to diversity in contemporary (German) society. *Zweikampfverhalten e.V.* combines team sports with young people's development of social competences. Around 80% of participants have had direct experience of conflict – in some cases leading to forced displacement.

One of the distinctive features of the organisation's approach is the commitment to continuous professional development. Young participants are supported in every session by staff tutors and volunteers, as well as by regular youth work practitioners. From the age of 14, participants have the opportunity to develop skills in facilitating and leading activities. Team-wide reflection is used to ensure that professional standards are clearly understood, shared and reviewed. In this way – positively recognised by external funding bodies – *Zweikampfverhalten* has embedded diversity in its staffing resource and created a sustainable pool of positive role-models to support outreach.

Conclusion

Both examples were chosen to show how proactive measures are needed to expand access and facilitate participation by new groups of young people. Of course, each situation is different and each may need a different approach. But there is a common thread: the commitment to achieving an inclusive, attentive, respectful society. This article is intended as a reminder that the primary responsibility in this context lies with the people who are the most privileged.

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About the author

Katrin Jaschinski is a Social Anthropologist, currently living in Berlin. She is a professional researcher and works with children and young people. Motivated by improving access to (and participation in) learning for all, Katrin's current research focuses on: social inclusion, youth work and non-formal learning (including experiential learning). Katrin is also committed to interdisciplinary perspectives and approaches.

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² This is an ambivalent and sometimes contested term. Further research and reflection in this area could consider: national definitions of migration background, multi-lingualism, categories of ethnicity, racial profiling or stereotyping.

Our creative self and its importance for contemporary Europe

Marija Farmer

*'Again and again, however we know the
landscape of love
and the little churchyard there, with its
sorrowing names,
and the frighteningly silent abyss into
which the others
fall: again and again the two of us walk
out together
under the ancient trees, lie down again
and again
among the flowers, face to face with
the sky'.*

Rainer Maria Rilke

Summary

Who are we? What defines us? These are questions for which modern psychology, anthropology, sociology and philosophy have many different answers. It seems that our search for our identity has been going on for centuries and will continue for many more. Perhaps there is no answer. As we grow and understand, the old questions remain and new questions appear. My article starts from the first premise of creative life: you just don't know. Life seems to be higher-bigger-broader than our cognitive and emotional capacities can grasp. But we still can serve it – with solidarity, connection and empathy. These are all properties of the soul. Where do we find the soul? The soul speaks to us through art, rituals and symbols; it helps us connect. When a *presentation* works, we feel not alone, we experience in that moment a sense of recognition, of connection to others. *Me too*, we say – in acknowledgement of our shared suffering, shared laughter and shared human destiny.

Introduction

My work in the field of youth work and non-formal education began 22 years ago. The biggest change in my work over that time has been the shift from seeing problems to seeing opportunities.

As a young participant and later as a trainer, I remember being part of so-called intercultural evenings: food, flags and *we are like this*. I was expected to present some imagined identity, which would somehow connect me to others. In fact, it had the opposite effect. I remember the over-whelming feeling: this has nothing to do with who I am, or how my heart beats and manages the horror and bliss of everyday life. From that moment, I began to search for the cross-roads and inter-sections of our individual and group identities.

I write poetry. When you read a poem that touches you, you know it has given you an answer – though you may not even know to which question. In my experience, the question is usually this: how do we make genuine connections with the people around us? And in my experience, such connections are found most of all in the creative arts. Working in theatre, for example, I felt that we were able to go beyond our limited identities, and to make links and connections in a broader space. Of course, when the performance or training came to an end, we went back to our everyday, earthly existence; the experience didn't last for ever. But we knew we had been changed – for the better. We had become larger.

Creativity, solidarity and empathy

Drawing on my years of experience, intuition and various theories, I have developed a methodology that helps people find the creativity within and to form new connections with others. This approach combines awareness, reflection and critical thinking – towards yourself and others. It involves plenty of listening too – not just to other people (project participants, for example), but to something bigger than all of us. This is not something that works in opposition to the logical brain; it is complementary – empowering the other part of ourselves that works independently of rational thinking. I believe that understanding such ideas can transform our practice in formal and non-formal learning – and enable us to respond to destructive attitudes and behaviours in the modern world.

