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**The Youth Sector and Non-formal Education/Learning:
working to make lifelong learning a reality and
contributing to the Third Sector**

Report

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Executive summary

In the context of the Life-Long Learning Strategy and the 2010 Agenda to create a Europe that is the most dynamically competitive, sustainable knowledge-based economy in the world, the youth sectors of the European institutions (Council of Europe and European Commission) launched a joint text that places the youth field as an integral actor in the debates on recognition of non-formal learning. This text was the impetus for the research seminar that brought together stakeholders from across the non-formal learning field in and beyond the youth sector. The common theme was the value of learning in all environments, and in particular learning outside of school and how to give recognition for this learning. The youth sector was mapped out in relation to formal learning, as well as to the similarities with and differences from the other non-formal learning contexts, such as vocational training and development work.

Within the youth sector, youth work was considered the priority for better recognition. There is very little value placed on the services that youth workers provide for civil society and the development of young people's key skills for the work force. Youth work contributes to civil society by working with young people who have fewer opportunities, creating social inclusion and active participation, and building tolerance in Europe. Youth work trains young people in skills and competencies such as leadership, communication and working with people from other cultures, essential skills for today's work force. The soft skills that are developed in the youth non-formal learning environment are those which are not part of structured learning in school and so complement the formal system. The contribution of the youth worker profession is little recognised by policy makers, employers and the formal education system, with budgets in the non-formal youth sector being minute in comparison to the formal sector and to other non-formal training available. There is a wide diversity of youth work experiences across Europe but in general it can be concluded that youth work is poorly paid or voluntary, with little job security and without clearly defined career structures.

In order to build a better recognition of youth work, the first step suggested was to be more precise as to what a youth worker is, and the skills and competencies required for this work. This should begin with the development of a professional profile and should then be compared with other professions to demonstrate the benefits that youth work provides. The different training courses available across Europe should be mapped out to show where these skills and competencies could be learned. If there are gaps in the training available then these should be supplemented with new training offers. A system such as a portfolio should be created so that youth workers can track their learning and can demonstrate it to potential employers. Once there is greater recognition of youth work the next step is to create better recognition for all young people who participate in non-formal learning activities.

1. Introduction

This research seminar was a dialogue across different actors in the non-formal learning community, those working in the youth sector and those working in vocational education and training, adult learning and development work. The commonality between these groups was the need to promote and value learning wherever it takes place. Achieving this dialogue across the disciplines of non-formal learning was, as the convenor Lynne Chisholm said, an 'historic moment' and well placed at a point where non-formal learning is playing a strong role in political European education, economic and civil society strategies. The actors from these different sectors were a balance between researchers, policy makers and educators. The dialogue between research, policy and practice is paramount within the research partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission as one of the key goals is the transference of research knowledge. The seminar in its methods followed the academic traditions of presentation of papers and discussion and was accompanied by the young researchers' virtual community, a community created by CEDEFOP under the Copenhagen process <http://cedefop.communityzero.com/youth>.

The impetus for the research seminar was the creation and launch of a joint text between the European Commission Youth Unit and the Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sport, 'Pathways towards validation and recognition of education, training and learning in the youth field' that states the common position between these two institutions on education, training and learning in youth voluntary and civil society activities. This text builds on the considerable knowledge developed in the youth field in the partnership institutions and agencies on quality standards and recognition. In particular this text places the youth non-formal and informal learning within the wider parameters of the life long learning process, denoting what validation and recognition mean within the youth context, and lays out plans for how these goals can be achieved. In this context the seminar was debating what it means for the actors (youth leaders, youth workers, trainers etc) and beneficiaries (young people) in the youth sector, and the wider implications for civil society and the knowledge society.

This report is a summary of the presentation and discussion from the seminar.

2 Political context

The life long learning process within the European Union countries is supporting learning for people to increase their prospects of employability, social integration, active citizenship, mobility and their personal development. The aim is to give people the proof they need to demonstrate their learning wherever and however they have gained it. This process began in the European Council in Lisbon 2000 with the setting of the 2010 agenda to create a Europe that is the most dynamic competitive, sustainable knowledge based economy in the world. Highlighting knowledge helped to emphasise the place of education and training within this goal. In Lisbon 2000 it was stated that one of largest obstacles to achieving this aim was the lack of transparency in education and training i.e. that there was a lack of understanding and awareness of the quality and level of education and training opportunities and qualifications across Europe. The European Commission

communication “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” of 21 November 2001, under the heading Valuing Learning, emphasised the need for tools that helped show skills and competencies learned outside, as well as inside, the formal education system. The European Council in Barcelona 2002 and the Copenhagen Declaration 2002 called for further action on such tools as the European CV and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Portfolio created by the Council of Europe) to be put into a single system. This single transparency system for qualifications and competences is called the Europass, which was presented at the seminar by Jens Bjornavold.

In 2001, EU Education Ministers agreed upon objectives for a ten year work programme. One of these key objectives was to make learning more attractive by developing ways for validation of non-formal learning experiences. This was further developed by the Copenhagen Declaration to give priority to the development of a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between different approaches. Thus one important step towards creating production of proof of non-formal learning is the creation of the text ‘Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning’ (2004). The argument presented in the common principles and in the seminar by Jens Bjornavold is that learning is of great importance and that it should be supported in the different contexts in which it takes place, and it should be the right of these individuals who learn to have, if they want it, proof/ evidence of their learning for the purpose of employment, mobility and/ or taking other learning opportunities. The reasons that these are called common principles are that innovation and differences of approaches and methods are recognised as important and equally there are common features that can denote quality within these learning experiences.

