

NARRATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ASSESMENT OF THE REPORT

Short description

- This book is the culmination of an Erasmus+ funded project which aimed to independently identify the impact of youth work in the UK (England), Finland, Estonia, Italy and France.
- It applied a participatory evaluation methodology entitled 'transformative evaluation' which collated young people's own accounts of the impact of youth work on their lives – collecting their stories. Over 700 stories were collected in total over a year long process;
- commenced in February 2016 and had three distinct phases, each enhanced by an Erasmus-funded 'transnational learning activity',¹ which was a week-long training event:
 - Training phase, February 2016 – August 2016;
 - Implementation phase, September 2016 – August 2017;
 - Analysis phase, September 2017 – August 2018.
- The book is in two sections:
 - Section 1 begins with a chapter providing the background to European youth work policy and argues that the EU and the Council of Europe have played an important part in defining youth work across a broad spectrum of member states. However, it has also been quite explicit in its policy priorities such as increasing employability and social inclusion, as well as more recently in its focus on combating extremism;
 - Section 2 focuses exclusively on the findings of the project. After a brief introduction to the approach taken in the analysis of findings there are five distinct chapters focusing on the findings from each of the five countries;
- There was considerable coordination of the project in the initial establishment and implementation stages (for example, through the first and second transnational learning activities and the production of a training manual). However, the countries operated autonomously, and in particular the analysis was done independently

On the methodology

The methodology involved a year-long process of story collection in the group's respective organisations, through three separate cycles of transformative evaluation. The project coordinators and lead youth workers from each of the youth work organisations attended a second transnational learning activity in Helsinki and Tallinn in February 2018, to share their reflections on the implementation process and learn any lessons for the second and third cycles. The group was composed by youth workers as follows: four of the countries (the UK, Finland, Italy and France) three youth work organisations were enrolled as Erasmus partners, and lead youth workers from each of those organisations coordinated the collection of stories in their organisations. In Estonia the youth work partners were national umbrella youth work organisations, and they coordinated the collection of stories across four regions of Estonia.

! Special element of this report: a chapter on transformative evaluation methodology (p.101)

On the results

- The report gives an exploration of the notion "youth work", as an ongoing debate;
- Definitions on youth work (mentioned as most recent):
 - Youth work engages with young people on their terms and on their 'turf', in response to their expressed and identified needs, in their own space or in spaces created for youth work practice. (EU/Council of Europe, 2015: 4);
 - Commonly understood as a tool for personal development, social integration and active citizenship of young people. Youth work is a 'keyword' for all kinds of activities with, for and by young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature. It belongs to the domain of 'out-of-school' education, most commonly referred to as either non-formal or informal

learning. The main objective of youth work is to create opportunities for young people to shape their own futures. (Council of Europe, 2015: 7);

- Youth work takes place in the extra-curricular area, as well as through specific leisure time activities, and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes and on voluntary participation. These activities and processes are self-managed, co-managed or managed under educational or pedagogical guidance by either professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and can develop and be subject to changes caused by different dynamics.
- Youth work is organised and delivered in different ways (by youth-led organisations, organisations for youth, informal groups or through youth services and public authorities), and is given shape at local, regional, national and European level, dependent for example on the different elements p. 23:24);
- Youth work – which complements formal education settings – can offer considerable benefits for children and young people by providing a wide and diverse range of non-formal and informal learning opportunities as well as appropriate targeted approaches. Youth work invites young people to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions by giving them an active role in its development and implementation. Youth work can provide a comfortable, safe, inspirational and pleasant environment, in which all children and young people, either as individuals or as part of a group, can express themselves, learn from each other, meet each other, play, explore and experiment. (European Commission 2010, OJ C 327/2);
- Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making. (C of E, 2017)
- Youth work on the policy "radar"
 - (p.22): The Youth for Europe programme, in its second phase, shall comprise a range of incentive measures to promote the development of Youth Exchanges and Mobility in the Community. The measures are directed at young people (normally of 15 to 25 years of age), as well as youth organisations, youth workers, public authorities, non-governmental organisations and all other bodies active in promoting youth exchanges or mobility. (Commission 1990, OJ C 308, 7);
 - Taken together, legislation provides a basis to not only regulate the sector in terms of youth work provision, but in some cases to provide the necessary funding mechanisms for the delivery of services and to serve as a tool for the recognition of the work that is undertaken within the youth work arena. (EC, 2014: 92);
 - (p.28) Clearly the funding structures and supporting policies of European institutions have assisted the development of youth work, and they are shaping both what youth work is and what goals it should reach, within broadly established European ideals
 - Together with families and with other professionals, youth work can help deal with unemployment, school failure, and social exclusion, as well as provide leisure time. It can also increase skills and support the transition from youth to adulthood. (European Commission 2009, 40);
 - (p. 28) Within this policy climate it is imperative that a bottom-up process is initiated whereby youth work and youth workers become a driving force within the development of youth work across Europe. It is up to youth workers to create their 'image', and continue to define youth work on its own terms as well as begin to set limits on how much influence from 'Europe' will be accepted

