Introduction

Precise definitions of youth work, its contexts, influential factors and objectives are almost impossible. This is mainly because the contexts within which youth work takes place are incredibly varied, and activities undertaken by youth workers are often shared by many other professionals (Sercombe, 2010). Moreover, youth work is constantly required to adapt to the variety of new emerging social problems and such expectation is likely to generate vagueness in its conceptualisation (Morciano and Scardigno, 2014). As a working concept, youth work is often broadly understood as interventions directed towards the voluntary participation of young people, supporting them towards their personal and social development through non-formal and informal learning (European Commission, 2015).

Youth work activities are usually of a social, cultural, educational and/or political nature focused both on individuals and groups organised by, with and for young people, aiming mostly at the cultivation of associative life and the promotion of self-government experiences (Council of Europe-European Union, 2016). There is also a common agreement that youth
work has a diverse range of fields, goals, and methods of intervention (Morciano and Scardigno, 2014). In general, youth work is considered to be educative, empowering, participative, expressive and inclusive in cultivating the imagination, initiative, integration, involvement and aspiration of young people (Council of Europe-European Union, 2016).

In her paper, Bello (2016) presents a comprehensive situational analysis of the ‘refugee crisis’ in relation to some youth work in Europe. Over the last five years, more than a million of young people from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea and elsewhere fled their homelands, mainly because of violent conflicts and chronic poverty, to seek asylum in some European countries. For instance, more than 35,000 unaccompanied minors arrived in Sweden during 2015 (Swedish Migration Board, 2016). This represents about 40% of all unaccompanied young people applying for asylum in Europe during 2015 (Ibid). Indeed, the recent flow of young refugees through Europe calls for extra attention, resources and planning for youth work in transit and receiving countries.

It is clear that most young refugees face multiple ‘internal and external’ challenges, namely: from the refugee experience itself, in their personal growth and development and concerning integration and settlement in their new environment (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2005). Given that youth work is based on the principles of inclusiveness and participation, efforts and effective strategies are needed for the social integration of young refugees in and by means of youth activities. The United Nations (1995) broadly defines social integration as a process in fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for
diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all people. Social integration is particularly seen as a two-way process where the support providers and the support receivers have to interact and participate in designing the process and activities.

This paper conceptualising youth work with young refugees draws on some specific approaches to work dealing with youth in trauma, conflict management and skills for life deliverable in non-formal educational settings, and indicates that such approaches should be put in place to support integration. It has been prepared in support of current youth work provision and is intended to shape and design responses to be delivered in the non-formal youth-centred setting. Future delivery of responses may also be useful to strengthen clinical and social services currently provided for adolescent unaccompanied minors and lead to strengthening and integration of case management practice all along the migrant route.

A Framework for Youth Work Interventions

Quality youth work is based on sound theories and trusted methods. A theory provides knowledge and explanation on what is happening/going to happen and why; and, a method helps in designing a model of intervention and practice. Eco-social work can be considered as both a theory and a method for youth work. Eco-social work originates from the application of systems theoretical thinking in practice. A system is usually defined as a collection of units that interact with each other to form a collective whole. Within youth work, the notion of systems can be understood as collections of interrelated individuals, families, political agents, schools, youth clubs, faith communities, parks, playgrounds and so on that form a web of
interactions to contribute to the make-up of society as a whole. An eco-social work model has a holistic view by considering people and their social environment as well as the bio-physical environment in processes of mutual reciprocity and complementary exchanges of resources (Matthies, Turunen, Albers, Boeck and Närhi, 2000). A critical perspective of eco-social reiterates the argument that bio-physical environmental problems are connected to social problems, social inequality, and social changes at the global and local levels (Matthies et. al. 2000; Rambaree 2013).

An eco-social work theoretical perspective recognises that human health and wellbeing (including social sustainability) is to a large extent dependent on the bio-physical environment. Essentially, an eco-social orientation is based on the argument that both the ecological and the social are inextricably related and cannot be considered in isolation from one another (Rambaree and Ahmadi, In Press). Eco-social work approach therefore not only focuses on the social environment of human beings but also on the natural, bio-physical environment in enhancing human well-being. In particular, this approach makes maximum use of natural resources and supports available within the human natural, bio-physical environment to enhance human wellbeing and functioning.