The aim of having common principles was presented by Jens Bjornavold as that they should encourage across Europe the development of comparable validation practices. The principles should enable the support of individuals, link together sectors and institutions and provide a guide for design and development of tools for recognition. The validation process is not aimed at a certain standard or certain sectors and encompasses the whole age range. The emphasis lies on people with less opportunities: in particular those mentioned by Jens Bjornavold were the unemployed, school drop-outs and migrants. The aim is to provide basic level requirements for the validation of non-formal learning. To impact these principles their needs to be support by monitoring, such as through the European inventory on non-formal and informal learning.

The key principles were presented as:

- Entitlement - the right to recognition
- Voluntary - the right not to be validated
- Possible to make an appeal
- Results private to the individual
- Open Access
- Equal treatment

These principles are valid to many learning domains but the key domain for the youth sector is that of voluntary and civil society actors. Other learning domains that these principles apply to are the labour market and formal education and training, wherever the learning takes place and whatever purpose the stakeholders need to make it comparable across the sectors. These key players need to offer career guidance for the different learning experiences and be responsible for ensuring the quality of the learning activities. For those people wishing to take part these stakeholders need to give confidence and trust through demonstrating a fair and transparent system of criteria and access in the processes and procedures. In order to assure credibility there should be inclusiveness in the interests of all stakeholders.

3 European Youth Policy Response

The Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sport and European Commission Youth Unit in response to these developments have developed their own position towards these political developments in the form of the joint text on validation of non-formal learning in the youth sector. The purpose of such an exercise was to make clear how these policy initiatives can be understood in relationship to the youth field, what function the youth field already plays in these roles, what is the future scope for the youth sector, and what bridges can be made between youth and the life long learning agenda. The European institutions' youth sectors have been promoting quality youth work and the need for recognition in the youth sector within their non-formal learning offers. The joint text defines the youth sector as a 'wide range of activities outside mainstream education and training systems, in youth work and youth clubs, in sports and neighbourhood associations, in voluntary and civil society activities and in international exchange and mobility programmes'. It is not part of the formal education system and, as such, the joint text emphasises that it is seen by the participants as a more attractive way to learn as it is flexible, innovative, participant centred and voluntary. The European Commission White Paper on Youth outlines many of the non-formal learning activities carried out in the youth field along with the EC Youth Programme and National Agencies that implement the programmes, and CoE training offers and Youth Foundation that serve to fund such activities. The existing non-formal learning offers give the possibility for youth workers and trainers to gain advanced skills and knowledge in their field, documented in curriculum development, and individual and group results with-out demonstrating individual success and failure.

The joint text, which was represented at the seminar by Peter Lauritzen (Council of Europe) and Hans-Joachim Schild (European Commission), states that what is required now with these activities are:

- *clearer definition of concepts, of skills acquired and of quality standards*
- *higher regard for the people who become involved in these activities*
- *greater recognition of these activities*
- *greater complementarities with formal education and training.*

The principles in which this should be done are:

- *the voluntary and often self-organised character of learning, the intrinsic motivation of participants,*
- *the close link to young people's aspirations and interests, the participative and learner-centred approach,*
- *the open character and structure, and the transparency and flexibility of the underlying curricular construction,*
- *the evaluation of success and failure in a collective process and without judgement on individual success or failure, and the 'right to make mistakes',*
- *a supportive learning environment,*
- *a preparation and staging of activities with a professional attitude, regardless of whether the activity is run by professional or voluntary youth workers and trainers,*
- *the sharing of results with the interested public and a planned follow-up.*

Actions to be taken:

- *Simplifying methods of documenting learning histories through tested instruments (like the portfolios) and to do this in such a way that they contribute to the CV and employment prospects of participants just as much as they contribute to their active participation in public affairs.*
- *Finding a balance of tools that guarantee appropriate and satisfying solutions for validation, certification and recognition of non-formal learning, in accordance with the development of quality standards, open access, (self-) evaluation and assessment procedures for non-formal learning. Non-formal learning in the youth sector must keep its unconventional, innovative and attractive character.*
- *Putting in place quality criteria. Such criteria should apply to organisers, youth workers and trainers and their performance, locations chosen, dissemination of the learning offer made and criteria for access, preparation of participants, cost efficiency, coherence, evaluation and the links to other possible experiences in education, and learning with regard to personal development, social inclusion, public and civic life or the labour market.*
- *These criteria should be relevant to life skills, cognitive learning and understanding, and living in groups and communities. At the European level this includes intercultural competences such as communicating in foreign languages, respecting difference, discovering universal values, living and sometimes suffering diversity and thus developing tolerance of ambiguity. How to understand an enlarging European space and reflect it appropriately in programmes of non-formal learning at European level will become a key category for quality assessment in the future when looking for relevance.*
- *Giving the possibility that an individual has easy access to validation of non-formal and informal learning and non-formally acquired skills, if desired and*

appropriate. In certain cases and countries there might even exist an individual right for validation.

- *Understanding validation as ‘confirmation’, and taking the learner’s perspective on such questions: What have I learnt, how did I learn, what does it mean for me, what can I make of it, and what does it mean for the communities I live in and refer to?*

4. Defining the learning contexts

The joint text was the principle discussion paper within the seminar both virtually and face-to-face. In order to take discussions further it was necessary to map out the learning environment with the purpose of establishing the position of the youth field, highlighting what it offers the learner which is distinct and different to other learning environments, and considering its limitations. Manuela du Bois-Reymond, the keynote speaker, began this task by addressing the question ‘What does learning mean in the learning society?’ and highlighting the revolution which has taken place through which we have arrived at this complicated puzzle of learning needs and opportunities.