Youth work in England (Chapter 2, p.32)

- Looking back:
 - dominance of voluntary organisations continued, and provision was confined to the uniformed troops and brigades and the more informal youth club settings which they had pioneered, supplemented by the occasional shortterm residential event
 - important: the Albemarle Committee published in 1960 by the Ministry of Education. Set up by the then Conservative government, in part because of its doubts about the capacity of the 'traditional' voluntary sector to respond innovatively enough to the new, less deferential 'teenager', the report's forty-four recommendations were accepted by the Minister of Education. The implementation of this report was different in England, Scotland, Northern-Ireland and Wales;
 - youth workers would never work with under-8s as this would be the jurisdiction of those trained separately to work with 'early years'. New Labour narrowed youth work to 13 to 19 years, extended to 24 years in some circumstances.
- In England, and also for some years in Wales, the Albemarle Committee had a substantial and lasting legacy
 - the report supported a distinctive young person-centred 'social education' which assumed young people's voluntary engagement in leisure facilities offering enjoyable forms of 'association', especially with peers, as well as 'challenging' activities and programmes;
 - also advocated support for young people's 'self-programming' groups – a recommendation which, while never being implemented as the Committee had envisaged, nonetheless during the 1960s helped to prompt some 'experimental' detached work projects;
 - the dominant social democratic ideology of the time, advocated strongly that the state, both national and local, should take an active role not only in funding youth work facilities but also in directly providing them, as well as the policy-making and managerial structures needed to support and develop them;
 - instigating a national network of qualifying courses for youth work, which in the ensuing decades moved from offering one- and then two-year diplomas to awarding three-year degrees.
- a Conservative government brought a profoundly significant shift in policy, from one underpinned by social democracy to one defined by Neo-Liberalism. Youth work increasingly found itself required to focus on national government priorities, which at that time of very high youth unemployment concerned keeping young people in education and jobs, or supporting youth training schemes and dealing with what was perceived to be young people's 'anti-social behaviour';
- the "new labour", in 1997, brought youth work back in the spotlights, with a new statement on youth work: offers quality advice, enables the voice of young people to be heard, provides a rich diversity of personal and social development opportunities and promotes intervention and prevention to address ... disaffection and exclusion';
- but soon this new deal developed very "instrumental" for governments :
 - "it introduced an instrumentalised form of practice emphasising programmes which led to pre-defined outcomes", introducing 'integrated' youth work into multi-disciplinary teams whose overriding priority in the wake of a series of tragic child abuse scandals was the safeguarding of children and young people;
 - young people's voluntary participation and the negotiated educational and developmental process were increasingly disregarded, to be replaced by a simplistic conception of the role of 'positive activities' in the lives of young people;
 - choose to promote a form of 'personalised support' for young people deemed to have 'serious problems' (such as NEETs – young people not in education, employment or training – teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol problems, anti-social behaviour etc.);