For eco-social work to be useful framework for youth work interventions, it needs to be based on the following core values, among others: Holism, Cultural Competence and Human Rights and Social Justice (As depicted in Figure 1).
Holism

A holistic approach (with social, economic, civic, politic, cultural, ecological dimensions) to youth work is highly recommended by the European Commission (European Commission, 2015). A holistic approach recognises that youth development is influenced by, such as, the social, economic, political, environmental realities surrounding the young people (Fletcher, 2014). Given the complexities surrounding human societies, holistic youth work needs to strive for the broadest possible understanding on the young refugees’ situation and then direct multi-dimensional efforts towards responding to their needs (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2003). Youth work in promoting the health and wellbeing of the refugees therefore need to be based holistic initiatives and responses. Holistic approach to youth work demands for multi-disciplinary team work.

For instance, with regards to facilitating the adaptation of refugees to their new environment in the recipient country, a holistic approach to youth work needs to focus on both the social and the bio-physical environment. Current discourses lack focus on youth work facilitating
the adaptation of the young refugees in their new bio-physical environment. Adaption to the new bio-physical environment is much more than just getting used to the climate and the geography. Refugees are often considered as being ‘uprooted and transplanted’ with a broken tie to their own natural bio-physical environment (Hammond, 2004). Their holistic development needs support their flourishing through the ecological resources available in their new bio-physical environment. In this sense, Ungar (2011: 1) posits that, “greater emphasis needs to be placed on the role social and physical ecologies play in positive developmental outcomes when individuals encounter significant amounts of stress”. For instance, youth work with refugees could consider ‘EcoWellness’ model that provides a basis for integrating nature into the counselling process to enhance holistic wellness (Reese & Myers, 2012).

Cultural Competence

Council of Europe-European Union (2016) makes the following declaration in the European Youth Work Convention 2015:

“Critical practice elements for youth work include enabling young people to explore and build their own identities, attuning communication and information to culture and family contexts, and fostering inclusion while respecting cultural traditions and differences”. (p.5-6)

Further, sound knowledge about any specific group or population, such as refugees, is a necessary prerequisite for culturally competent youth work at every level from individuals, to groups, organizations, communities, state and national and international policies and programmes (Rothman, 2008). In this sense, the Council of Europe (2011) states:
“cultural competences encompass an ability to acquire, use and make changes in culture and are therefore of vital importance in order for diverse cultures in Europe to flourish, and for their richness to be preserved and protected”. (p.2)

Cultural competence in youth work today certainly includes understanding of refugees from a socio-cultural perspective. Although culture can be seen as a container concept, it is commonly understood as a system of interrelated beliefs, values and practices that influence and condition perception, judgment, communication, and behaviour (Airhihenbuwa, 1995). In particular, cultural competence moves beyond concepts of “cultural awareness” - knowledge about a particular group primarily gained through reading or studies; and “cultural sensitivity” - knowledge as well as some level of experience with a group other than one’s own (Advocates of Youth, 1994). It is defined as “the ability of individuals and systems to work or respond effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served” (Williams, 2001:1).

Among others, cultural competence in youth work needs an awareness of diversity among human beings, an ability to support and care for individuals/groups having different cultural background and orientation, non-judgmental openness in interactions, and most importantly recognise the enhancement of cultural competence as a long term continuous process (Jirwe, Gerrish, Emami, 2006). Cultural competence is enhanced by adopting a reflective practice in youth work. Reflective practice which is broadly defined as making reflection in, on, and about youth work situation/s and intervention/s, is crucial in the process of enhancing quality of work through critical thinking and reasoning. Promoting reflective practice for enhancing cultural competence in youth work will strengthen the knowledge base, improve practice and broaden the voices that inform policy (Herman, 2012).
In relation to this, Emslie (2009: 417) opines that, “given the fundamental role of reflective practice in youth work, it is surprising the development of youth workers’ ability to critically reflect has received so little formal attention”.

