



# From Pathways to Pathways 2.0

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*I don't think that I'm going too far when I say that the strategic discussions on recognition of non-formal learning and of youth work in Europe in the last six to seven years were very much influenced by two documents:*

- *“Pathways towards validation and recognition of education, training and learning in the youth field” of February 2004 and*
- *“Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe” of January 2011.*

These working papers were not part of official institutional strategies but they were edited and published by the directorates responsible for youth in the European Commission and the Council of Europe respectively and the partnership between both institutions. The SALTO Training and Co-operation Resource Centre of the European Union's Youth in Action Programme and the European Youth Forum were also invited to be members of the editorial group of the second paper.

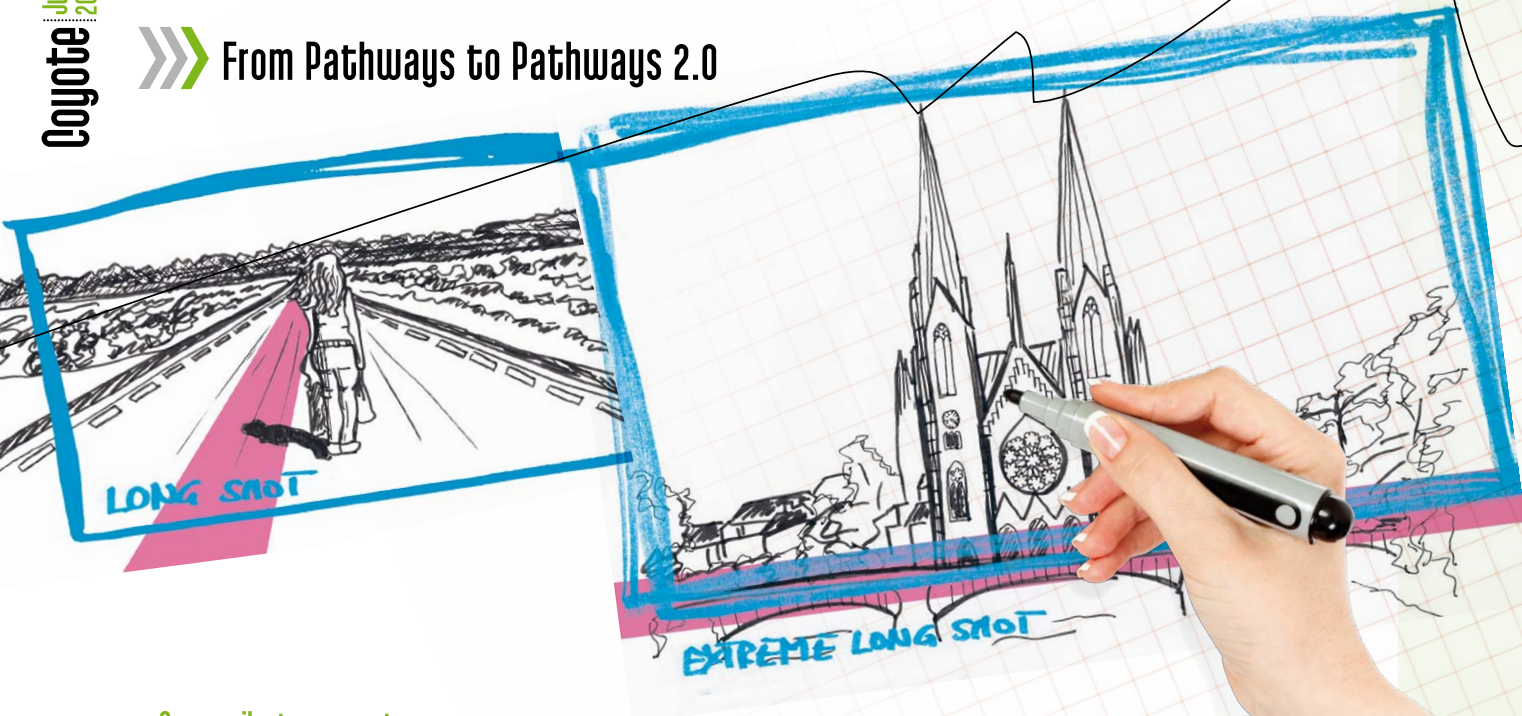
Since the publication of the first paper one can talk about a “pathways” process consisting of milestones that bring the discussion on recognition of non-formal learning in youth work forward. *Coyote* published a first reflection on this process in May 2006, under the title “Milestones for formal and social recognition of non-formal and informal learning in youth work”.

