Finding your *own* recognition adventure

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An organisation from Greece is doing research on the value of youth non-formal education…
an organisation from Germany is developing a tool for making visible competences that are gained in cultural activities…
an organisation from Serbia wants to register youth workers in a national qualifications framework…
an organisation from the Netherlands is looking for ways to include learning outcomes from volunteering in the Europass…

They all found their own recognition adventure.
They all have set their own recognition goals and took action.
What about you?

Perhaps you are doing a great job with your non-formal learning activities, but they are not valued by other institutions or you might be providing youth work that is not understood by your community. Perhaps you would simply like to help young people become more employable through participation in non-formal education. Yes, you feel the need for better recognition of what you do, but you might be wondering how to find it. If this is your case, this article will provide you with some useful guidelines for the process of setting up your own recognition strategy.

Before entering into strategic thinking, it is important to know that there are different forms of recognition: formal, political, social and self-recognition (as outlined in the "Pathways 2.0" article) and some of these might be more relevant for you than others. Think for a moment about what types of recognition you are looking for.

The recognition of non-formal learning and youth work is usually a long-term process and requires a strategy that is adapted to your own reality as well as a lot of persistence and flexibility on the way. If there is a will, there is a way!

Here are the 7 steps of how to set up your own recognition strategy:

1. Know your context

Do some research on the status of youth work and non-formal education in your community and country. This will help you make informed decisions and choose the best possible ways to work on recognition in your context. You might consider the following questions:
— What is the status of youth work in your community/country?
— Are there any laws on youth and/or youth work in your country?
— Are there any strategies dealing with youth and any national, regional or local policies dealing with "non-formal education" or "non-formal learning"?
— Is there any co-operation between the formal education sector (schools) and youth workers?
— Is there any connection between youth work and the employment sector?
— Are there any national, regional or local mechanisms and tools for recognition of learning outcomes (for example knowledge, skills and attitudes) of a youth activity?
— Finally, to what extent are youth workers themselves (including yourself) aware of the "educational value" of youth work?

2. Set your vision on recognition

Dreaming is the first step on the way to identifying the aims of your strategy. Our suggestion is to dream and dream out loud.
… allow yourself to dream and create…keep yourself from saying "yes, but"…
… enter the world of possibilities…feel free to imagine…
… in 10-15 years time…
… when youth work and non-formal education have received their recognition…
…What do you see?

There You Go

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3. Choose your recognition adventure

There is no way to recognition: recognition is the way! Indeed there is no given or ready-made road to recognition, it is a rather a path made while walking. This usually implies a long-term process that starts with selecting what you would like to have recognised, how and by whom. In other words, it is rather about finding your own recognition adventure that best fits the needs of your working context. While making your way, you will need to think about what aspects of youth work ("objects") you would like to have recognised, and possible recognition mechanisms (from more social to more formal ones).

For example, you may wish to focus on the recognition of the educational value of youth work, on how non-formal learning is perceived by other stakeholders in your community and on the better visibility of competences acquired by young people participating in your activities. In this scenario, you may wish to work on "stakeholder understanding" of what youth work and non-formal learning are about; to establish links and start a dialogue with local formal education institutions, the employment sector or local governments. At the same time, you may wish to establish a tool for self-recognition of competences acquired by young people (such as a tool based on self-assessment). Finally, you could work on better visibility of these competences and benefits of participation in youth work through promotional films or even a simple research project. The scenario described above is outlined by the **blue** lines in the exercise.
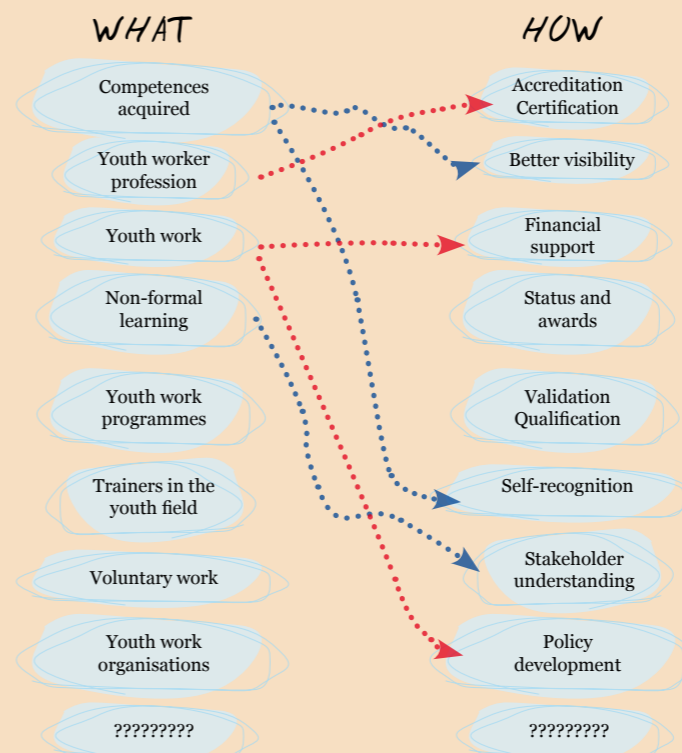
Another example could be that you wish to focus on the status of youth work and youth workers in your context. If you choose this road, you may wish to fight for better formal recognition of the profession of youth worker (through accreditation of professional youth workers and recognition of the occupational profile by national authorities), as well as advocate for the development of relevant policies (for example a strategy on youth work in your region or country). Eventually, this should also lead to more available funds for youth work activities from the local, regional or national authorities. This scenario is described by the **red** lines in the exercise.

