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Stimulating Lifelong Learning through Non Formal Education: Recognition of

core competences of the Youth Worker as an Educator

Masterthesis to obtain the degree of Master in Educational Sciences

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SUMMARY MASTERTHESIS
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Title of the Masterthesis: Stimulating Lifelong Learning through Non Formal Education: Recognition of core competences of the Youth Worker as an Educator

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The recognition of the Youth Worker's competences is an ongoing discussion for the decision makers as well as for the civil society, particularly the ones involved and working for the field of NFE.

Currently Lifelong Learning assumes a capital value to create new opportunities thoughout individual's life and where educators play an important role providing learning opportunities. The youth work is seen as one of the main drivers of education for young people and a promoter of NFE through its educators with competences to lead learning programs.

The current qualitative research intends to describe the educative role of the youth workers from the international youth organizations perspective in Europe. It presents youth workers' competencies as educators, how they can promote lifelong learning (LLL) for young people and what are the existing frameworks which can recognize their educative role. The study used three focus groups to explore the recognition of Youth workers, their competences as educators, how they promote LLL and the existing frameworks in Europe that recognize their educative role. The thematic analysis

revealed that Youth Workers as educators are recognized from YO as trainers with facilitation skills while five core competencies were identified as essential for them. In addition, Youth Workers promote LLL by engaging young people in the NFE environment. The focus groups (FGs) also revealed that further steps should be taken at local and international level towards the recognition of youth workers as educational providers while more scientific research is needed in order for YO to respond to the future challenges.

After data analysis and a discussion based on literature review and findings the conclusion presents strategies for further development of the field on practical and political level.

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BRIEF CONTENT OF THE MASTERTHESIS
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A qualitative research focused on the recognition of the youth workers as educators

emphasis on three focus groups were conducted to gather visions and positions from

stakeholders working in the field. A literature review and data analysis are the support

to the discussion of this study. Findings indicate that there's a need for deeper

discussion and awareness on european and national levels among different stakeholders

as well as a proposal for a common framework contributing for general understanding

of the competences of the educators of the youth field.

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Abstract

The current qualitative research intends to describe the educative role of the youth

workers from the international youth organizations (YO) perspective in Europe. It

presents youth workers' competencies as educators, how they can promote lifelong

learning (LLL) for young people and what are the existing frameworks which can

recognize their educative role. The study used three focus groups to explore the

recognition of Youth workers, their competences as educators, how they promote LLL

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analysis revealed that Youth Workers as educators are recognized from YO as trainers

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them. In addition, Youth Workers promote LLL by engaging young people in the NFE

environment. The focus groups (FGs) also revealed that further steps should be taken at

local and international level towards the recognition of youth workers as educational

providers while more scientific research is needed in order for YO to respond to the

future challenges.

I - Introduction

The recognition of the Youth Worker's competences is an ongoing discussion for the decision makers as well as for the civil society, particularly the ones involved and working for the field of NFE.

LLL is the continuous building of skills and knowledge during one's life (Laal, 2011). LLL plays an important role in motivating individuals to continue learning, increase and develop skills, as well as knowledge and experiences in order to better prepared for a constant changing world and Youth Workers can have a key role by promoting educational programs. However, depending on the perspective of the different institutions, these professionals can take different areas of expertise and areas of work within the youth field. But still exists multiple and different "gaps" on the recognition of their core competences which can affect further engagement in the professional career. Generally Youth Workers are recognized as members of the organizations who work directly in the Youth Field (Ministry of Ireland, 2003) however YO promote more than that by stressing their educative role basically as trainers or facilitators (Jeedas, P. & Enn, Ü. 2011).

However the processes of recognition needs to be also recognized by the different stakeholders, not only by the decision makers and also is important to clarify what needs to be recognized. Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a very important role in this, by developing democratic processes such as constant consultations, discussions/debates and work implemented that could be seen as a reference and as an opportunity to stimulate partnerships in different sectors as well as bringing the topic to the center of political discussion.

The following research objectives are focused on understanding who is the youth worker in the youth field and its main competences and educational provider,

how they stimulate LLL within their work and what common frameworks exists to recognize these professionals/volunteers.

