



CHALLENGES TO GLOBAL YOUTH WORK

More than Europe

The 1st Youth Work Convention represented a big step towards the recognition of youth work in Europe. But is this enough? In an increasingly globalised world where any change – economic crisis sadly included – provokes a sudden and complete butterfly effect, should we be happy with only solving the issues in our own backyard, or is it time to look at the big picture?

Many youth workers have already chosen the second path, and are actively working by running exchanges and engaging in more and more complex projects with their partners overseas.

The Ghent convention reflected this objective by inviting delegations from different continents and providing space for discussion about these topics.



The butterfly effect

The crisis that began in 2008, and which is far from over, has been a deep blow for most of the world's economies. The funding invested in youth work, thus, is very likely to be significantly reconsidered. In this light, many European countries will have a lot to learn from places where youth work is carried out without big institutional funding possibilities, according to Howard Williamson (see the interview with him in this issue of *Coyote*).

There are, however, common challenges that go well beyond the economy. One just has to think about the climate change disasters that are increasingly hitting different parts of the world and – experts reckon – threaten to affect Europe as well. Advocacy for youth rights is one more field where dialogue is mutually beneficial. Christoffer from the YFJ asserts: 'Our partners in Africa and Ibero-America have succeeded in the adoption of legal instruments for the recognition of youth rights on the regional level, and we are now working on a convention on the rights of young people in Europe.'

Youth work goes global

by Tena Prelec

Global networking is already a reality. But there are still barriers to effective co-operation. It is still necessary to build a true, long-term dialogue, and the path to achieving this is long.

In Ghent, European youth workers had the opportunity to meet their counterparts from other countries, exchange precious information and pave the way to new collaborations. What they found are some good reasons to continue working with each other. And – perhaps even more importantly – they identified their mistakes and figured out the main challenges they need to tackle.

Building trust

In the workshop 'Global Networking of Youth Work', nobody questioned the necessity of co-operating for the common good and exchanging best practices. However, there are several problems youth organisations face when they engage in trans-continental exchanges. The main issues arise when youth are sent to institutions with which there is no trustworthy partnership established. Have we been relying too much on electronic media lately? 'There is nothing I experienced that compensates for face-to-face experience with young people, especially if you are working on issues as delicate as religion and migration. 'I don't think social media can make up for that: they are a great tool for keeping up something you have already built, not vice versa', says Lloyd from IFM-SEI.



Much closer than we thought

In Ghent, the South African delegation was the most sizeable among the non-European delegations. Deline from the South African Volunteer Centre strongly underlines the necessity of building long-term dialogue, instead of engaging in one-time volunteering missions: 'The main issue is to make exchanges sustainable and to leave a real effect. What you need is a quality pre-programme preparation, trustworthy partners and a good accountability system.'

When asked what the differences in youth work methods in regards to this aim were, 'There is a lot of difference in terminology' she responded. She continued, 'yet, what struck me the most when coming here is that we found out that at the end of the day, despite the terminology, everything else seems to be the same'.

Challenge #1: build bilateral agreements and political structures for young people

'We advocate for the establishment of independent and democratic national youth councils where they do not exist, both in Europe and in other regions – and are very happy that the UN at their latest General Assembly confirmed their support for this process.'

Christoffer Grønstad, European Youth Forum

'In America the process of networking among youth organisations is just at the beginning, and it is extremely interesting for us to come and see what kind of structures you have already established. We already have bilateral agreements with 13 out of 27 EU member states, and are aiming to get more.'

Beata Romanovsky, Mission of Canada to the EU

Challenge #2: foster long-term dialogue, not humanitarian tourism

'We need to avoid the risk of creating youth travel organisations: there are many cases of youth spending some time in Africa at an enormous cost to mommy and daddy, taking pictures, feeling good about themselves and going back. The key issue is collaboration and support: we need not only to invest in infrastructure, but in long-term development of young people.'

Deline Van Boom, South African Volunteer Centre

Challenge #3: transmit what you learned to your reality

Global networks are really important because they allow you to accomplish political actions you would not be able to put into practice otherwise. However, there are actually far too many of these networks already. Sometimes they even risk pushing members away. The real issue is how to transmit what you learned to your reality.