Recent political and theoretical texts have defined the boundaries of learning into 3 distinct groups: formal, non-formal and informal. These were put into a simple diagram by Torben Bechmann Jensen to help the understanding of these areas:

Formal – Knowing, Informal –Being and Non-formal –Doing.

This section of the report will map out these learning fields further using the presentations given at the research seminar.

4.1 Formal Learning

Due to the implementation of mass and compulsory formal education around 150 years ago across Europe most people have some experiences, all be it to different ages and diverse in quality in implementation, to know what formal education is. In this learning environment the *‘learning process is structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time, learning support and it is intentional; the participants get certificates and/or diplomas’* (Joint text). Manuela du Bois-Reymond outlined some of the less obvious aspects of formal education as: selection is explicitly used to decide who can stay on in education and who are the most able, this system has the power to define both the ‘contents and accomplishment of learning’ through assessment and certification and recognition of standards, and achievements are published and ceremoniously acknowledged. The curriculum in formal education is developed by experts in the field not with the students themselves (Anthony Azzopardi). The curricula in individual countries in Europe have been predominately built upon national agendas (Roisin MC Cabe). In this learning context, knowledge in general is transmitted through language, either verbally or through written texts. Demonstration of acquiring knowledge is conducted through language (Cristina Belardi). Mass education served a purpose of giving access to education and wider employment opportunities to more people.

Within the 'formal learning context in- and non-formal learning takes place and this is known as the hidden curriculum (Helen Colley). This is where implicit codes and practices teach young people information such as their social status within societal structures. This picture was added to by Marianne Søgaaard Sørensen who spoke of formal education's rituals, codes of social interaction and 'rites of passages' using the example of examinations that emphasise a link between power and knowledge. Marianne Søgaaard Sørensen described this as the teacher having the knowledge and the power, and the pupil subservient to this until having the examination, certification and recognition to prove their status. Marianne Søgaaard Sørensen explained that the traditional use of space increases this in the classroom: 'the desks were placed in rows facing the teacher's desk'.

Those who do not succeed and those who leave early by force or by choice have been offered compensatory education, sometimes called second chance schooling. These programmes that began in the 1970s have been suggested as being the forerunners of non-formal education and are where the youth sector can be found in the formal learning environment.

Manuela du Bois-Reymond, who called the introduction of mass formal education the 'second epoch' (the first was with education for only a few), explained that we are now in transition to a third period of learning. The difficulties that the formal system faces today, which were outlined by Manuela du Bois-Reymond, are that young people have been empowered from objects to subjects –thus they are the ones who are used to negotiating their position in relation to all issues including learning, thus challenging the compulsory and power relationships that historically mark the formal system. In the latter environment the initiative is with the educator (Roisin Mc Cabe) and the passive student often lacks the motivation required to obtain the necessary results. Thus skills for active participation are less developed in the traditional methods of formal education. To motivate the learner and to increase active citizenship some schools in Europe compensate by increasingly using the methods used in non-formal education, blurring the boundaries between the methodologies. Youth workers and volunteers working in schools, helping with school councils and as mentors, are increasingly common.

The description of the reality of formal education can be seen as a straw person. Rarely does formal education in Europe today follow so closely the powers, rituals and traditions of the past. This formulation of the formal sector of education is often used to demark what non-formal education is not.

4.2 Informal learning

- *Informal learning: learning in daily life activities, in work, family and leisure is mainly learning by doing; it is typically not structured and not intentional and does not lead to certification. In the youth sector informal learning takes place in youth and leisure initiatives, in peer group and voluntary activities etc. It provides specific learning opportunities, in particular of social, cultural and personal "soft" skills. (joint text)*

To understand informal learning, learning must be recognised as relating to activities. What people learn through informal learning was described by Cristina Belardi as 'tacit competencies'. This means that people have difficulties in explaining what they are and are not aware of having, or how they acquired them (Cristina Belardi). Cristina Belardi stated that when these competencies are made visible to the individual they often downplay the importance of them. Her research was about how to help unemployed and disadvantaged young people demonstrate their informal skills and competencies in order to improve their chance of employability. The example presented in the seminar was of a young man who had learned the competence from his father of how to fit electrical lighting.

Another context of informal learning is within the family. Annermarie Gerzer-Sass introduced the family as a learning environment. This, as with Cristina Belardi's example of disadvantaged people, is a situation that is not exclusively relevant to youth. In the context of the learning environment Gerzer-Sass emphasised the 'direct, personal and responsible nature of the family setting stronger and more sustainable effect on skills developments'. There is very little recognition of the learning of skills and competencies and they are unlikely to be made visible when applying for work, but Annermarie Gerzer-Sass found from her research that people who had developed these skills used them every day in their working environment.

Informal learning exists in many areas of life and Annermarie Gerzer-Sass' and Cristina Belardi' example's are of a very positive approach in this field. However, there are examples of where informal learning has been used to promote and maintain privilege, for example through mentoring in what has been called in the UK the 'old boys' network'. These informal networks, as Helen Colley presented, are where boys from privileged schools and universities are informally groomed for the top jobs in society. Implicit, behind the informal networks of learning are formal structures and conventions that hold status and power (Helen Colley). The methodology of mentoring holds no moral value but Helen Colley proposed that it is always important to understand the formal structures that it is reinforcing. Planned mentoring is becoming an increasingly used methodology in European youth work and with young people (for example in the UK).

