Youth Partnership

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Diversity of practice architectures in Europe:

An Analytical Report

based on *Mapping Educational and Career Paths of Youth Workers*

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Executive summary

This report analyses patterns and differences in the educational paths of youth workers in Europe using a theory of practice architectures. The analysis is based on the findings of the study *Mapping Educational and Career Paths of Youth Workers* by Cairns, O'Donovan, Sousa and Valcheva, and also uses the questionnaire distributed to the national correspondents of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) and relevant ministries, institutions and bodies. The research is the result of an EU-CoE youth partnership research initiative on Mapping educational paths of youth workers and gathering knowledge on youth work.

The theoretical framework of the study was based on the idea of social learning, in particular a theory of practice architectures as developed by Stephen Kemmis. What an individual practitioner does and is able to do is shaped by a wide background of discourses, social and political practices and also concrete material facilities and resources available. According to this theory, there are three dimensions of practices. These dimensions are used to group the data of the study into three different categories:

1. Sayings/cultural-discoursive dimension: how youth work is recognised, formulated, talked about and debated.
2. Doings/structural-occupational dimension: how youth work education is supported and how youth work can be a sustainable career.
3. Relatings/social-political dimension: how youth work is recognised, supported and organised so that it can relate to young people, general public and other professional cultures.

Forty-four countries and regions were examined using these three categories. The report analysed first how youth work is talked about and thought about by examining three factors: is there a legal recognition of youth work; some form of quality assurance; and are there competency descriptions? The second group of analysis examined four factors: is there vocational education; tertiary education; public support for non-formal learning in youth work; and are there sustainable career paths in youth work. The third class of analysis examined whether there are associations of youth workers. These eight different aspects were combined into one variable reflecting the support available to youth work in a country or a region.
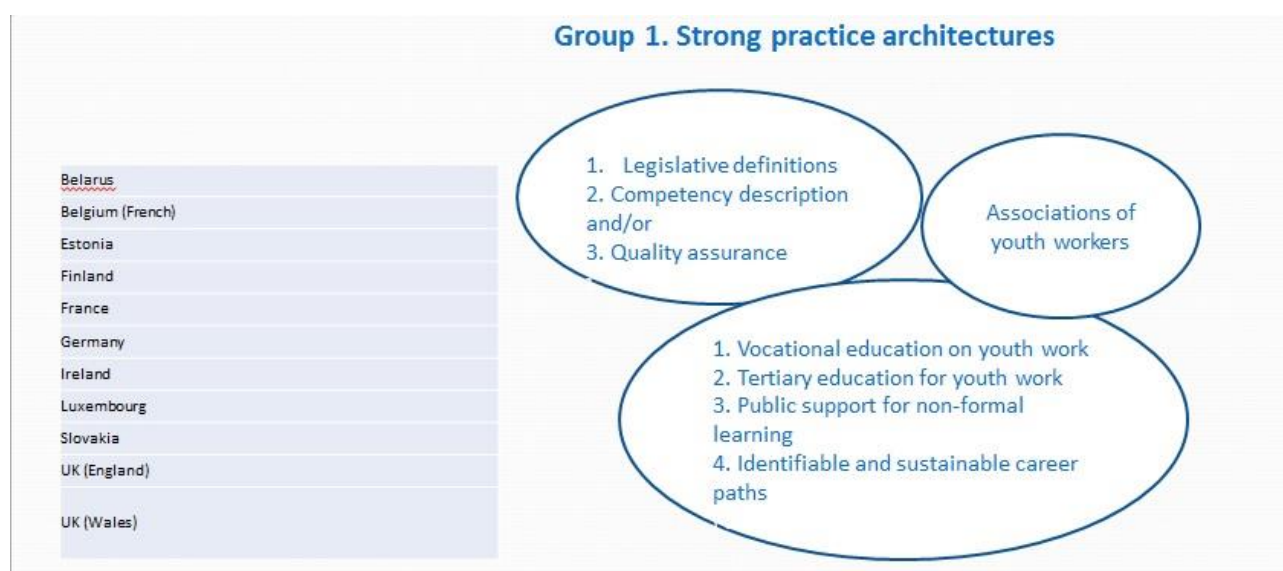
According to the analysis, the 44 countries and regions examined can be classified in four different groups. Eleven countries and regions have strong practice architectures supporting youth work education. All of these countries and regions have legislative definitions and have either competency description or quality assurance, if not both. They all have public support for non-formal learning and identifiable career paths. There have formal learning in youth work available, half of them both in vocational and tertiary education. They have associations of youth workers.

Group 2. Strong practice architectures, room for development on certain level

Austria
Belgium (Flemish)
Belgium (German)
Czech Republic
Iceland
Liechtenstein
Malta
Portugal
Russian Federation
Serbia
Sweden
The Netherlands

1. Usually legislative definitions
2. Competency description and/or
3. Quality assurance work

Associations of youth workers

1. Usually vocational education on youth work and/or
2. Tertiary education for youth work
3. Usually public support for non-formal learning
4. Usually identifiable and sustainable career paths

Twelve countries and regions have strong practice architectures as well, but they may lack some important elements which could be developed in the future. These countries and regions usually have either vocational or higher education for youth work. They also usually have public support for non-formal learning and usually have sustainable career paths. They all have associations of youth workers.

