



Graphic facilitation, or how to catch (wild) ideas

An interview with Siiri Taimla, Vanda Kovács, Aline Rollin and Bianca Gainus

By Gülesin Nemutlu Unal and Marlies Pöschl

At the 2nd European Youth Work Convention we had the chance to observe a remarkable trend in the behaviour of youth workers. At coffee breaks you could see clouds of people moving along the walls of the big atrium, gesturing, laughing, taking photos, pointing at the walls. But what was it that drew those people towards the walls? How could a formation of bricks enchant hundreds of participants?

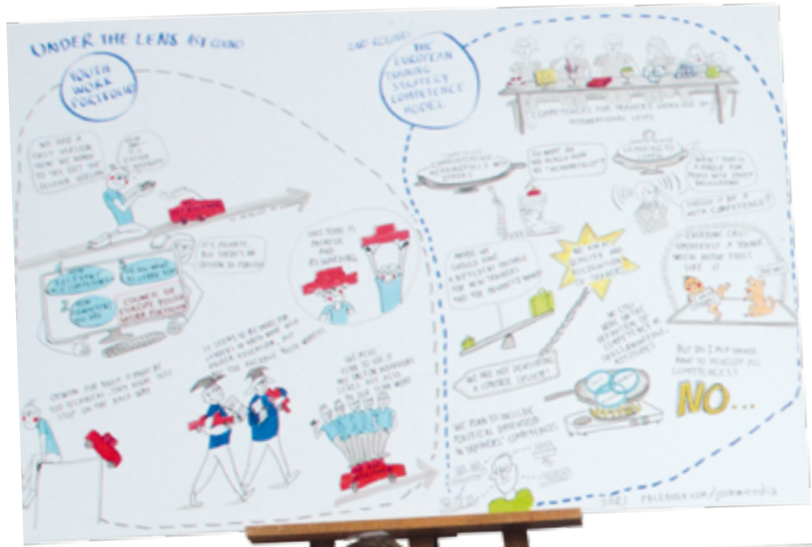


Here's the trick: Those walls were turned into a visual memory of the convention by a team of four talented graphic recorders (Siiri Taimla, Vanda Kovács, Aline Rollin and Bianca Gainus), who documented the convention with their incredibly creative, precise and hilarious drawings.

Gülesin: How do you feel about being at this convention as a graphic recorder?

Vanda: It is very difficult to answer because there are several different aspects to the question. If you just look at it as an event, it is a very well-organised, huge event. So to be a part of this is fantastic! It is a nice professional challenge. On the other hand, because this is one of the most important events of the youth field, especially at the international level, there is another great aspect to being here. And for me it is nice to record it not just through my ears and the figures of a graphic recorder but as a youth worker as well. It is good and great to listen to all the people and all the discussions about this and I have great hopes and expectations for the future.

Aline: I often work in different contexts and I like to work in events related to the youth field because people are really natural; you know they aren't playing a role, they are themselves. They really believe in what they're saying. You feel that when you are listening. It's about being spontaneous and sincere. The atmosphere can be extremely different at each event. Sometimes people have an attitude related to their job, especially in a more institutional context. They have a particular behaviour that is specific to their context. Sometimes when they look at the drawings they suddenly change their attitude. They're not even aware of that, but they suddenly become like a child again in front of the drawings. They forget who they are supposed to be at that moment.



Vanda Kovács



Siiri Taimla



Aline Rollin



Bianca Gainus

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Marlies: What's your aim as a graphic recorder at this convention?

Vanda: I believe graphic recording supports people that are part of that very particular moment. Once the workshop is over, you can summarise it on the big foam board but if you weren't there, you feel just a bit of it. You will not get a full picture like you can in a written report. Graphic recording is much more of a visual memory for those who were there and for them it helps to bring back all the things that happened there.

Aline: The style of drawing really depends on what you want to say and what you want to express. Here we have two different processes. We have snapshots which focus on situations and the big panels, which are more about catching the flow. The method I choose really depends on the aim of communication. Our aim as a team is to highlight the main themes, insights and problems, but also to highlight the atmosphere, the participants, how they get involved.



Illustration by Siiri Taimla

Gülesin: We know that you are four in the graphic recording team. Have you worked together before? And seeing that you have different styles, how do you experience this collective work?