It uses a qualitative analysis to gather contributions from practitioners in the field along with the literature review in order to understand that phenomenon and find a link between theory and practice. It is based on literature review and institutional documentation, while 3 FGs were implemented which involved youth leaders, project managers and youth workers working in the field of youth and education and a discussion were the findings are analyzed from different perspectives based on existing evidence and institutional references. Last, the conclusion validates this study's goal to provide preliminary insights into what needs to be done and what directions could foster further developments on the recognition of the youth worker as educators.

II - Significance

This study intends to contribute to an under-researched topic, reveal the topics that need more attention and initiate discussion at local/international level. Giving concrete examples a better understanding and know-how about educators in the youth sector will contribute to foster coalitions and recognition on a cross-sectorial wide-range. The findings of this research can contribute to foster national and international discussions on the above-mentioned matters, re-thinking on strategies to sustain LLL within the youth sector. Bringing evidence to the field might contribute for its external impact and to foster further interests and collaboration on scientific research.

III – Literature Review

Emphasize the meaning of LLL is also defining learning which is always complex specially when we have a globalized society that needs to be prepared to face changes, new technologies, a society more demanding in terms of the pursuit of

knowledge and the quest for recognition and validation on their learning experiences.

According to Laal (2011) "LLL literally means that learning should take place at all

stages of life cycle (from the cradle to the grave) and, in more recent versions that it

should be life-wide; that is embedded in all life contexts from the school to the

workplace, the home and the community (...) LLL is the continuous building of skills

and knowledge during one's life, that occurs through experiences faced lifetime". In this

sense we have to assume that LLL is an educational pathway opportunity for all, that

takes place in the whole life, at all times, in all places and through different learning

approaches such as formal, non-formal and informal learning. From this 3 dimensions

in education interests us to know what NFE is as it seems to be a "flag" of YO. NFE is

an organized and intentional process that gives individuals the opportunity to develop

their values, skills and competencies that they would not receive in the framework of

formal education and it is "shared and designed in such a way that it creates an

environment in which the learner is the architect of the skills development" (YFJ,

2010).

 In the 80s the concept of LLL was closely related to adult education. The last

decade Europe passed through a recessive economic crisis where was necessary to

combat the social and economic effects. It was at this point that urges the faster combat

to unemployment by raising the literacy, qualifications and skills of adults (Laal, 2011).

In this context adult education began to have a different dimension promoting

investments in education as means of tackling the new difficult reality in Europe. (The

above led in recognizing LLL as priority in Europe and the Lisbon Strategy, i.e., as an

answer for the social, political and economic needs (Laal, 2011).

 LLL arises as an answer for a sustainable development of the society and

consequently it was emphasized because of a strong political need.

Does LLL have place within NFE? The skills acquired in non-formal programs and informal spaces are not politically and socially recognized, how we can guarantee the effectiveness and efficiency of LLL?

Some steps have been taken in Europe, as for example the programs created by the EC (EACEA, 2014) after the Lisbon Strategy and Lisbon Treaty that came also to make improvements in Education enhancing the importance of LLL, becoming other changes for state governments and for the CSOs in implementing projects supported by the LLL Program of the EC. However the development and effectiveness of LLL in individuals still has a huge room for improvement.

Nowadays with the boom of technology and a simultaneous economic crisis in Europe, the importance of LLL has been more valued. The currently knowledge-based economy, new technologies and the globalization have a huge influence on the needs to improve skills and competences. Education should be seen as cross sectorial in the learning process, as participated in different contexts and approaches.

LLL doesn't recognize only the knowledge acquired within a classroom but also and fundamentally with the involvement of individuals in other spheres of education which also prepare them for the labour market, to their personal life, sports, cultural, active citizenship, democratic participation, etc. and where they acquire skills and knowledge that complements the ones gained through formal education. On the other hand is also important to mention that the labour markets increasingly require professionals with greater diversity of skills and responsiveness towards different contexts. Here again LLL gain emphasis and should be prepare to be the provider of the market, social and individual demands (Laal & Salamati, 2011).

As Laal & Salamati (2011) stated "nowadays, there is an increasingly important basic skill in ever-changing technological universe: ability to learn and adapt to the

needed new skills and training" (OECD, 2007). Their study on "Why do we need

LLL?" give a clear idea of the benefits of LLL: 1) "Benefit of helping us to adapt to

change"; 2) "Job promotions go to the employees who are the best versed and educated

in their job fields" and 3) "the enriching and fulfilling the life (...) We all have subjects

in which we are interested in. A lifelong learner uses opportunities to explore these

topics which they find compelling" (Laal & Salamati, 2011).