4.3 Non-formal learning/education

- *Non-formal learning: learning outside institutional contexts (out-of-school) is the key activity, but also key competence of the youth field. Non-formal learning in youth activities is structured, based on learning objectives, learning time and specific learning support and it is intentional. For that reason one could also speak of non-formal education. It typically does not lead to certification, but in an increasing number of cases, certificates are delivered (Joint text).*

As described in the research seminar, the non-formal learning (NFL) approach in the youth sector is voluntary, in contrast to formal learning. Thus learners need to be motivated and active in their learning. The principle of learning behind NFL is learning by doing. It is participant centred and can be changed according to the needs of the

participants. The learning is predominantly value based on equality and inclusivity. It emphasises open access to those who do not have formal qualifications. In reality other exclusionary cards, implicit and explicit, can be played and, unlike formal education, the opportunities for participation are dependent on information and location (Lauri Veikko Savisaari).

The skills that can be learned in the non-formal learning context were expressed by Torben Bechmann Jensen as the soft skills or interpersonal skills, and often closer to skills that are used in everyday life. Non-formal skills and competencies, as was the case with informal learning, are easier to demonstrate in action or in context (Torben Bechmann Jensen). The learning process is implicit, often without the learner realising what or if they have learned anything or that they were experiencing a learning process (Torben Bechmann Jensen).

There is limited amount of recognition of what is learnt in this environment even for the learners themselves. For some training activities there are certificates, as is the case for Council of Europe training courses and with European Commission EVS experiences. However, the learning in non-formal learning is limited in its recognition by employers, formal education, civil society and by young people themselves.

The people who facilitate non-formal learning directly with young people in the youth sector are called youth workers. The people who train the youth workers in their profession are called trainers. The terminology is difficult to translate into many languages in Europe and precise definitions of these words are often avoided at a European level in order to not to exclude the diversity of roles, responsibilities and professional status carried within the different countries in Europe. However, the need for precision is becoming increasingly clear in order that there can be greater recognition of the work performed by these educators. Therefore in this report the following definitions will be used:

Youth Workers: *'Practitioners responsible for leading certain activities with young people who can be paid or unpaid peers and/or adults that do not take place in schools.'* (Definition given by the youth workers/trainers recommendations group at the seminar).

Youth Trainers: *'People who train others to work with ('train') young people using non-formal education methods, focusing on personal and social development and with an emphasis on fostering intercultural competence* (Lynne Chisholm ATTE evaluation report).

As the ATTE evaluation report states, the terminology chosen for the educators in the youth field highlight the distinction in role between educators in the formal sector, 'teachers', and the work of the facilitators in the non-formal sector youth workers and youth trainers.

The methods used in non-formal learning in the youth sector are based on group and individual learning processes. The group learning processes frequently use intercultural experiences and encounters as learning devices (Torben Bechmann Jensen). The individual learner is becoming a major element within youth training courses. This has led to learning becoming more explicit to the learner and the participants have taken

greater control over their own learning. The time frame and intensity is usually distinct from formal education in that there are certain periods of short and intense learning, such as during the training courses. This is usually obtained through creating residential courses.

Methods used in the youth sector that were explained at the seminar were:

- **Simulation**, as Andreas Karsten explained, is ‘a replicated, authentic real-life experience’, for example, a model European youth parliament or a model United Nations. This method was explained as using a combination of a virtual environment that in some ways reflects the real situation with role play. The aims for such activities were said to be ‘testing learning success, transferring information and testing applicability, changing participant’s perspectives, finding alternative approaches to solutions’. Simulation originates from the armed forces and has been used in management training and science. This method was emphasised as being transferable to a formal setting.
- **Structured and organised Mentoring**. Helen Colley discussed the structuring and organising of mentoring to disadvantaged young people, with the view of supporting them to become socially included and employable citizens. Structured mentoring which is also used on training courses such as ATTE has its origins in business management and is used also in politics to assist in increasing representation by minority groups. At the virtual seminar Tadeusz Lemańczyk asked, ‘if the purpose of mentoring was to make people like us, or to develop youth who can criticise the system and create change?’
- **Personal Development Plan (PDP)** was explained in a paper presented by Paul Kloosterman and written by Erzsebet Kovacs, as having the aim to support individual learning, in particular directed towards, ‘developing existing skills and competencies, existing knowledge, reflections on earlier experiences their structuring and interpretations, exploring new contexts of them based on the participants new aims and needs.’ The PDP was used to help participants plan their learning, mostly in periods where there was no residential course. The use for participants was predominantly in the reflection on how and when they learnt and if they were motivated to learn, important skills to gain within the context of the world of lifelong learning.

Non-formal learning environments

- One form of non-formal learning is within **youth organisations and NGOs**. Young people who work in an international youth organisation and their programmes can benefit from learning about other cultures in the framework of European or globalised citizenship (Roisin McCabe). Sara Rzayeva explained that these skills are only developed if the programmes run by the NGOs are of quality. Quality in this case means being based on the initiative

of the local people and on research into their needs, and developed in a way that is sustainable when international donors disappear.

- **Vocational training** courses are another example of NFL. Policies towards unemployment in countries such as Spain have focused on using this methodology for getting people back into employment. Youth participate in these programmes but they are not the exclusive membership (Coral Palomero).
- **Training courses** such as the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe's Advanced Training Trainers Europe or from the European Training for Open Youth Work 'Train the Trainers' programme, are examples of structured NFL learning opportunities for those people who train the trainers of youth workers. In this field there are advances at a European level towards making learning visible. Within the ATTE course tools such as the above PDP, quality criteria and self assessment were starting to be used.
- **Youth and community work.** This broad category was introduced by Anthony Azzopardi to cover the work of administrators, organisers, educators, counsellors, social workers, entertainment and sporting activities. He explained that in Malta there was a new degree course on this topic that had introduced many non-formal elements into the formal environment of the university. In 2005 this course will also be available at Masters Level.

