

Linking Youth Work and Learning Mobility: The Practice Perspective

Linking Youth Work and Learning Mobility...and the formal education system: the curious case of pupil's mobility.

Exploring the link between youth work and learning mobility for AFS

Learning mobility in the youth field 'has learning as a central component of mobility, whether formal, informal or non formal'¹. Therefore 'learning mobility in the youth field' is not linked either to youth work/non formal education or to formal education, but it is based on the objective of learning to 'develop personal & professional competences, communication, interpersonal & intercultural skills, active citizenship'².

Following the policy perspective, the link between learning mobility and youth work can be found in the fact that youth work through non formal education methods, offers the opportunity to develop primarily competences for active citizenship (social, civic, intercultural), within the experience of mobility.

The learning mobility promoted by AFS Intercultural Programs fully reflects this broad definition of learning mobility in the youth field which bridges the diverse learning concepts. The mission of AFS is to promote *intercultural learning through mobility, to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world*,. Although this mission reflects the principles of youth work, namely the fostering of active participation, social and personal development of young people, AFS pursues these objectives with non-formal education methods in the frame of long-term pupil exchange programmes embedded in the formal education system.

AFS as an example of the origins of learning mobility in the youth field and its links with European youth work and policy

AFS was born during - and lived through - World War I and II, with the aim to promote solidarity between nations through the work of volunteer ambulance drivers. After World War II, AFS decided to transform mobility from something 'linked to the tragedy of war'³ to a tool for intercultural learning and the building of peace, starting with young people, namely secondary school students. Therefore AFS started using the tool of mobility for learning purposes in order to develop social, civic and intercultural competences for a 'more just and peaceful world, before there was any European policy in the youth field promoting such instruments. When in the 1970s the Council of Europe, followed by the European Union, started with the development of European youth policy and mobility programmes, AFS, through its European Federation called EFIL, offered its expertise in Intercultural learning and its orientation framework to ensure quality of mobility experiences (pre-departure, hosting and re-entry orientations). The main outcomes were the development of the

¹ Hanjo Schild, EPLM 2013

² Hanjo Schild, EPLM 2013

³ Charles Berg , EPLM 2013 integrated keynote

ESSSE programme (CoE) and the Comenius Action 'Individual Pupil Mobility'⁴. The chance for cooperation between actors of European youth work offered by the CoE and the EU provided EFIL with the opportunity to grow with quality and develop expertise on the topic of European Citizenship and thus gave birth to the European Citizenship Trimester programme, combining the new knowledge with its practice of long-term pupil exchange schemes.

Similar dynamics can be seen in the history of other European youth organisations promoting youth mobility, such as YFU, AEGEE and ESN: they engaged in a mutual learning process with the institutions promoting European youth policy and youth work, and as AFS they are characterized by a co-existence of diverse learning principles in their work: mobility takes places/is promoted in a formal education environment (secondary or higher education) while youth work and volunteering provide the added value of non formal education methods to the mobility experience.

Therefore, in the field of learning mobility we can see that informal learning and non-formal learning through youth work have been promoted in a framework provided by universities and schools, and there is not necessarily a strict division between educational sectors.

Learning mobility: a playground for the interaction of diverse learning concepts? The experience of Comenius Individual Pupil's Mobility.

Between 2006 and 2008 EFIL run the pilot project of Comenius Individual Pupil's Mobility(IPM)⁵. Comenius IPM is a EU funding programme which takes place within the secondary school system, without the support of an 'out-of-school' / volunteering organisation such as AFS.

EFIL was then confronted with the question 'How to ensure quality in this learning mobility?'. To some extent learning happens anyway during a mobility experience, but intercultural learning competences are fully developed only through experiential learning supported by the facilitation of youth workers, in structured non formal education activities. Therefore, any learning mobility initiated in formal education needs a non formal education dimension for the development of intercultural competences. How to provide participants with the opportunity to learn to deal with differences, in a framework outside the one of non formal education, and still make sure that mobility is a quality learning experience?

While running this pilot project, EFIL tried to transfer the AFS orientation framework developed within non formal education, in the school environment. In Comenius IPM the orientations based on non formal education methods are responsibility of teachers or they can be outsourced to external providers (in some European countries, these are AFS organisations).

How successful are non formal education methods used in schools? Can the learning concepts be independent from the educational institution where they are implemented? What is the difference between pupil's exchanges run only by schools and the ones run by youth organisations within the framework of a formal education institution?

⁴ Elisa Briga in Learning Mobility & Non-formal Learning in European contexts, CoE Publishing, 2013.

⁵ <http://www.efil.afs.org/projects-and-programmes/other-projects/individual-pupil-mobility-scheme/>

What training do teachers need in order to be able to use non formal education methods? Can teachers play the role that youth workers fulfil in other learning mobility experiences? Is it only a matter of training of 'educators' which can act as teachers or youth workers depending of the needs of the young people, or does it go beyond?

Due to its hybrid nature, can learning mobility in the youth field be the setting where to experiment an holistic approach to education where the formal education institution offers the whole set of diverse learning approaches? Or youth work and the non-formal learning it provides in an out-of-school environment constitutes an un-replaceable added value to learning mobility, which cannot be reached in any way inside the formal education system?

All these questions were raised during the workshop on 'Linking Youth Work and Learning Mobility'. At the moment, it is clear what is added value of each educational framework within a learning mobility experience:

YOUTH WORK: non formal education methods, pre-departure, hosting and re-entry orientations, promotion of volunteering and active citizenship through the direct experience of it.

FORMAL EDUCATION: the actual possibility of doing a long term exchange at an age when young people are still in education and, at the same time, receive academic recognition of the mobility experience itself (eg.Erasmus, Comenius). The formal education system offers also a learning multiplying effect inside the classroom or the school itself, which youth work cannot provide at the same extent.

Future strategies needed for strengthening learning mobility in the youth field and especially pupil's mobility

Following the discussion and questions raised, we are able to identify demands for both research and policy:

RESEARCH

- research on assessment of competences from long term exchanges, including comparative research between learning outcomes from exchanges provided by formal education institutions and those provided by youth organisations.

POLICY

- recognition of study periods abroad conducted outside the EU formal education exchange schemes, such as Erasmus and Comenius;
- recognition of competences gained through non formal and informal learning;
- easier access to visas and residence permits for young people participating in learning mobility.