Vanda: I think so far the work is easy going. When there are different styles in the graphic recording team, you can really focus on your own style and not feel forced to do different things. And when you have four different styles, there is a bigger chance that all the participants will be happy with one result or another. I think it is great that we can count on the fact that there will be different points of views from us. Not just the style, but I think the things that we find catchy and want to draw are different.

Süri: I have worked with Vanda before. I think it is also important that we have this shared experience on how it is to work in a team. In a team, we can really divide who is following which sessions. We can work in parallel. And I think it works well here. In plenary sessions where the four of us sit together, next to each other, one of us is responsible for the main board and the others can do the smaller drawings if they want. Such as Aline for example, she makes smaller drawings all the time; it's is her specialty.

Marlies: What is the most important or most difficult thing in graphic recording?

Bianca: I think that the most important thing is to listen actively and to catch the message, because hearing and listening are not the same. And there are people who catch an idea and start to illustrate it, but at the same time, some other ideas are flying around and they don't catch them. In order to make a good selection you actually need to catch all the ideas and select them afterwards.

Vanda: For me there are two different things. There are certain moments when I have heard a sentence and immediately I see a picture of it. That's the easy one. When I know at that moment exactly what I want to draw about this. The second one is when I hear with my brain and I know that it's important and I have to find a picture for it. And do it very quickly. Mainly these two are in a race. And on very easy days, I always have the pictures first; in the second context I really have to work to get the picture.

Süri: I think one thing that maybe applies to all of us is that if the speaker is talking inspiringly, like from his or her heart, then it is very easy to get these images. Because if it is inspiring, somehow the images bubble up. But sometimes the talk is more formal, and then you have to do more work to find these images. There are some ideas, which are like facts. You feel it is important, like Vanda said. You have to take some time to find an image for this. And sometimes you miss some ideas of what the speaker says, because when you are trying to find images, you might miss some things.

Illustration by Aline Rollin



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Gülesin: So the speaker matters...

Siiri: When the speaker speaks naturally, it helps the graphic recorder. So it is a good combination. If he or she is inspiring all through the talk, then there is a chance that you get almost all of it. And I am also very happy that here they do not use power point presentations much. This is one of the most difficult things for a graphic recorder. If the information is so condensed and the speaker speaks from the slides, it is not natural. I think, for the graphic recorder, the process here is very natural.



Illustration by Vanda Kovács



illustration by Siiri Taimla

Marlies: How much do you think it's documentary work and how much is it your own interpretation?
How do you navigate between those two poles?

Bianca: I think we are never objective enough, because everything we say is going through our filtre. So, sometimes the speakers might be emphasising certain things, but it's possible that my filtre says something else. When you know the field and have background information, it's a lot easier.

Marlies: Is there a pattern or an image that has been recurring for you at the conference? Or that has been on your mind?

Sööri: Common ground. But also standardising – fitting or not fitting into the criteria.

Vanda: What is youth work?

Bianca: For me it's the attitude: "We can do it."

Aline: Empowerment.

Marlies: How would you translate that into an image?

Bianca: Maybe Superman. Or maybe a bunch of people flying together to a star.

Aline: Yes, I think it's important to say that it's a bunch of people and that they are flying together, because the collective theme is something that we can see almost everywhere here.

Bianca: That's the most important thing to mention, when it comes to youth work – the community. In youth work we can have more Supermen, not only one, like in reality.

Aline: Everybody is a Superman. (Laughs)



Illustration by Bianca Gainus

[illegible]

From self-reflection to recognition

By Eliza Popper



Yes, **you**! I am talking to **you**! Has anyone told you lately how amazing you are? That your tireless work and all your endless efforts aren't in vain? **You** make the lives of so many others better. **You** inspire. **You** give hope. **You** make a change. Don't ever give up!

Recognising the work and efforts of others is ultimately the key to having motivated, inspired people around you, no matter if we are talking about volunteers, employees, students, participants, family members or friends. If you want to empower people around you to do their utmost best, recognise their efforts. I am sure you can recall moments in your life when you felt that your work was unappreciated and all in vain, and that no one saw or recognised the effort you put into it. You felt that maybe, just maybe, it's not even worth it and you should just give up.

Well let me tell you a secret. Recognition begins with you! You can't really expect others to recognise you without recognising your own values first. Let me guide you through a journey – a journey from self-reflection to recognition, focusing on different tools and methods to help you on the pathway to recognition. Enjoy the ride.

