



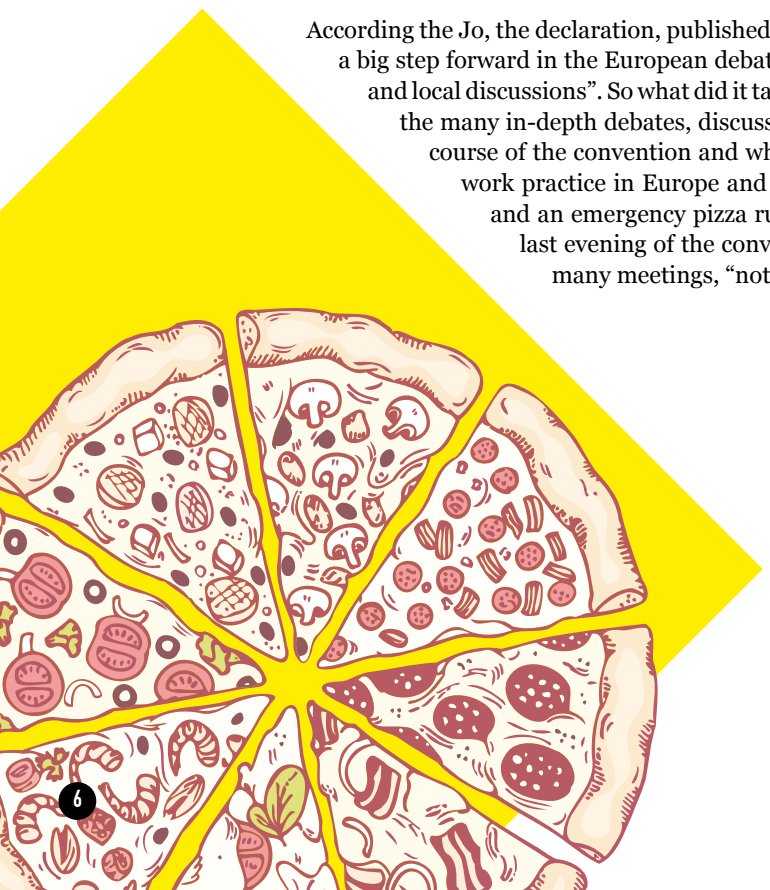
Ladies and gentlemen... we have a declaration!

Sarah Farndale interviews Jo Deman, member of the declaration editorial team and Policy Officer for Youth Work at the European Youth Forum



It was 5:16 in the morning on Thursday 30 April 2015 and, after a physically exhausting but mentally invigorating three-day marathon, the editing team put the final dot on the proverbial “i”. The Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention was a fact! It was a huge undertaking to process the input of 24 workshops and 20 project visits into one strong, coherent document that was both balanced and ambitious, but Jo Deman – member of the six-person editing team who made this their mission over the course of the three days – is convinced that they managed it!

According to Jo, the declaration, published on the final day of the convention, “brings us a big step forward in the European debate on youth work and also nourishes national and local discussions”. So what did it take to get to a final declaration that synthesises the many in-depth debates, discussions and workshops that took place over the course of the convention and which covered the length and breadth of youth work practice in Europe and beyond? Well firstly, it took a lot of caffeine and an emergency pizza run in that long overnight meeting during the last evening of the convention! But, as it was pointed out during the many meetings, “not having a declaration was not an option”.



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The declaration editorial team was made up of six people, all bringing their own expertise and reflecting the diversity of youth work itself. So what was it like to be part of the team? “There was a good atmosphere. While we didn’t always agree on everything,” says Jo, “it was a journey that we were on together to find the consensus and to get to exactly the right wording.” It seems like it was a real team effort. “While we were six different people, with most probably six different priorities, hopefully it reads as one voice: the voice of the convention.”

When it comes to the end product, Jo is proud of the work the team did. “It was a lot of work to find common ground, which can be elusive because of the huge diversity that there is in youth work. I think we did find common ground; but pinpointing exactly what youth work is was not an easy task!”

The declaration in numbers

- 3 days
- 36 hours of editorial meetings
- 6 members of the editorial team
- 6 pizzas
- too many coffees!
- one declaration:
 - > 3 200 words
 - > 8 recommendations
 - > 27 action points

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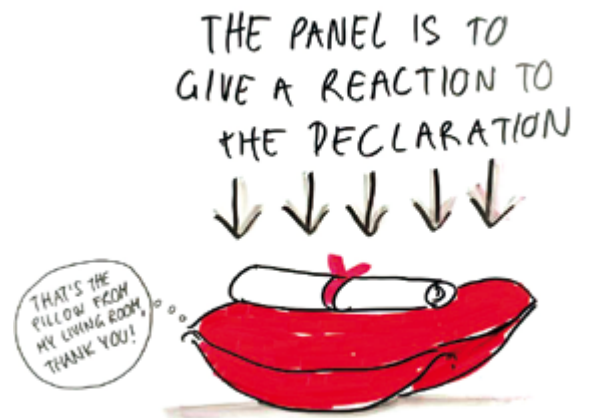


Illustration by Vanda Kovács

But what exactly is in the declaration? To start with, it aimed to acknowledge some key points of youth work. Firstly, it states that “youth work is a distinctive practice” with its own unique goals and challenges. The essence of youth work, which connects us to each other, is twofold: it creates “space” for young people and provides “bridges” in their lives. Secondly, “youth work does not stand in isolation”. Building bridges and expanding co-operation with other policy areas and sectors are essential.