**Human Rights & Social Justice**

Human rights and social justice are fundamental to youth work with refugees. Human rights and social justice often goes hand in hand. For instance, Wronka (2017) considers human rights as the bedrock for social justice. Human rights frameworks ensure that all people, including young refugees, have the opportunity to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy an adequate standard of living and well-being (European Youth Forum, 2016). Under the influences of globalisation and migration, a most pressing challenge for youth work in European countries is to find means for addressing racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious and other diversities utilising a human rights and social justice perspective. In this sense, McDaniel (n.d.) believes:

“The field of youth work needs to shift its focus away from prevention/intervention and positive youth development models to one that examines the complex social, economic and political forces that affect the lives of young people and adults. Social and economic patterns of racism, sexism, classism and homophobia are some of the main problems confronting youth today.” (p.41)

In particular, the concept social justice allows for a broader understanding of freedom from oppression, exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence of vulnerable groups such as the refugees. As a concept social justice is valueless unless youth work have clear practical orientations towards its use for achieving emancipation/liberation of the marginalised, vulnerable individuals/groups from injustices and
oppressive agencies, forces as well as structures (Morgaine, 2014). Young people are often engaged in issues such as human rights and social justice – for example, getting involved in campaigns for peace, for ending poverty and resolving conflicts in their communities and so on (Lemos and Crane, 2006). Within the context of youth work with refugees, there is therefore clearly an incentive to practice human rights based participatory approaches, in which the young refugees together with their peers from the host country can act as contributors to youth programmes.

Some areas for youth work from eco-social work perspective

Trauma

Among newly arrived refugees, individual profiles and life stories of young people vary, while opportunities and key encounters are not the same for everyone (UNHCR and Council of Europe, 2014). Indeed, personal strength and past trauma differ from one person to another. However, recent studies confirm that most young refugees have more mental health problems, and are highly at risk of developing mental illnesses than their non-refugee counterparts (Hollander et al, 2016). Unaccompanied minors during their journey may suffer traumatic events that affect both physical and mental health. In fact, the existence of mental illness in unaccompanied children is the rule rather than the exception. For instance, a Norwegian study with 160 unaccompanied minors showed that 82% had experience of traumatic events and that 41.9% met Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) criteria (Jakobsen, Dermott and Heir, 2014).

Many of them have been exposed to chronically stressful family environments and further complex trauma. Such experiences affect young people’s biological and
cognitive development, their ability to self-regulate emotions, behaviours and impulses and their self-esteem and confidence (Cook et al., 2005). Previous studies confirmed that unaccompanied young people show a high frequency of psychiatric symptoms upon arrival into the receiving country (Hessle, 2009). It is also known that Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) is strongly associated with adulthood-associated high-risk health behaviours such as smoking, alcohol and other drug abuse, promiscuity, severe obesity, and correlated with ill-health including depression, heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease and shortened lifespan (Felitti et al, 1998; Murphy et al, 2015; Steele et al, 2016).

Many young people tell of beatings, abuse, rape and torture, to having witnessed violent events of the same nature (UNICEF, 2016). Some young people suppress their emotions following traumatic experiences (Nickerson et al, 2016) and studies by Goran Bodegård, describe how in the most severe cases young people develop different disabling symptoms that go under the term "Pervasive Refusal Syndrome", which briefly means refusal to communicate (Bodegård, 2005). These symptoms are derived from severe trauma, lack of meaningful activity and poor belief in the future.

According to studies, research and experience mentioned above it is easy to understand that it is a great challenge for a community to receive and be responsible for a large group of young people with potential complex trauma experience. For instance, in 2016 Sweden received the equivalent of a third of its own youth population as unaccompanied minors aged 15-18 years old (Swedish Migration Board, 2016). There is a need for models to support those institutions taking care of young refugees, and methodologies to heal the suffering of those being traumatized. There is a need for
new approaches to youth work based on existing trauma research. A possible youth work intervention can be based on ‘The Three Pillars’ framework that builds on the understanding that much of the healing from exposure to chronic stress and trauma can and does take place in non-clinical settings (Bath, 2015). The Three Pillars’ framework is based on: Safety - to feel safe, Connections - to enhance good relations in life, and Coping - help finding better or more functional coping strategies (Ibid). In fact, healing relationships need not always involve psychotherapy, as many people recover from trauma exposure without seeking professional assistance processing and resolving their injuries in the context of family, friendship, and other relationships (Briere and Lanktree, 2012).

**Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights including to Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

As they transit from childhood to adulthood, adolescents (defined as persons aged 10 to 19 years) normally experience puberty and sexual development alongside neuro-psychological processes closely associated with risk-taking. At the same time, the influence of adult role models and structured community groups (cultural, peers, religious bodies) generally establishes or reinforces social norms, both positive and negative, with consequences for identity construction, well-being and health including sexual health.

World Health Organisation (WHO, 2010) defines sexual health as:

“Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual
health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled”. (p.3)

Recent studies have highlighted the unmet sexual and reproductive health and rights of young refugees (Sudbury & Robinson, 2016). However, little attention has been given in sexual health and rights discourses on the sexuality of young refugees within a normative step in relationship pathways that include experimentation/dating/romantic/sexual/ partnerships. Within youth work it is vital to acknowledge young refugees as sexual beings having the same rights as ‘non-refugee’ youth. Many young refugees do not get organised support to learn about sexuality and sexual relationships. As a growing adult, young refugees need to establish dating/romantic/sexual relationships which form parts of basic human relationships and fulfil their basic human needs to have age appropriate sexual interactions/activities. Ignoring young refugees’ sexual rights which form parts of basic human rights can have severe consequences of the all human beings. Recent sexual violence in Germany and Sweden, which gained so much media attention and resulted in rising hostility toward refugees, is perhaps a consequence of neglecting basic life skills support as a vehicle for addressing the sexual health of young refugees (Davis & Vidler, 2016).

During such humanitarian emergencies as Europe is currently facing, family and social structures of the adolescents are largely disrupted, while formal and informal education is discontinued. Despite the human capacity for resilience, community and social networks break down in times of large-scale population movement. Vulnerable groups including children (defined as under-18 years of age) and adolescents face the additional risks of being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence when fleeing armed conflict and seeking
protection and asylum. Family members are often dispersed during flight, leaving children isolated from the rest of their families as unaccompanied minors.

Unmet needs remain significant, due to acute accommodation and shelter weaknesses and unfamiliarity on the part of humanitarian actors concerning the specific aspects of adolescent health and development. The loss of livelihood, security and the protection provided by family and community places adolescents at many risks. A number of adolescents, both boys and girls, including younger ones, experience sexual attack, coercion, extortion by persons in authority (UNICEF, 2016). Sexual abuse of separated children in foster care, domestic violence, sexual assault when in transit facilities or while collecting food, water, fuel and other resources is reported. Recourse to sex for survival, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation in the country of asylum or in transit, with or without the complicity of family is undertaken often in expectation of access to assistance and resources. Resumption of harmful traditional practices affecting the health of children and adolescents is also regrettably noticed in situations of displacement (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2015).

Young refugees, though often resilient, need the support of life-skills delivered through non-formal educational methods. The lack of access to education and information, the disruption or inaccessibility of health services and commodities, and the increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse as well as high-risk sexual behaviours during emergencies, puts adolescents at risk. Risks include of unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, STIs and HIV infection and resort to selling sex to meet their own or their families’ needs. Essential protection services are still lacking, and while the ones that exist such as the UN Blue Dot protection facilities for children and mothers do assist in prevention and response to Gender Based Violence, identification and assistance to persons with specific needs and access to
legal information and solutions (UNHCR, 2016), they are not directed towards adolescents. Cultural differences, language barriers, unfamiliarity for the vocabulary of intimacy and economic and other forms of vulnerability in their host country also limit adolescent migrants’ (especially males) ability to have their specific health needs addressed adequately and complicate their access to appropriate health information, commodities and services.