In the framework of this article it is impossible to provide a detailed and chronological list of all the relevant activities, events, instruments and tools, or of political or other documents, which have stimulated and promoted the discussion on recognition. Instead I will focus on a few key events, political processes and decisions.





## From Pathways to Pathways 2.0



### Some milestone events

Out of many events focusing on recognition that were organised by various stakeholders in recent years, four were of particular relevance in terms of their contribution to the political process and the quality of reflection:

- The first symposium on non-formal learning in 2000 at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, organised by the Directorate for Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe; it gathered together for the first time researchers, trainers, youth organisations and policy makers from the youth field to develop a common understanding of non-formal learning and define a strategy for implementation of a work programme in this field.
- The “Bridges for recognition” conference in 2005 in Leuven, organised by the SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre, which brought together a wide range of practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders from the fields of youth work, formal and non-formal education and the labour market – this was the first event that looked beyond youth work, involving and facilitating the creation of strategic partnerships with other sectors in which non-formal and informal learning take place.<sup>1</sup>

• “Continue the pathways towards recognition...” 2008 in Prague, this event, organised by the Czech authorities, aimed at deepening the reflection and renewing the impetus in discussions and in political strategies to improve the social, political and formal recognition of non-formal learning, education and training in youth work activities. It also hoped to launch a political process, we called it the Prague Process, similar to those in vocational education and training or in higher education, but it did not really fly.

• The 1st European Youth Work Convention, 2010 in Ghent, under the Belgian EU Presidency, made visible the various characteristics, needs, strengths and contributions of youth work to society. It looked beyond non-formal learning as a youth work practice to the various disciplines of youth work, facilitated dialogue among them and contributed largely to the social and political dimension of the recognition agenda. Thanks to the convention, youth work was placed high on the European political agenda; it contributed strongly to a conceptual discussion on youth work, its impact and value for society and individuals.

### Some milestones in European political processes and decisions

Again, only a few political documents that have been published since the debates on non-formal learning started in the late 1990s can be mentioned here – those comprising key messages outlining the political priorities of two institutions, the Council of Europe and the European Commission, in relation to recognition of non-formal learning and youth work.

In the statements of Council of Europe bodies, non-formal learning through youth work activities is seen as complementary to formal education in the field of lifelong learning. Non-formal learning and youth work play a crucial role in promoting the core values of the Council of Europe and enhancing active democratic citizenship, voluntary engagement and social inclusion.

Consequently the statements ask for a two-fold strategy:

1. recognising, politically and socially, non-formal learning in youth work and making it a significant element of national youth policies;
2. developing effective quality standards and tools for the formal recognition of non-formal education.

The European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers, developed in 2006-07, is a – one could say – milestone/tool. It helps in describing experiences and competences that are relevant in non-formal settings via self-assessment and feedback and is adaptable to users’ needs and realities. A recent political document, “The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: Agenda 2020”



re-confirms that non-formal learning plays a crucial role for social inclusion by ensuring young people’s access to education, training, working life and social rights. Thus the promotion and recognition of non-formal learning should be at the core of priorities and activities.