Power relationships

In the youth sector non-formal learning the balance of power between the educator and the learner is explicitly equal as educator and participants are understood to be learning from each other (Manuela du Bois-Reymond). In reality, as Erzsebet Kovacs explains in her paper, 'Trainers wished to be involved as equal and responsible partners. This, however, was not at all easy as it was not enough to regard them as equal partners; they also had to be given greater support to become that.' Through Marianne Sogaard Sorensen's experience in assisting the evaluation of the ATTE training course, she noticed the use of rituals to demonstrate equality and inclusivity. One such ritual was the use of space in training courses, such as sitting in a circle during structured learning sessions. The circle formation was used to give a clear demonstration of inclusivity and equality (Marianne Sogaard Sorensen). The trainers emphasised this, referring to participants as participant trainers or colleagues to highlight their equal status. As rituals are emotional and become truths within the community, Marianne Sogaard Sorensen explained, that they are difficult to challenge and too change. Her critical stance was that making inclusivity in one specific community has the effect of creating exclusiveness from others even in the wider youth work world, let alone further. She questioned whether this limits the possibility of transfer of the learning to other communities.

5 Valuing all learning environments

'What we learn in formal settings (schools, colleges, training sites) is only one part of needed skills; learning through civil society as well as leisure time activities or in social

environments, i.e. in non-formal settings (associations, clubs, youth activities, political and family life etc) is the other complementary side.’ (Joint text)

Defining learning in these three areas helps to demonstrate how complimentary the different environments for learning are and that all people can gain skills, competencies and knowledge using a combination of the different environments for personal development and employability. As Lynne Chisholm said, ‘the complimentary nature and cross fertilisation across learning fields enriches the learning opportunities available’ and that ‘what is important is learning opportunities for young people in a variety of contexts which they can use to suit their needs in the world.’

In the knowledge society/ information society/ learning society the knowledge which is gained from formal education does not correspond to the demands of the labour market, the needs of civil society or the needs for a global world (Roisin McCabe). Roisin McCabe outlined the necessary skills such as adaptability, communication and interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, leadership and management skills, planning, problem solving, teamwork, the ability to take initiative and being self motivated to learn. The global context means that young people need to learn about different cultures, tolerance and religious difference. These social skills were emphasised as predominantly being learnt outside institutionalised environments. It needs to be recognised where they are learnt; these learning contexts should be given recognition for their contributions.

The contributions to the labour market and the Lisbon strategy of youth non-formal learning is that it is an employer and has a labour market of its own within the third sector, it provides young people with relevant transferable skills for other employment possibilities, it contributes to civil society by creating active and politically competent individuals and it contributes to the diversity of possibilities of learning outside of the formal systems (Joint text).

Equally, in the knowledge society where more and more of the population have formal qualifications, in particular degrees, then the demonstration of soft skills learnt in non-formal setting can make the difference for gaining employment

At this point, there is little resistance to the opening of the definition of learning to the wider fields of non- and informal learning but the recognition, power and wealth across these borders cannot be understood as equal. It can be said that these definitions are beginning to aid the reduction of the hierarchy between academic and non-academic knowledge but there is a long way to go, with young people themselves not always valuing the competencies gained through non- or informal learning (Cristina Belardi). Within the context of the Lifelong Learning debates, non-formal learning is now positioned as an integral part of learning. The next steps are to create equality in recognition within all the actors in the learning and employment field and subsequently equal funding opportunities (Anthony Azzopardi).

As the joint text states, ‘Generally budgets in the field of non-formal education, youth work, youth exchanges, cultural exchanges and civic education are considered to be

surplus to the formal education system, only affordable if the state budget is affluent and permits this kind of 'luxury'. This is a very short sighted view; it overlooks that non-formal education is a production force of its own.'

As Torben Bechmann Jensen said, there needs to be a change in attitude where formal education, employers and policy makers become more 'tolerant, accepting, demonstrating equality, invitation to cooperation, partnership and networking, appreciating of non-formal learning, trust and willingness to engage with people with NF qualifications. Equally it needs to be stressed for actors in the youth field that they should become open and trusting towards the formal sector and those with formal qualifications. Increasing validation and recognition in the non-formal learning sector can provide the impetus for creating greater equality across the learning field and also for building more bridges between the two.

6 Blurring boundaries of the learning environments

It is arguable whether the above definitions of learning can be so neatly mapped into distinguishable categories: formal, informal and non-formal. In fact, as many in the seminar argued (Bechmann and Helen Colley), there is formal learning that takes place in the non-formal context and non- and in formal learning that takes place in the formal learning context. Simply because a learning activity takes place in a school does not make it formal. Conversely, because an activity is run by a youth organisation does not make the activity non-formal (Paul Kloosterman). Many interpersonal skills and competencies can be developed in any of the learning environments. Formal examinations do not measure these skills but active involvement, listening and teamwork are clearly learned and necessary to succeed in the formal as much as the non-formal learning context. Policy makers, observed Helen Colley, are increasingly pushing the formal environment of learning to be more informal and the in/non-formal learning environment to be more formal, so 'creating hybrid learning contexts' (Helen Colley).

Defining the learning context in these three categories have been beneficial in making the learning taking place out of the formal school environment visible. However, there are limitations in keeping these boundaries. As Helen Colley explained, the distinction between the three types of learning are rarely consistent or evidence based. The reason for distinguishing the differences can often be for the purpose that a stakeholder or a community can claim that their techniques and ideology of learning are better than another's. Thus often how the community describes the other is through its limitations. Helen Colley suggests that there should be exploration of the attributes of formal and informal learning in all learning environments and then they should be situated in the power relationships of the wider context. There is no case for arguing that non-formal is good and formal is bad or vice versa. What needs to be explored is the 'purpose, context and power relations' where the learning takes place (Helen Colley).