Based on the practices, needs and challenges identified over the course of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention by young people, youth workers, researchers and policy makers the declaration team put forward the following eight recommendations and action points.

- ✓ **A European Agenda for Youth Work** aimed at strengthening youth work in Europe. The declaration calls for a legal basis, national strategies or binding frameworks to safeguard and further develop youth work in the member states. It also demands recognition of youth work through active promotion and advocacy by all actors in politics, the public sector and civil society.
- ✓ **Improving the quality of youth work** — The declaration calls for further discussions about a necessary set of competences, qualifications and training for youth workers. These competences must then be recognised via national strategies.
- ✓ **A knowledge-based approach to youth work** — The convention supports the consolidation of efforts to build a knowledge base for youth work in Europe.
- ✓ Youth work needs a **sufficient, sustainable and accessible system of funding** for both existing youth work practices and structures as well as funding for innovation and new forms of practice.

- ✓ **Finding common ground and a “Charter for Youth Work in Europe”** — There is a need to continue work on exploring common ground in youth work and its standards and concepts. And youth work has to reach out to those target groups which are most affected by the social situation and living conditions of young people.
- ✓ **Cross-sectoral co-operation** — There needs to be more collaborative practice with other sectors working with young people.
- ✓ **Civic dialogue** — The development of youth work can only be taken further when young people get actively involved from the beginning at all levels: European, national, regional and local.
- ✓ Finally, the convention calls on the relevant institutions to take the initiative to organise a **3rd European Youth Work Convention**.

The overarching message is about the impact that youth work has on individuals, but also on communities and society as a whole. As stated in the declaration: “Youth work is a central component of a social Europe.” While it may not be the main purpose of youth work and should not be seen as a kind of panacea to all of our society’s problems – youth work can also help to tackle some of the major problems that face society today such as unemployment and extremism. The declaration closes with the stark warning that “a failure to invest in youth work is an abdication of duty to the next generation”.

Hopes are high for the impact of the convention and its declaration. As Jo puts it: “We now have an agenda on youth work in Europe. We have the evidence of youth work’s huge impact on both the personal and societal level. Now is the time for it to be fully recognised and supported.”

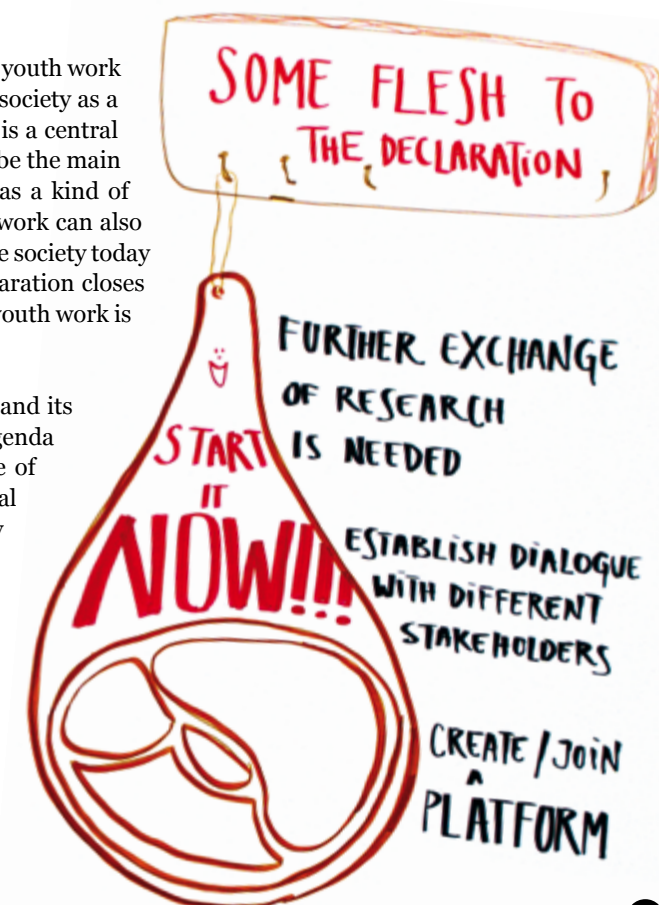


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