Group 3. Practice architectures where some parts have been developed

Armenia
Bulgaria
Latvia
Lithuania
Norway
Slovenia
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Turkey

1. Usually legislative definitions
2. In some cases competency description and/or
3. Quality assurance

In some cases associations of youth workers

1. Usually vocational education on youth work and/or
2. Tertiary education for youth work
3. In some cases support for non-formal learning
4. Usually no identifiable and sustainable career paths

Eight countries and regions have developed some parts of the practice architecture but would most likely benefit from establishing stronger structures for youth work. They usually have legislative definitions. In some cases they have a competency description or quality assurance. They usually offer formal education for youth work. In some cases they have public support for non-formal learning. Usually there are no sustainable career paths. In some cases there are associations of youth workers.

Group 4. Practice architectures in the need of development

Albania
Azerbaijan
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Croatia
Cyprus
Georgia
Greece
Italy
Moldova
Montenegro
Poland
Romania
Ukraine

1. Usually legislative definitions

In some cases associations of youth workers

1. In some cases tertiary education for youth work
2. In some cases public support for non-formal learning

Thirteen countries are only starting to develop their youth work architectures and will probably benefit from learning from other European countries and regions. These countries and regions usually have legislative definition. There are no competency descriptions or quality assurance. There is higher level education in some cases, and public support for non-formal learning in some cases. There are no identifiable career paths. In some cases there are associations of youth work.

The analysis showed a lot of variation in the practice architectures of youth work. European countries and regionsvary considerably in how youth work is talked about and recognised, how it is supported through providing formal education and how resources are allocated to non-formal learning and career paths, and how youth workers relate to each other through associations. These different features form a picture of social and institutional conditions affecting the learning paths of youth workers. Some of the countries and regions have plenty of supporting structures that most likely produce strong practice architectures which help youth work to blossom. Some countries and regions lack even the basic infrastructure for promoting professional youth work. Educational pathways available in different parts of Europe vary accordingly.

Recommendations

The analysis of this paper gives only a partial picture about the practice architectures of youth work. Some of the relevant themes are either not in a questionnaire or the data is inconsistent. The quality of answers in the questionnaire may result in inadequacies when analysing individual countries and regions. There are dimensions that are important for learning paths which cannot be examined based on the approach chosen for this study. It is recommended that further research should cover the following topics:

- The actual career paths of youth workers are only touched upon in this study. On-the-job learning is vital to one's professional development. Understanding what type of career paths (sustainable, cumulative/short-term, precarious) different practice architectures make possible will likely shed light on how youth workers learn and develop as individuals and as communities.
- Studying quality, scope and availability of non-formal learning in different countries and regions cannot be done reliably using the data of this study. A different methodology might be needed. In a context of life-long learning different opportunities to share ideas and learn new things based on

one's own motivation are important. Understanding what possibilities youth workers have for non-formal learning makes the picture about educational paths more complete.

- The relations dimension could not be covered properly in this study. One aspect of this is the relation of youth work to other professional cultures. How is youth recognised as a partner? What type of professional networks are formed and what is the role of youth work in these? Do youth workers work in isolation or together with other professions?
- The links between different between different topics covered in the analysis should be analysed further. Of particular importance is the connection between formal youth work education and the structures of youth work practice. What are the possibilities for learning in versatile environments (on the job, at the institution, virtual platforms, peer learning)? How is on-the-job learning integrated to curricula of youth work education?
- Some aspects of studying the educational paths will likely require qualitative interviews with youth workers from different backgrounds. This way the meaningful learning experiences and contexts as experienced and lived by the youth workers could be found out.
- An important aspect of the practice architectures of youth work is the knowledge about the living conditions of the young. If young persons are engaged as the primary clients in their social contexts (Sercombe 2010, 27) in the process of youth work, youth work in general requires knowledge about the young. Different methods for producing knowledge about the young and their connection to youth work should be studied to gain better understanding of how youth work relates to the young and their social networks.

On the policy level, the following recommendations can be given if the aim is that "establishment or development of quality youth work is safeguarded and supported within local, regional or national youth policies" (CM/Rec(2017)4):

- The results show that support to youth work infrastructure, training and practice varies considerably. The resources allocated to youth work are not sufficient in all the examined cases. National governments should make efforts to secure adequate funding for youth work.
- Some countries and regions have developed a strong discoursive basis for youth work. This includes defining in legislation what youth work is, developing quality assurance and explicating competency frameworks. Legal basis should be supplemented with different descriptions on what youth work is and what it contributes to society. Efforts should be made to establish descriptions about quality youth work and competency description of youth workers.
- The learning possibilities of youth workers vary considerably. In some countries and regions formal education of youth work should be further developed. This should be combined with access to non-formal learning, so that learning paths for youth workers support life-long learning on an individual level and creating reflective practices on a communal level. Training should be offered to voluntary and professional workers alike.
- In about half of the examined countries and regions there are not yet sustainable career paths for youth workers. Creating a sufficient system of funding for youth work is required to enable youth workers to have sustainable careers and to create learning networks and communities based on their continuing careers.