

Professionals and volunteers in youth work

The two sides of the same coin?
Or is it really only about 'the coin'?

by Gülesin Nemutlu

During the 1st European Youth Work Convention, extensive discussion took place on the concepts of **professionalism**, **professionalisation** and **volunteerism**. Throughout the discussions, professionalisation was usually described in terms of 'efficiency and credibility'. While volunteerism was associated with the concepts of 'passions and accountability', professionalisation was related with the concepts of 'criteria and quality' regardless of whether one was contracted for the job or was doing it on a voluntary basis.

This discussion has been on the table for some years now, and it is evident that it will stay there for years to come. The following is a series of questions on the topic. What are your questions? Can you come up with some answers for yourself and for the work that you do?

The bigger picture

- > What is the real issue? Is it professionalisation or professionalism? Is it getting paid for the work that you do or doing your work with a certain level of quality?
- > Can we talk about the professionalism of volunteers?
- > Who needs quality and standards: youth workers, policy makers or young people?
- > Does professionalisation always kill the spirit of youth work?
- > Is professionalisation of the youth worker a must to describe what young people can take out of youth work for a stronger position in the labour market?
- > Is the youth work field alone when discussing professionalisation and volunteerism? Isn't it a question for civil society organisations in general? Can we learn from the experiences of other fields?

What?

- > What are the competences that youth workers need? How do they know they need them?
- > What are essential themes that are emerging from today's youth work realities for which a youth worker should be competent?
- > Which competences will be crucial for youth work in the next ten years?
- > How do we know what youth workers need to learn?
- > What is the role of youth researchers in the process of training youth workers?

How?

- > How should the competences of youth workers be developed?
- > What training and learning models will youth workers be looking for in the future?
- > What should be the duration of the training of youth workers: intensive short-term or long-term training programmes?
- > What should be the basis of learning: experiential, theoretical and academic, on-line, blended (various learning environments), based on peer learning, being trained by experts of youth work?
- > At which level should youth workers be trained: international, national or local levels?

Quality in training?

- > What is needed in terms of ensuring the quality of training for youth workers?
- > What about quality standards?
- > How should quality be ensured?
- > Who should oversee training quality?
- > How is quality related to mobility (national vs. international training)?

Innovation?

- > What are the needs in terms of innovative training programmes for youth workers?
- > What kind of innovation is needed in the light of upcoming challenges such as social, economical, and environmental changes?

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