- Youth Matters, like many of its predecessors, operated from ‘deficit model’ of young people;
- the National Citizen Service is the government’s ‘flagship’ since 2010, a four week ‘course’ specifically aimed at bringing together 15-to-17-yearold young people from different classes and ethnic backgrounds in a residential experience and a local volunteering project;
- Youth Workers in the UK, particularly as a result of New Labour’s step change in integrated working, increasingly find themselves working with a number of other professional fields that also work or have contact with young people?
- On evaluation and measurements:
 - A strong focus on “outcomes” (both conservatives and Labour): the need for youth work to be accountable for its outcomes; it also stipulated what these outcomes ought to be – specific, tangible and measurable, and often linked to young people’s employability;
 - A Committee report of the Parliament described “the continuing problem facing the youth work field, namely that it had ‘great difficulty in finding objective evidence of the impact of services’, and declared itself ‘frustrated in (its) efforts to uncover a robust outcome measurement framework’” and “the kinds of open access youth work which had been developed in the UK for nearly a century thus came to be judged as unable to meet such crucial tests of efficiency, effectiveness – and ‘success’”
- Effects of the EU-youth policy: little if any influence on the development of youth work in the UK.

Youth work in Finland (chapter 3, p.49)

- In Finland there are now around 1,100 youth facilities funded by the municipalities, and 3,000 professional youth workers on the payroll of the municipalities (Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, 2016);
- Since the 1990s the emphasis on comprehensive youth policies and youth policy plans as universal instruments to provide better opportunities for all young people was gradually replaced by political pressures to focus on youth at risk: ‘social empowerment’ was a key priority of youth work;
- Overall, youth work in Finland is characterised by:
 - strong public funding for youth organisations and a respect for their independence,
 - strong municipal youth services, which, however, vary according to the size of the municipalities,
 - well-resourced open access and cultural youth work,
 - focus on children (7–15 years old).
- Recent developments on local youth work:
 - developments in digital youth work – working with young people on the internet, including online youth clubs;
 - the local authority shall have a youth guidance and service network with representation from the local educational, social and health care, and youth administrations and from the labour and police administrations; An increase of youth work targeted at young people with fewer opportunities

Measurement & evaluation:

- in Finland commitment to youth work has traditionally been value-based, not outcomes-based;
- Accountability mechanisms are to a large extent absent in Finland. Municipal youth services support and fund local youth organisations and the Youth NGOs, they must report back on the use of such funds;
- At a national level in Finland various measures are used to assess the living conditions and aspirations of young people;
- On EU:
 - A tension towards the often “neo-liberal” choices of the EU;

- policies and measures focusing on 'youth at risk' are often promoted to the detriment of a reduction in universal services based on active citizenship, cultural innovation, tolerance, solidarity etc

Youth Work in Estonia (chapter 4, p.63)

- After the restoration of independence in 1991 (the end the Soviet domination), a process of restructuring youth work started with the aim to transform and modernise it into a system to meet the needs of an independent state;
- Key factors of youth work practice:
 - Hobby education and activities – extracurricular activities in young people's spare time;
 - Youth organisations constitute an important sector of youth work. As of 2017, there are more than sixty youth associations and organisations in Estonia. Their size varies;
 - Youth Councils constitute a special form of youth organisation and are currently given a high priority. Starting from 2018, there will be two types of youth council in Estonia: student councils in schools and colleges, and local youth councils in municipalities;
 - Youth centres, which operate on the basis of open youth work, are a relatively new phenomenon – majority of visitors 10-15 years (aiming for a wider target group). At the moment 263 "open" youth centres;
 - Targeted Youth Work with At-Risk Groups has become a growing area of youth work in Estonia in the last five years. This corresponds to an increasing focus on youth antisocial behaviour and crime prevention;
 - Information, Advice, Guidance and Counselling is another significant strand of youth work in Estonia (2016: 23 county and local-level information and counselling centres);
 - In 2016, there were twenty-six licensed permanent youth camps in Estonia (EYWC, 2017iii), as well as many other non-permanent or project camps;
 - Work Education Programmes can vary and respond to the target group and local situation, but the most common method is the 'youth brigade' – a youth summer project camp that combines a vacation with work;
- Measurement & evaluation:
 - In 2010 the Estonian Youth Work Centre, together with Ernst & Young, developed a youth work quality monitoring and assessment model, which provided a methodology for carrying out youth work self-assessments in municipalities and at a local level;
 - Estonian Youth Work Centre has commissioned research on different aspects of youth work evaluation and published the results of the research in the annual Estonian Youth Monitoring Yearbook;
 - Estonia was a founding member of the international Consortium of National Agencies for the monitoring the implementation of European 'Youth in Action' programmes (2006–2013) and now Erasmus+ Youth in Action (2014–2020):
- On European Youth work policy:
 - Since joining the EU, Estonia has embraced its policy direction;
 - The implementation of public policy initiatives in the youth field and youth work have also been influenced by European funding;
 - both government ministries and youth work organisations have started to import a variety of targeted youth work programmes from other countries;
 - Youth, Youth in Action, now Erasmus+ have been influential in Estonia, notably through the training and development of youth workers, the development of youth policy and youth work, as well as improving the quality of services offered to young people.