7. Who is learning?

'Are we the architects who do not live in the house?' (virtual community discussion)

An observation from the research seminar is that young people who have formally acquired educational qualifications also have non-formally acquired skills and competencies, and often those who train in the youth sector have formal qualification experiences as well as their own training experiences in non-formal education. The young people who benefit from the non-formal learning sector, 'biographical trend setters' (Manuela du Bois-Reymond description from the yoyo project), are the motivated and most advantaged in Europe. These experiences are used by them to supplement their formal education according to their needs in personal development, in civil society and in employment. The issue addressed by Manuela du Bois-Reymond was that all the learning opportunities, whether non-formal, informal or formal, were failing to solve the disparity of learning between those with less opportunities and young advantaged people with even more knowledge, skills and competencies than before, acquired in a multitude of learning environments. One of the concerns expressed by Tony Geudens at the seminar was whether these non-formal learning qualifications would become another hurdle for young people to get a job: new demands on young people to gain these qualifications as well as the formal ones.

How to successfully target and support young people with less opportunities to learn in an environment which suits their needs and how to gain recognition for what they can do are topics that continually need to be worked upon. The principle of recognition of non-formal learning as expressed in the seminar is about lowering the barriers for people with fewer opportunities. If young disadvantaged people have learned something out of the school environment then they have the right to ask for recognition to increase their self-esteem, to have the opportunity to get back into the formal education system with this learning, to be involved in civil society and to be given the possibility for work. In the words of the discussion of the virtual community, 'we have to look on things as like architects for improvement, but at the same time appreciate the work of others'.

What is key to the argument of recognition is that youth workers who support disadvantaged young people, helping them to gain such confidence, skills and competencies, have the right to be recognised and valued in their profession. Equally, it needs to be recognised that not everyone has the skills to be a youth worker and, as said by Tom Wylie, that the alternative of placing young and disadvantaged people in the hands of untrained persons without trained support has its risks.

8. Recognition

Those who work in the youth sector or young people who are active in youth non-formal learning are often those who have had negative impressions or experiences of the formal education system at some point in their lives. The explicit image of the youth sector is then created as an image of a safe haven from the competitive world (even if the ATTE evaluation report by Lynne Chisholm has shown that in reality the competition can be just as fierce but is implicit and non-transparent). Thus, as Lynne Chisholm raised in the seminar, the discussion of recognition and assessment, that are principally associated with formal education, can create fears and anxieties in the youth sector. The introduction

of this terminology and discussion of these processes goes against the ‘anti-formal education’ ideology.

To build trust in a system of recognition for the youth sector it is important to agree on principles of how recognition and validation should happen in the youth sector. Trust can be built if a system is created that is fair and transparent and that is not about demonstrating success or failure. The principles that are marked out in the joint text, stating such elements as self-assessment and young people demonstrating what they know and can do are the first steps in this area. This process can make transparent the reasons, for example, for selection of a particular trainer for a training course.

New Principles raised in the seminar were:

- transparency through too much audit in itself can demonstrate a lack of trust so it was emphasised that a degree of sensitivity and common sense is required in implementing standards
- to make sure that youth workers, trainers and those working with young people are trained to have the capacity to be involved in accreditation and the monitoring of standards
- the youth sector non-formal learning should not become over formalised and structured because this can create bureaucracy, and there should not be fixed systems removing the flexibility and versatility that is currently adopted
- unintended situations that arise and built upon in non-formal learning should be safe-guarded

The place to start developing recognition in the youth sector was agreed to be with youth workers. As Anthony Azzopardi reminded us, the demands on youth workers are extremely high and the skills and competencies required for this work are diverse, such as intercultural learning, communication, youth culture, addiction and supporting learning processes on topics such as political participation and Euromed. The professional profile of a youth worker needs to be made precise, making clear what skills and competencies are required for the job (Burkart Sellin). The skills and competencies have been described in a number of different ways in the youth field but what can be completed at a European level is the further work to provide one consolidated version. It was highlighted as important in the seminar that this profile should be general enough to include the diversity of the youth workers and their different working environments across Europe, whether they are volunteers (as in the case in Belgium) or paid workers with university qualifications (such as in Malta or the UK) or whether they work in Azerbaijan or in France. Once the profile has been defined and the training structures mapped out, the learning needs to be made visible to the youth workers so that they know what skills and competencies they have and which areas they need to develop.

8.1 The Council of Europe youth worker portfolio

One method which is being created for this is the Council of Europe youth workers portfolio. The portfolio has its traditions in the work of artists and craftspeople – giving a representation of their performance as an indicator of the different competencies that their

owner has been given (Cristina Belardi). The purpose of the Council of Europe portfolio, as described by André-Jacques Dodin, is to demonstrate youth workers' experience and the quality of work performed, both for themselves and for potential employees. Added to this is the aim to give better recognition to the youth worker profession as a whole in a regional, national and international context. The portfolio will use participants' self-assessment to define their learning and to give the ability to demonstrate this learning to a potential employer. Different levels will be offered so that youth workers can follow, plan and demonstrate their learning progress. The youth worker portfolio should be supplemented with description of these activities and how they were learned in order to emphasise the quality of these learning experiences. Institutional actors on national and international levels would need to agree criteria for certifying portfolios. Ideally this portfolio could be added to the Europass and, keeping this in mind, the target group would probably need to be widened to a greater variety of NFL activities, such as youth exchanges, voluntary activities in the YOUTH Programme and to the wider life long learning age groups. The idea is to build on the success of the Council of Europe language portfolio that is now part of the Europass.