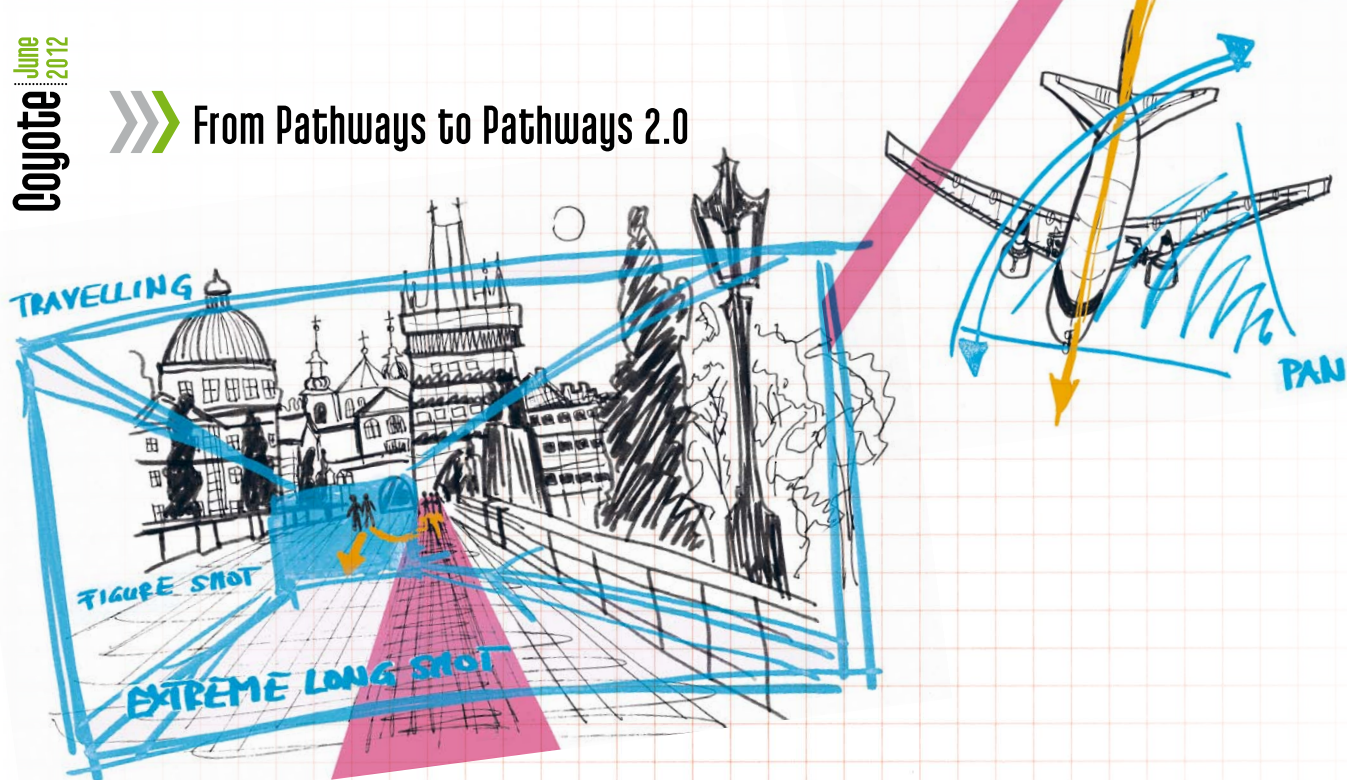
Outside the youth field, the Committee of Ministers adopted in 2010 the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights. It acknowledges the important role of non-formal education in providing each individual with the opportunity of democratic citizenship and human rights education. It also highlights the positive role that NGOs play in this respect in promoting democracy, social inclusion and human rights.

In the European Union, recognition of non-formal and informal learning has played a prominent role since the 2001 launch of the White Paper “A new impetus for European youth”, in terms of policy development, tools and practice. It argues for a greater recognition of non-formal and informal learning and in particular greater complementarities with formal education and training. This policy was confirmed in 2006 with the Council Resolution on the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field, aimed at facilitating the understanding of what young people learn through non-formal learning. It encourages the development of comparable and transparent youth-specific tools which could be linked to those in the formal education and training field, such as Europass.