Youth work in Italy (Chapter 5, p.74)

- Key elements:

- The term 'youth work' has limited currency in Italy, and is not explicitly recognised within public or policy discourse;
- Youth work was strongly dominated by political parties & ideologies;
- From the 1980s ideological or religious pluralism gradually became widely accepted, but this merely compounded the difficulties in establishing a common, shared understanding about the principles of youth work practice, but with a tendency to limit the education of young people in critical thinking – and the promotion of freedom of choice – replacing it by an adherence to specific religious or political ideology;
- youth work in Italy is that practice tends to reflect the interests of the youth work organisation, not necessarily that of the young person. This problem is further compounded by the insecure foundations of 'professional' youth work;
- Much of the 'youth work' practice in these early youth centres predominantly focused on the prevention and control of 'perceived' youth problems;
- followed by a new progressive era of youth policy at the turn of the century, which was more emancipatory and youth-led, allied to the widespread construction of new youth centres across the country;
- the Framework Programme Agreements (APQ) of 2006, new youth policy interventions began to build upon principles of cooperation between central government, regions and organisations operating in the youth sector;
- The ongoing challenge for these new youth centres is that of breaking away from a dependence on public funding through the diversification of financial resources;
- The lack of national support for 'youth work' in Italy includes a lack of public recognition or regulation of the specific professional role of the youth worker or the youth informal educator;
- The religious or faith-based sector remains a key player in Italian youth work. This is dominated by the Catholic educational spaces known as 'parish oratories', in which religious education is combined with recreational activities and initiatives in social volunteering;
- In the secular sector the Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (ARCI, 2017) is one of the largest national networks of cultural spaces engaged on a political and social level, while implementing the 'Giovani in circolo' project for the creation of a network of clubs run by young people under 35 years of age.
- Measurement and evaluation / influence of EU:
 - The recent government initiatives to create new youth work centres and the brief attempt to formulate a national youth policy were unable to generate sufficient momentum to create a strong identity for youth work in Italy;
 - despite a number of projects supported by these European Union programmes, in Italy there is still no specific national public policy or programme with the specific purpose to develop youth work professionals, services, practices or evaluation;
 - Despite the lack public national support, training projects for professional youth workers have started to be implemented at local level;
 - an emerging trend for the creation of new spaces both for and with young people, where coaching, tutoring or mentoring is provided to help young people in the implementation of a project in a career-related sphere (such as business creation), in their leisure time (such as developing a hobby or interest) or social commitment (such as volunteering);
 - despite the insufficient professional recognition of youth workers, there is some recognition of the pluralistic 'youth work' provision within the Third Sector, although this seems to have failed to encourage either the development of a common professional base for youth workers or a tradition of evaluation or research on youth work outcomes or methods.

Youth work in France (Chapter 6, p. 86)

- General context:

- the literal translation for youth work is 'generally considered as not applying to the French context';
- Young people in France are broadly regarded as being between 11 and 29 years of age;
- three major ensembles of practitioners, recognised as youth workers: animateurs, éducateurs spécialisés and niche players;
- two distinctive features of French youth policy may be highlighted: (1) Enduring State support for the existence of a recognizable professional workforce composed of two dominant groups regarded as 'in need or likely to cause trouble', and the majority who are perceived as 'ordinary young people'. It is the role of animateurs, administered through Youth and Sports, to engage with mainstream youth, whereas the role of éducateurs spécialisés, administered through the Ministry of Health and Social Care, is to respond to the needs of young people causing serious trouble or with major developmental or social problems. Overlapping missions assigned to both professions may include prevention work to curb anti-social behaviour and unrest in deprived neighbourhoods and priority areas. On the whole, policy control over welfare and social care issues is much tighter than it is over the Youth and Sports sector; the former also tends to have a higher status and professional recognition. (2) Increasing role of central-government in setting the broad legal parameters/frameworks with responsibility for control and accreditation procedures. exercising significant indirect influence on policy orientations and the voluntary sector through targeted programmes and incentive funding;
- the influence and power of the voluntary sector has been receding, although a long-standing tradition of networking and lobbying has allowed the more powerful organisations to retain some influence;
- Local governments (mainly city councils and municipalities) have become key players although they have never actually had a statutory duty to secure recreational or educational activities and services for young people outside of formal education and social care;
- an increasing theme has been a shift from animation to insertion - French professional youth work was encouraged to develop forms of practice where 'problematic' people were divided from 'normal' people';
- Key features of practice:
 - animation is a blanket term covering a wide range of professional activities: animation sociale, animation socioculturelle, animation socioéducative, and animation jeunesse;
 - The Government plan Priorité Jeunesse was launched in the wake of the report and formulated a series of actions in line with the eight areas identified in the 2009 Council of Europe resolution on the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010–2018):
 - key players to implement such a scheme include state administration offices¹¹ at national and regional level as well as the local authorities, with voluntary sector organisations as commissioned providers;
 - At all levels, major policy focus areas are youth autonomy (with key themes including health, housing, education and training, employment, mobility, enhanced accessibility to welfare and social rights) and youth citizenship;
- Measurement and evaluation:
 - systematic procedural evaluation and quality approaches in the field of youth work has been rather slow in comparison with other European countries;
 - the approach taken by central government in France is mostly top-down and outcome focused;
 - the part "éducation spécialisée" is located in travail social (social work) and therefore subject to mandatory internal and external evaluation;

- the tradition of active youth participation in either evaluation or decision-making (governance) – excluding tokenism – is arguably rather weak as compared with other European countries;
- the development of procedural evaluation and measurement is not yet seen as a priority in the French context.
- Influence of EU-youth policy:
 - the very concept of ‘youth policy’ has been imported from other countries. In this respect, the European institutions, influenced by representatives with clearly articulated youth policies and where youth work is well-structured, have played a major role in encouraging national governments to build a more integrated approach towards youth-related issues;
 - The relevance of ‘youth’ as an official labelling term for a particular professional field or policy domain has often been challenged with the assumption that rather than isolating ‘youth’ as a specific target group, it would be safer and more inclusive to take young people’s needs and interests into consideration within each of the various existing policy areas;
- Conclusions (p.97): New participatory approaches will no doubt therefore prove useful to provide French youth workers with an opportunity to reflect upon their practice and demonstrate the value of their work.

SPECIAL CHAPTER: TRANSFORMATIVE EVALUTION (TE) MATHODOLOGY (p.100-108)

- TE was developed in order to build a model of evaluation from practitioners’ own accounts rather than superimposing an abstract, ideal model, which merely tests for standardisation and conformity;
- Transformative Evaluation offers a methodology which promotes interaction and communication between a variety of stakeholders; working within a transformative paradigm allows evaluation to become a part of the intervention and enables it to be used as a reinforcing rather than discouraging feedback mechanism;
- it is a strength-based approach explicitly taking a positive stance in an effort to counterbalance the deficit discourse of problem-solving;
- can be understood as a process of collective action that involves a range of stakeholders in reflection, negotiation, collaboration and knowledge creation.

GLOBAL EVALUATION

This book offers well-structured and accessible information on three subjects:

1. A well-documented and global view on the notion youth work in an European context;
2. The good balanced overview of the beginning, evolution and present situation of youth policy (both local and central) in four very different countries: Finland, Estonia, Italy and France, with accents on structures, evaluation and effects of the EU-youth policy.
3. A short but very useful and inspiring chapter, developing the concept of Transformative Evaluation Methodology.

This book brings a lot of knowledge, critical and constructive information on the phenomenon of youth work, youth work policy and the presence of it in the countries involved: a lot of differences, a lot of comparing issues and evolutions, four intriguing stories. Strongly recommended.