Creative Personality, Intercultural Learning and Diversity

Most theories of identity make a distinction between personal / individual identity and social / group identities. It is generally accepted that social categories (large groups, such as countries, intermediate groups, such as companies, and small groups) provide their members with a social identity which can define and describe who they are. Social identity can be expressed as the sense of *We* – of attachment to a group. At the same time, it is important to recognise that identity is dynamic; different people react in different ways to different events (and even to the same events, when they occur). Some events will cause rapid and unpredictable shifts at the level of individual identity – and may also prompt changes in group identity.

In seeking to link creativity with appreciation of diversity, the relation between our individual identity and our group identity becomes even more critical. There is evidence to show that when individual identity is strong, it is less likely that elements of group identity will be accepted uncritically. In other words, belonging becomes a matter of choice. Similarly, research in to common traits among creative people indicates a relatively high acceptance of ambiguity, flexibility in behaviour and high levels of empathy. It is therefore possible to show a causal connection between the development of creativity and the development of intercultural competence.

What does this mean for our practice?

‘Poïesis is an ancient Greek word and means to make. This word, the root of our modern poetry, was first a verb, an action that transforms and continues the world.’

Stephen K. Levine

There are many definitions of creativity.

Key concepts include:-

- creativity is one of the main distinguishing characteristics of human beings – the capacity to create and re-create inner and outer reality;
- creativity can be developed;
- creativity contains vision;
- left-brain / right-brain – there are different aspects to our being, continually interacting with one another.

As practitioners, how can we go about supporting young people to recognise and develop their own creativity?

- focus on product – process matters, but it’s the end-product that brings most benefit;
- forget identities – at least, put identities aside for now and allow yourself to be fully absorbed in what you’re doing;
- listen – sometimes the best ideas come from the most unexpected sources;
- in team work, take every offer – the rule of improvisatory theatre;
- challenge good practices – don’t waste time on bad practices;
- change your mind, often;
- focus on action, rather than discussion, explanation and analysis;
- allow feelings to help shape our ideas and actions;
- practice self-acceptance.

Reflection questions

- Can you go without reflection for a while? Can you imagine training without de-briefing – just a very short sharing?
- Can you remember and act on the rule of improvisation – to say *Yes* to everything and everybody?
- Can you spend a week with as little thinking and as much doing as possible? Make a list of 10 things you would like to do – and just do them without evaluation or preparation.

'Art is an act of the soul, not the intellect. When we are dealing with people's dreams – their visions, really – we are in the realm of the sacred. We are involved with forces and energies larger than our own. We are engaged in a sacred transaction of which we know only a little: the shadow, not the shape.'

Julia Cameron

About the author

Marija Farmer is an international consultant and trainer, with 22 years' experience in personal, professional and civil society development. Marija is also a psychologist, theatre director and performer, poet and writer. She has worked with different national and international organisations, on short- and long-term assignments, covering around 5,000 project participants in total. Marija's passion and expertise is focused on creativity and innovation – on helping individuals and groups to regain trust in their creative capacity, as the basis for shaping their own lives and the lives of their communities. Marija is founder and owner of the consultancy, *Magic Agency*, which combines innovative business thinking with live theatre. Marija lives in Belgrade, writes, dreams, is occasionally clairvoyant and believes passionately in love.

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Some of the authors that have influenced me and suggested readings

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Stephen Mitchell (1989). *Selected poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*. London: Penguin Random House UK

Neethling, K. and Rutherford, R. (1996) *Am I Clever or am I Stupid? South Africa*.¹ –

Madson, Patricia R. (2005) *Don't prepare, Just show up*. New York: Bell Tower

Cameron, J. (1992) *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. New York: Tarcher.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996) *Creativity: The Work and Lives of 91 Eminent People*. London: Harper Collins.