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Such a tool, Youthpass, was developed in 2005. It can be considered to be a tool for certifying participation in all Youth in Action activities, and the relevant SALTO centre is now exploring possibilities for its use beyond the programme. The Youthpass is a real milestone in terms of concrete tools for formal recognition, validation and certification.

Since 2001, when theAs regards the political agenda in the European Union today, the “Renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field – investing and empowering (2010-2018)” calls for supporting non-formal learning by developing its quality and recognising its outcomes, complementarity with formal education and contribution to lifelong learning. The strategy to bring non-formal learning in youth work closer to the agenda of lifelong learning is even more evident in the “Youth on the Move” flagship initiative within the Europe 2020 Strategy; it proposes non-formal and informal learning as a way to expand life-enhancing learning for young people with fewer opportunities and/or at risk of social exclusion, and advocates for strengthening its recognition and validation.

The Council Resolution on youth work of November 2010 has a wider perspective: non-formal learning is an important, but not the only, discipline of youth work and competences developed through,

broadly defined, youth work need to be sufficiently valued and effectively recognised. It aims at enhancing the quality of youth work, the capacity and competences of youth workers and the recognition of non-formal learning in youth work. It advocates for further development of user-friendly tools for (self-)assessment of learners and documentation of competences of youth workers and youth leaders.

Since 2001, when the lifelong learning strategy was launched, the youth field has contributed to and profited from processes that were set up by the education and training sector in the European Union (and beyond), including the development of European instruments that promote quality, transparency of qualifications, mobility in learning and implementation of effective measures to validate learning outcomes, which are crucial for building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The future Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, expected in 2012, will take into account the challenges expressed by experts and stakeholders, such as guidance and information, reliability of instruments and trust of stakeholders. It will certainly give the subject of recognition a new dynamic and will be the next milestone.



### Milestones in practice of youth work: quality development and support structures

Quality development and quality assurance of youth work and non-formal learning are at the heart of many youth work projects at European, national, regional and local levels. They are essential to building trust in youth work and its capacity to foster development of key competences.

In particular, the work of the Council of Europe in the field of youth was from the very beginning focused on the empowerment and capacity building of multipliers, youth leaders and trainers. The two European Youth Centres support this approach and a set of quality standards for education and training was developed for this purpose.

Specific training courses and long-term training for trainers organised by the Council of Europe, the network of the National Agencies of the Youth in Action Programme and SALTO resource centres, the European Union–Council of Europe youth partnership, the European Youth Forum and many youth NGOs must be mentioned here. Additionally, the European Youth Forum has been developing a strategy on quality assurance for non-formal learning, aimed at the adoption of a quality charter. At European level, youth work would not function without funding and support structures.

As regards the Council of Europe, the European Youth Foundation offers support to youth projects that empower young people and build the capacity of youth.

In the European Union and beyond, the Youth in Action Programme plays an extraordinary role in promoting youth work, its value and its recognition, socially, politically and formally. The national agencies and eight SALTO resource centres are key in that they allow this process to be as close as possible to stakeholders and beneficiaries and ensure good results, in particular at the national level. The interim evaluation of the programme in April 2011 drew very positive conclusions with regard to its relevance, added value, effectiveness and efficiency, in particular in terms of non-formal learning experiences. In this respect the programme must be seen as more than a milestone, it is a meadow where thousands of flowers blossom.

It is a challenge to safeguard the milestones identified here and to develop them further, as expressed in the symposium on recognition, as well as to provide youth work the space and the reputation that it deserves, in partnership on an equal footing with other sectors.

#### Reference:

1. For the report on Bridges, see:  
<http://www.salto-youth.net/tools/bridges/Bridges2005/BridgesForRecognition/>

And for the recent key event also organised by the Resource Centre, Bridges to Work, in October 2011 in Antwerp a report will be available soon.

