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Workshop 4 – Competence & Training

Welcome to everybody and my respect to the organizers for having invited me here.

In my part of this workshop, I will speak from 3 different stand points: a) As a youth worker, working in the field since 1997, b) As a youth trainer, having started in 2003, and last but not least, c) As a young entrepreneur, having established my own firm in 2011, amidst complete financial and political instability, along with 5 friends of mine around the age of 30.

When I started doing youth work, the main question from my close environment was “What is that and as it is not something that we know of, are you crazy?”

When I moved into the youth training field, they were (are!) asking me “What is that and as it is not something that we know of, are you crazy?”

Well, you can imagine the question when I told them “I am starting a business”... In Greece... In 2011.

But I had good reasons for everything and solid grounds to step on before moving to any of the next steps above.

It all, though, started because of curiosity.

And curiosity is what leads me through my explorations and consequently, any possible findings. So, being curious again, I would like to ask:

If there would be one element common in all (youth) training activities at European level, what would it be?

[Many answers collected, including *language, the “youth” element, competence development and more*]

What if the question was the same but with a small addition... that is “15 years” ago, or, “in 10 years from now”? Would our answers be different?

In my understanding of the youth field, there have been moments in time that there were elements at least prevailing, if not present in all activities, during the delivery of training. There was the moment of *intercultural learning*, as a major body of knowledge and educational approach, being in the session titles and descriptions of any youth training activity at European level, in an effort to become the mechanism of greater understanding and appreciation of diversity among young people. Then it was *European Citizenship*. Similar story. Both of them, well needed I’d say.

Now it is learning, competence development, self-assessment and recognizing the value of the very activities we do.

But what about *action*?

It is my strong belief that any educational activity at European level in the field of youth should lead, and to an extent ensure, some form of *action*.

Not necessarily just project development and realization. That's a rather sclerotic and mono-dimensional way of seeing at *action*. In my capacity as a youth trainer, I have come across situations that the (institutional) need for projects being developed after the course, had casted a shadow over all other immensely beneficial elements of the "here & now" part of a course.

Something related to the community, something that makes a difference in the neighborhood. One can say that if the person changes, this already has an impact in the community anyway (the person being part of the community in the simplest logical hypothesis). And I would agree. But then there has to be a stronger emphasis on the capacity of a person to multiply the learnt and making sure that what they have benefited from, can be of use from others, not physically present in the activity. And think how important this becomes in times of economic turbulence where the first fields to see their budgets being cut is education, training and youth.

Something has to be brought back. The last 10 years we have seen an increase of availability of youth training activities. It would be interesting (and I am looking at the researcher in the room) to see if and how proportional the development of *action* has been; setting up an initiative, a campaign (online) for an important cause, starting a local youth NGO, developing projects, starting, even, a business or a social enterprise. I cannot forget one of my fellow participants in a course in Prague more than 10 years ago telling me "*I want to travel, travel and see, go to places, go to activities... and then come back to my country, to my little village and do something there; don't know what, but inspiration will come in the way, I am sure*".

And that leads me to the next question:

The end-beneficiaries of all training activities at European level are - mainly - the young people. But are they?

There are some recurring questions when I deliver trainings that are related to the above question. But there might be a hidden meaning behind, which we also need to pay attention to.

These recurring questions are:

- a) **How can I start my own NGO?** I get this question and I say "*Great, that's the spirit. Putting your idea into a systematized form of (youth) action*". But then why your NGO and not one that it's already there? The sustainability element is rather crucial here.
- b) **How can I start my own project... and does this project pay?** I say again "*Awesome, I am a firm believer of action and doing a project is one of the ways to go about it*". But, wait a moment, if this project pays? Hmmm.
- c) **How can I get a job in the youth field?** That's a difficult question, in many ways. What is the youth field at European level anyway? Or, is there any *youth field* as we

practitioners think about in many of the countries in the continent. And, by the way, is it about getting a job or is it about the youth field?

d) **How can I become a trainer?** I am asking the youth trainers present in the room. “How many times you got this question and what did you answer back?” And by the way, why someone wants to become one? Traveling will become your worst nightmare...ehmm, not your main motivation.

Hope you had allowed me for some cynicism above. Nevertheless, whatever the question might be, we need to take it serious and try, with the help of dialogue, to look on its essential background.

Without being able not to generalize, I would say that the main concern of young people nowadays at European level is unemployment or how to get a job, more specifically, a job that fulfills the needs of the *soul* as much as the needs of the *pocket*. I would agree passionately with everyone saying “but, hey, youth training cannot and shall not be the savior of the collapsing markets... We are already speaking a lot about it and why not just step back into our “traditions”... giving the young person the possibility to grow, change, understand, move across borders... Just that... And that already takes...wow... hell of a work! And you are speaking to us about, what, employment?”

No panic.

The competences needed for a young person to be more *active* all life fields (social, economic, cultural, civic) are already being cultivated in our, youth, training activities.

My proposal is that we just need to put a greater emphasis.

A greater emphasis on those competences related to one’s capacity to initiate, create, manage, evaluate and LEARN! A few examples: retrieving & analyzing information, team work, negotiation/communication/cooperation, project & financial management, social responsibility, human/social rights, creative thinking/understanding mistakes as part of a learning process/risk-taking.

We are already doing it! We support *action*. Just a bit more fine-tuning and we are there! And to ease any possible tension, I would like to quote Bryony Hoskins “[...] *non-formal learning in the youth sector must keep its unconventional, innovative and attractive character*” and I am personally on a mission for that, from all my stand points mentioned in the beginning.

Thank you!