**Conclusion and Call for partnership**

Quality youth work not only requires sound theories and practical methodologies, but also sustainable partnership with committed principles for the welfare of all in the planet. In current situation, youth work needs to play its vital role in creating unity in diversity in Europe through partnership with other stakeholders. The rise of hate and fear need to be dissipated through collaborative youth actions. Violence towards volunteers and caregivers, for complex reasons including radicalisation, need to be peacefully tackled. In the context of the current migrant and refugee displacement into Europe, adolescents subjected to or perpetrators of GBV, sexual exploitation and abuse may become, inter alia, drawn in to violent extremism either through peer-pressure, criminal gangs or the outreach of militant groups. Hate crime is the most severe expression of discrimination, and a core fundamental rights abuse and a shameful act.

Within this context, we - a team of University of Gävle - would like to invite partnership in the following project-based youth action research and initiatives:

1. **Youth Upcycling Project**
Young people have a huge stake in sustainable development, not only as consumers but also as producers, decision makers and main labour force for the future. Therefore, their personal wellbeing is of prime importance to the society; and, their involvement within the process of sustainable development is vital. In this sense, projects/programmes, such as the ‘Upcycling project’, that promote healthy youth development and the participation of young people in sustainable development initiatives are crucial for any society. Upcycling is commonly defined as the reuse of waste products in a new way without degrading the material it is made from. It is based on the principle that junk can be re-used for creating new products of high value and design. The project ‘Upcycling’ will have an innovative approach to health and work-life promotion. It will be based on core components of eco-social work such as social solidarity, sustainability, and holism. It will be a space for bringing together young people from a range of diverse backgrounds (including Refugees) together under one roof (incubators). The idea behind such initiative is to provide a health and work-life supporting environment in a holistic and non-stigmatising manner within an inclusive environment. For example, an upcycling incubator will not only provide training, empowerment services for developing entrepreneurship skills and enhancement of employability; but, it will also provide health support/enhancing services. Such project will therefore require input from a multi-disciplinary team with social workers, clinical psychologists, career guidance workers, project administrators, engineers, designers, expert workers in wood, metal, clothing, plastic, organic materials and so on.

2. Equine-Assisted Reflective Activities

Horses are believed to have certain distinct emotional and caring characteristics that make them suitable for human health promotion. In particular, it is argued that horses have an ability to provide social support which act as a stress buffer that generates long lasting
benefits for people. Such practice is essential in supporting people with mental health vulnerabilities. As such equine’s characteristics alone do not foster gains for clients; and therefore EEA service providers need to be supported so that they can help their clients to engage in reflective activities for enhancing health and well-being. In this project, a 10-steps equine-assisted reflective activities is being planned as a project-based action research with young refugees. The activities will start after the young refugees have learn certain basic horse riding skills. The young people participating in this project are also part of the research team.

3. Community Gardening: Sharing Wisdom, Culture and Love

This project is for promoting the social integration and adaptation of young refugees through community gardening and eco-therapeutic activities with the help and support of elders (retired/pensioners). Elders usually carry a lot of wisdom regarding the bio-physical environment. Bringing young refugees and elders together in community gardening project will create opportunities for persons from diverse backgrounds to become acquainted and form relationships, thereby dissipating fear, uncertainties and stereotypes about each other. Eco-therapeutic activities are well suited for a number of vulnerable individuals and groups who may derive a variety of wellbeing benefits from such activities.

4. Life Skills Programme for Unaccompanied Adolescents, Refugees & Migrants

This project is about non-formal life skills support for youth along the migration path towards the host country in Europe. The outline of a 10-sessions life skills educational curriculum is as follow:

MODULE 1: Know and Understand Self
- Session 1.1: Health/Hygiene/Self-care
- Session 1.2: Emotions
- Session 1.3: Coping with Stress

MODULE 2: Know and Understand Others
- Session 2.1: Identity/Values
- Session 2.2: Sex and Sexuality
- Session 2.3: Healthy Relationships (Interpersonal/Community)/Power

MODULE 3: Know and Understand Society
- Session 3.1: Communicating Respect/Social Engagement/Cultural Awareness
- Session 3.2: Planning
- Session 3.3: Wild Card, Adolescent Select

MODULE 4: The Big Picture/Making Connections

References


Council of Europe (2011) Council conclusions on cultural and creative competences and
their role in building intellectual capital of Europe