YOUR OWN RECOGNITION ADVENTURE

What will your adventure be?

Exercise: Recognition objects and mechanisms
What is your way to recognition? Draw lines connecting WHAT you would like to have better recognised (on the left) with HOW you want it to be recognised (on the right).

WHAT	HOW
Competences acquired	Accreditation Certification
Youth worker profession	Better visibility
Youth work	Financial support
Non-formal learning	Status and awards
Youth work programmes	Validation Qualification
Trainers in the youth field	Self-recognition
Voluntary work	Stakeholder understanding
Youth work organisations	Policy development
?????????	?????????

4. Get to know the policies

Working on better recognition of youth work and non-formal learning is advocacy work that often aims at changes in relevant policies and formal decisions as well as establishing of new mechanisms. As for all other advocacy initiatives, it is not enough to form partnerships on the way; you also have to have sound knowledge and understanding of relevant policies that can strengthen your position. Understanding of policies of other sectors may help you in finding a "common language" and establish inter-sectoral partnerships at local and national levels.

For more information about European-level developments related to recognition of youth work and non-formal and informal learning in the field of youth, visit: *www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/recognition/*

5. Create partnerships

A partnership can be defined as a relationship between individuals or groups that is characterised by mutual co-operation and responsibility for the achievement of a specified goal. Depending on the type and scope of recognition you are advocating for, there can be a whole list of stakeholders that have a common interest in your goal and/or in your recognition process. For example, if you are advocating for social recognition of youth work, families, friends, civil society organisations, funders and the media could be some of your stakeholders. In the case of formal and/or political recognition, schools, universities, political parties, employers and vision setters could be on your list of stakeholders. For self-recognition, your stakeholders could be peers, educators, coaches and/or your colleagues.

In practical terms, while setting up your recognition strategy, it is crucial to identify the stakeholders involved and to ask some of them to become partners or involved with a network.

6. Plan for change

It has been said that a poor plan is one that only lists the actions that should be taken; although poor, it is still a plan. A better plan is one that also identifies who does which action. An even better plan is one that lists the actions to be taken, identifies who does which action and also puts all of this into a time frame. Still the best plan is one that has all the above-mentioned elements with a good sense of flexibility.

No matter how it is organised, your recognition plan should involve the activities, the people in charge and the timing of the activity planned.

7. Act, monitor and adapt!

Take the actions according to the plan, monitor its results and be ready to adapt your strategy on the way. Be prepared for a long journey and remain open to learning along the way.

Good luck!

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Bonus inspiration:

42 activity ideas for your recognition strategy

During the "Let's train: recognition of non-formal learning and youth work" training course which took place in November 2010 in Milocer, Montenegro, we asked the following question to a group of youth workers/leaders from different regions: western Europe, the Mediterranean, South-East Europe, eastern Europe and the Caucasus regions.

What are the top 42 activity ideas for recognition of youth work and non-formal education/learning?

42 IDEAS FOR RECOGNITION

1. A publication about non-formal education/learning in your language
2. Collect and publish stories about non-formal education/learning
3. Research about non-formal learning in youth work
4. A video project about the value of youth work and non-formal education/learning
5. Make an inventory of youth work and non-formal education/learning providers
6. A seminar for various stakeholders about non-formal education/learning
7. Translate relevant policies and documents
8. Write an article in an education/youth magazine
9. A gallery of famous youth workers
10. A computer game for young people
11. Public debate (for secondary schools)
12. Youth worker awards
13. An Internet platform
14. A list of employers that recognise non-formal learning
15. A common Facebook page for youth work events

IDEAS (CONTINUED)

16. To have awesome training (like this one) for teachers
17. E-learning programmes about non-formal learning
18. A camp for kids of influential people
19. To live it and implement it myself
20. T-shirts with "I love non-formal education" on them for school kids
21. Festival of youth work/invite groups
22. TV and radio programmes
23. A film about different experiences of non-formal learning in Europe
24. Regular reports for web, TV, radio, adult or parental audience
25. Street action, flash mobs, circle in the street
26. Info points about youth work and non-formal education
27. An online network of students and volunteers to inform about non-formal education
28. A living library in universities and secondary schools
29. Slogans on stickers
30. Street art

42 IDEAS (... A BIT MORE)

31. A non-formal education fair
32. Concerts/theatre... about formal and non-formal education
33. Workshops for parents
34. Pressure on stakeholders
35. Billboards as road signs to non-formal education
36. A manual to libraries for teaching
37. Advocacy for strategy on non-formal education/learning
38. A campaign about youth work and non-formal education
39. Training for human resources managers about non-formal education
40. Training for people from education departments
41. A quest for non-formal education or treasure hunt
42. An energy drink "feel young, go non-formal"

BONUS INSPI-RATION