It was suggested that one of the keys to success of this project would be that the portfolio itself should be user friendly, inexpensive and an open process avoiding the bureaucracy of large scale institutions.

Further examples of recognition

- A **digital portfolio** was presented by Cristina Belardi from Italy. It is aimed at enabling disadvantaged young people make visible their skills and competencies and giving self-empowerment to young people whose skills were not recognised.
- Philine Scholtz from Germany, used a **CV** to demonstrate skills and competencies learned both in the formal and non-formal learning environment, for example the skills used in long term volunteering.
- A **Finnish study book** was presented by Lauri Veikko Savisaari. This book is for recording skills and competencies learned in non- or in formal learning, in particular voluntary activities.
- A **Slovenian record book**, presented by Danilo Kozoderc at the virtual seminar. The aim of this book is to record knowledge and experience learned from non-formal activities.

9. Quality standards

Combined with the creation of the occupational profile for youth workers and a system of recognition of skills and competencies, as Peter Lauritzen explained, there is a need at a European level, for the mapping out of the pathway of training and experience that is required for an individual to gain the skills and competencies required for a youth worker. This should explore the different options that already exist from the YOUTH

Programme, National Agencies, Partnership and Council of Europe courses, and define where the gaps are to supplement the learning. The whole set of training opportunities could be structured with an overarching umbrella organization that monitors and guides youth workers on the training possibilities.

In order that training courses are recognized within this structure, quality standards need to be agreed. Setting standards will serve three purposes. First, it will demonstrate that the activities offered to participants are going to be worth the time invested. Second, it will communicate to other communities, stakeholders, funders and employers that the activities provided are of a good standard in terms of criteria set up by the youth community. Third, that if there are activities that do not meet the standards then this can be made visible and changes can be made to improve the quality. The standards which would need to be set are, as Peter Lauritzen highlighted, the minimum which all the learning opportunities should reach. They should be created by those who work in the field and have the flexibility to be revised over time. The remaining question is who should be the monitors of quality standards. The response in the seminar was the exposure of the dilemma between the suggestion that it should be those who already work in the field and the question whether these people have the skills, interest, time or energy to do this extra work.

Examples of Quality Standards

Defining quality on European, national and local level youth work and youth worker training has begun with different examples given at the seminar. The research that Anthony Azzopardi had carried out in Malta highlighted a number of interesting criteria:

- youth work should be evidence based and contain a sound and solid body of knowledge developed to base the practice upon
- youth workers should be able to carry out some basic research in their particular field of practice
- the preparation time given should be on an equal footing to that in the formal system
- clear objectives
- relevant methods of delivery
- performance indicators created

Liz Morrey explained the quality assurance system that has been developed in England. Diplomas or degrees for youth workers are validated by the National Youth Agency (NYA) on behalf of the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for youth and community workers. The JNC negotiates salaries and terms and conditions for youth workers with valid qualifications. About 30 English universities or higher education institutions currently offer validated programmes (2400 students at the moment). Some of the requirements for validation are specified as:

- programme reflects underlying principles, ethics and values of youth work
- learning outcomes reflect specified national standards
- follows guidelines for equal opportunities
- sufficient resources for effective delivery
- sufficient pool of potential recruits and strategy for recruitment

- substantial field work requirements
- supervised by professional qualified and experience youth workers with a range of specialist skills, knowledge and recent experiences.
- assessment tools used to demonstrate learning
- governing board contains representatives of employers and students

In order to gain validation a course must describe how these requirements are going to be met. If a course is given validation then the course is monitored by the NYA to insure all the quality standards are met.

Andrew Cummings from the European Training for Open Youth Work presented their plans for the creation of quality assurance for European training programmes within the European Training for Open Youth work. A number of members of the network, such as in Flanders Belgium 'European model for total quality management', Iceland 'Balanced score card', Ireland 'Networking quality youth work' and the UK 'Five Key Standards' already had quality assurance schemes. The complexities that the network were facing were to define standards and forms of recognition that compliment the diversity of experiences and professions across Europe.

10. Recommendations

'Where do you want to arrive at to make things better and how are you going to get there?' These were the questions that Lynne Chisholm raised before the recommendations group work began. This group work was called the recommendation circus and the method was to divide into three groups; the division was made by the participants choosing their identity as either a researcher, policy maker or practitioner. In the groups time was given for the participants to create recommendations, and once the list had been created the groups moved around to question and make suggestions on the recommendations produced by the other groups. Once each group had given their feedback to the other groups they returned to their own recommendations to read the suggestions given and to make changes to them. Each group presented their final recommendations to the plenary where they were discussed.

10.1 Policy makers

The policy makers developed a set of projects that needed to take place sequentially:

- A map should be created for the occupational profile of those who work with young people and establishing a list of existing projects. This map should be used to refine the core elements that distinguish youth workers from other professionals in the youth field and provide a basis for common standards.
- There should be an elaboration of the guiding principles of youth work. For example, participation should be voluntary and inclusive. This would denote the principles that under-pin the profession, and demonstrate those who are

performing competently and professionally. This would help to distinguish this field from others that work with young people, for example social work where the ideology is toward the treatment of deficit, and child protection where the work is done to and not with young people. The concept is to draw a line around youth work and the use of non-formal learning.