¹ Dr. Kobus Neethling was the keynote speaker at the the 11th European Conference on Creativity and Innovation, 2009.
URL: <http://www.kobusneethling.co.za/Brussels>

Conclusions

The authors represented here have contributed analysis and insight over such a wide range of concepts, situations, policies and practices that it is almost impossible to draw conclusions. However, there are some common threads clearly visible.

First, the symbolism of bridges. Many of the articles have talked about bridge-building – between ethnic groups, sectors (particularly formal learning and youth work / non-formal learning), policy, research and practice.

Then there is the commonality of a constructive and forward-looking approach. Whether discussing local projects or European-level development, all of the authors hold out hope for social justice in a changing Europe.

There are also shared approaches in addressing issues of diversity. These include a commitment to working with change and to balancing honest reporting of negative influences (misunderstandings, stereotypes, prejudices and exclusionary practices) with evidence of good practice and innovation (focusing on young people's creativity and capacity to take responsibility for shaping their futures).

Finally, a consistent message from all of the contributions is that authentic participation by young people is essential if activities in youth work and non-formal learning are to have lasting impact on empowerment and ownership.

Geographically, the Balkans region is prominent. This is explained by several factors, including its historical exposure to migration and mobility, and the consequent diversity found in countries of the region. The fact that the editor was born in former Yugoslavia also influenced channels for promoting the Call for contributions, leading to the high volume of proposals coming from this region.

The authors have also put forward questions for reflection, in order to encourage critical exploration of our surroundings and context, as well as our own practices. They range from very specific questions, focusing on the use of particular methods, to wider conceptual debate. More specifically, they invite us to be constructively critical; to continuously learn; to link local, national and European tendencies; to challenge mainstream approaches and theories; to be more conscious of the language and terminology we use; to probe our openness and readiness to change our practices; to question the ideas and assumptions that drive our actions; or to just do, without thinking.

Exploring a transition is always likely to bring more questions than answers. Each individual position and perspective has provided a different opinion about the starting-point and the destination, and about what might change along the way. Nevertheless, the authors mostly agree that while a multi-faceted transition across Europe is happening, it is up to us where it is going to end. What brings optimism is the sense that youth work is in a unique position to work with young people during this time of transition. Whether you are youth worker, teacher, policy-maker, activist or entrepreneur, we hope these texts will have inspired you to action – and change.

Further (general) reading

Education for all 2000–2015: Achievements and Challenges: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002322/232205e.pdf>

Council of Europe publications related to education: <https://book.coe.int/eur/en/105-education>

Bookmarks – A manual for combating hate speech online through human rights education: <https://rm.coe.int/168065dac7>

Compass – A manual on human rights education with Young People: <http://www.eycb.coe.int/compass/en/contents.html>

Compasito – Manual on human rights education for children: <http://www.eycb.coe.int/compasito/>

All different All Equal – Education pack: <http://www.eycb.coe.int/edupack/default.htm>

Gender Matters – Manual on gender based violence affecting young people: <http://www.eycb.coe.int/gendermatters/default.htm>

Mirrors – Manual on combating antigypsyism through human rights education: <https://rm.coe.int/1680494094>

About the editor

Sever is a trainer, coach, entrepreneur, researcher and dreamer with over 15 years' experience working with individuals, groups, organisations and institutions. He is committed to community development and leadership, youth work, communication and public policy. He is also trained in business and life coaching, emotional exploration and facilitation.

Sever believes that each person and project is special – and that each deserves to be approached with care and understanding.

His nomadic approach to life means that he is open to the different pathways and possibilities life can bring us to. Living, studying and working in six different countries (so far) has also brought a deep appreciation of diversity.

Sever enjoys writing, photography, nature, baking... He loves to observe, explore and learn and is passionate about personal development, creative learning, critical analysis and the processes of social change.

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Europe in transition: Diversity, Identity and Youth Work

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