



Mirroring views from outside

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When discussing recognition of non-formal learning and youth work within the youth field, very often we are too hermetic, with our own in-group dilemmas, challenges and implicit agreements. Therefore, it was very valuable to have several people at the symposium who could provide an outside view of what was happening during the event.



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I came here as a complete outsider; it was strange and I had to learn a whole new vocabulary. It was a very steep learning curve to begin with and I feel I can now contribute more to the discussions than when we started on the second day. There are lots of things that I have learnt, one of the main things was the process that democratic schools are going through at the moment, where they are trying to lobby the European Democratic Education Community (EUDEC) council. We are facing the same changes in terms of recognition and in terms of non-formal learning, because democratic education is all about non-formal or even informal learning that happens and should be recognised. And in fact it should be equally important as all the academic learning happening in the classroom.

The focus is very important. We must keep the focus on helping individuals lead their lives in a successful and happy way, successful not only in an economic way, but so that they are content with what they do. And that does not depend solely on having the right job. There is so much outside of work that makes it worth being a human being. It is sort of a word of caution to not let the idea of employability influence the practice or influence all the good things that are happening, and not to forget all the potential novel approaches to life and novel ideas that come out of youth work or informal settings. It is also quite important to recognise education as being political, with its political side and its side of rebellion. If larger institutions, politics or the economy get involved, then suddenly it is more difficult to rebel or contribute to an area of dissent.



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Considering the symposium from the perspective of higher education and my own background, there are several points that need to be further reflected and worked on. First, when we were speaking about recognition during the symposium, there were always these two elements: recognition of youth work itself and recognition of the non-formal learning/education process that goes through youth work and youth NGOs. These two issues are not exactly the same because you can have recognition in terms of the social and political impact of youth work which is different from the question of how an individual can have recognition of his or her learning outcomes from a non-formal education process be recognised in society. These are some things that need to be more clearly separated as such.

On the point of political recognition of youth work, I would say clearly that youth organisations and youth workers don't need to feel as if they are obliged to defend themselves all the time. Because, I believe, in a society with all the democratic challenges that we currently have, it is quite enough for youth workers and youth NGOs to say: "We exist and we play a role in democratic citizenship." *Punkt and basta*. There is no need to argue about this. This role is important for democracy, without even having to negotiate.

With regards to individual recognition of the learning outcomes for different purposes, there needs to be a dialogue between higher education institutions and youth work and youth organisations. Because when it comes to formal recognition,

whether I like it or not, in our society universities alone give formal recognition. So, if you want such formal recognition, you have to enter the dialogue on assessment and recognition, on the learning outcomes and on non-formal education processes. Another thing is that there could be a reflection on the contribution of a number of elements that are common to formal and non-formal education approaches. Here non-formal education can really share very important concepts such as learner-centredness, learning outcomes, soft competencies... where youth workers can say: "We have the experience. We know what we are talking about!" I am quite sure that even higher education institutions would have an interest in this. At the same time, youth workers should always keep in mind that recognition is mostly for young people to be better equipped and to have more tools to be able to build their own lives. Otherwise, the risk exists even for youth organisations to run into over-professionalisation and a technocratic approach to their own work. And then they will be lost, because there is no interest if youth organisations and youth workers see themselves only as providers and if youth organisations' validity will only be proved by helping young people to be better employed. In this case, this role should be played by state youth workers and youth institutions. We wouldn't need youth organisations anymore, because the role of youth organisations in a global, social and cultural framework is to be a space for freedom and self-development, where the human being should be at the centre. If youth organisations give up this, they do not need to exist.