- Marketing youth work. It should be made explicit how it compliments the other professions. This project should outline how to cooperate between the different professions in the youth field, explaining in what ways youth work can help the other professions. It should present the case for why youth work.
- Create a road map of alternative routes and alternative destinations in the youth work field, presenting the argument that one size does not fit all. This map will present how youth work fits into the local context and could include the bridge between formal and non-formal learning principles, and how NFL will be validated. It can consider the professional and volunteer approach and who is responsible for what in which context. It should present how youth work can be sustained and resourced. First, it can be sustained by funding for the long run and not just a political fad, and second it is sustainable in terms of using the local circumstances.
- All the projects need support through extra research that will give the evidence needed for the completion of the projects and evaluating their implementation.

10.2 Trainers

The priority, as outlined by the trainer group, was establishing a **definition of youth workers** stating who exactly is meant? Do these include paid and unpaid workers? Or are we discussing different professions? Do we define youth work in terms of the end results for young people or their input into civil society? The working definition provided by this group was:

‘Practitioners responsible for leading certain activities with young people who can be paid or unpaid peers and/or adults that do not take place in schools.’

The **aim of youth work** should not just be outcome based but should be clearly placed in terms of values and common purpose. Understanding this should determine how youth work is carried out. It is not about producing labour market fodder; the starting point should be from self-determination, autonomy and what is worthwhile for the young people themselves. This group stated that youth work is not just about delivering a programme but rather it is a learning process.

The **qualities of a youth worker** need to be clarified and the different existing information pulled together. One quality was to be a self-directed learner. Further scope needs to be clarified.

What is the European added value to youth work? needs to be explained. The group suggested that this was the possibility for ‘intercultural learning’. The European added value should be provided as a stimulant and a contribution to debates on national level. It should be clear that not all training and training opportunities on a national level are equal. At the moment there is no common language for youth work cross Europe and a glossary of terminology would be useful to create.

Indicators and standards should be agreed upon with youth workers and not be criteria imposed on them. It should be understood as a continuum and not as a minimum of skill and standards. Without understanding that learning opportunities are context specific the standards will fail.

There should be greater **cooperation** and interaction between researchers and youth work practice to give greater depth to debates in youth work. The group of youth workers appreciated that there was much to learn from exploring other non-formal sectors and sharing the good practice on defining quality standards. There should be monetary resources available for this cooperation and to enable the sharing of methodologies with interrelated fields.

10.3 Researchers

The role, skills and competencies of youth workers

Youth workers need to be aware of the responsibility and educational function they are providing. Therefore youth workers need to have the competencies of reflexivity and basic knowledge of how society works, be aware of the context in which they work, be able to listen and have dialogues with others in the youth field including research and researchers, and be able to reflect on which values they believe should be transmitted. They also need the technical ‘know how’ to be able to work with young people and what methods to use.

The role and responsibilities of research and researchers in providing better recognition of youth work need to be made clearer. This will help to facilitate a dialogue between researchers and practitioners.

The areas identified for further research were:

- learning processes
- methods to use for research on youth work
- who the young people who participate are
- describe the realities that young people face
- further research to support youth work

There is a need for the development of a youth work culture that values research (Helen Colley via the virtual community). The minimum requirement for youth workers was to have the competence to be able to use research and to be able to develop a critical perspective on it. It was seen as beneficial for youth workers to be involved in research

project with researchers, to have training in how to use research in their youth work and/or to have university qualifications.

It was proposed on the virtual community that it was equally important for researchers to involve youth workers and young people in the development and analysis of their research projects. Helen Colley reported via the virtual community a discussion about the level of youth work experience that a youth researcher needs.

'We got a message from the practitioner group that they think all researchers in the youth sector should be trained as youth workers first. I think the researcher group disagreed with this as a general principle. I disagree with it myself. I think that it would greatly improve research if we had more youth workers involved in research, and if some researchers had already had youth work training and experience- if you've worked in a particular field, you know things an 'outsider' will never know. BUT, as another researcher colleague put it, sometimes an 'outsider' sees things that an 'insider' will never notice, because it is too familiar. We need some 'Martians' to land in our world, to tell us what seems remarkable to them!!!'

Helen's conclusion was 'I think we need four kinds of researcher: academic researchers who have not been in youth work, academic researchers who have been youth workers, practicing youth workers, and young people themselves.'

It was also considered as necessary to give researchers recognition when they contribute to practice and policy. Academic recognition at the moment is given more towards researchers who focus on theory and academic publications.

Annexes:

A. Definitions

How these terms are used in the youth field (by Peter Laurantzen)

Skills	<i>Life skills</i>
Competences	<i>Social, practical, emotional and intellectual qualities seen together (empathy, solidarity, creativity, tolerance of ambiguity, analytical force, distance to milieus, being 'unshockable')</i>
Professionalisation –	<i>Always seen together with volunteers – it is said that the ratio is: one professional binds the energies of 50 volunteers</i>
Standards	<i>Agreed standards, result of a consultative and participative process</i>
Indicators	<i>Move, like on a car. Help understanding a problem better</i>
Portfolio	<i>Non-formal open curriculum construction, never completed</i>
Certification	<i>Certifying participation in NF events; these are described in detail; overview of what has been learnt</i>
Comparative approach	<i>Based on best practices, not on models</i>
Young People	<i>Not a collective but a summary expression and includes kids; 13 – 30 years (EC + CoE)</i>
Values	<i>European Convention on Human Rights, rule of law, free elections and pluralism, gender equality, social justice, minority protection, children and youth rights, access and inclusion</i>
Globalisation	<i>Acting and living together across distances, crossing the world of nation states, religions, regions and continents – all of these having been factors of separation and obstacles in the past</i>

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