However participating constantly in different educational activities can be a

pitfull. For some people financial barriers can appear while for others, their professional

context may not facilitate their participation or does not provide on the job opportunities

at all. However, barriers can also be related to individual reasons. As mentioned by Laal

(p.614, 2011) "(...) those who have not learned since they left school face the barriers of

attitude, confidence, funding, basic skills and lack of time or childcare issues, all of

which would need to be addressed before they would be willing and able to participate

in learning."

On the other hand, other barrier of the LLL is the recognition of the NFE and

how to certificate and validate the competences acquired from these learning contexts.

"Youth Work belongs to the domain of 'out of school' education, most

commonly referred to as either non-formal or informal learning. The general aims of

youth work are the integration and inclusion of young people in society. It may also aim

towards the personal and social emancipation of young people from dependency and

exploitation." (CoE, 2013, p. 10). Therefore the youth field appears in this context as

one of the strong stakeholders for the development of the European LLL strategy. More

focused on Young people the field share the same values as the LLL program "central

role of the learner, the importance of equal opportunities, quality and relevance of

learning possibilities must be at the center of the strategies to make LLL a reality in Europe" (Europa, 2009).

v.   One way to enhance the LLL - The European Programme of LLL

With all resolutions LLL Programme of the European Commission (EC) gain another impact with the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training ("ET 2020").

This Strategic Framework recognizes LLL as a priority as it is the key to employment, economic success and allowing people to participate actively in society. Similar approach to what was given importance to LLL, in the '80s, when Europe faced a recessive crisis.

The aims of this strategic framework are: "Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;

Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training" (EC, 2014).

Taking to discussion the recognition of core competences of the educators and participants in non-formal practices, we also can relate it with one of the aims of this strategy "Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training" linking at the same time with the above-mentioned program of the EC that open actions to disseminate, exploit the results of projects and at the same time to the effectiveness of these efforts. One example of these actions is the *Leonardo da Vinci* program which "focuses on vocational education and training, other than at tertiary level. It addresses both the learning and teaching needs in the sector, and is therefore aimed at all parties involved, namely trainees in vocational education, teachers and trainers, institutions and

educational bodies, enterprises, associations, social partners and bodies relating to either LLL or the labor market" (EC, 2014).

This kind of programs are provided by the EC to CSOs to implement the political demands regarding with the LLL strategy for 2007-2013 and nowadays was included under the ERAMUS+ program (EC, ERASMUS, 2014) which emphasize the purpose of the youth field as a promoter of LLL and new trends to the field.

vi.   Recognition of Youth Workers Competences throughout Europe

Competences is the proven ability to use knowledge, skills, and personal/social/study situations on professional and personal development (Lupou R., Nuissl, E. & Savac, S., 2010). For the purposes of stimulating and recognizing LLL as a way to engage people in an active learning process throughout their lives the EC created the Eight Key competences for LLL (EC, 2011). Those competencies consider the knowledge, skills and attitudes according with a specific context. They are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. They are

"essential in a knowledge society and guarantee more flexibility in the labor force, allowing it to adapt more quickly to constant changes in an increasingly interconnected world. They are also a major factor in innovation, productivity and competitiveness, and they contribute to the motivation and satisfaction of workers and the quality of work" (EC, 2011, *n.d.*).

The 8 Key Competences defined are:

- "Communication in the mother tongue
- Communication in foreign languages

- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology

- Digital competence

- Learning to learn

- Social and civic competences

- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

- Cultural awareness and expression" (EC, 2011, *n.d.*).

Many different actors and organizations around Europe are using the above competencies to guide the development of programs for either young or older people. However, is important to have an idea of what in practice organizations are developing in the field of competencies and recognition of the youth workers is actually very relevant.

vii.   An overview of how some institutions see the Youth Worker:

SALTO-Youth is a network of 8 resource centers of the EC Training Strategy working in synergy and cooperation with other partners in the field. Provides opportunities for the development of, studies, training programs, information, work field and the promotion of the professionals in the youth sector (SALTO, *n.d.*). In cooperation with the Council of Europe (CoE) and the CoE-EU Youth Partnership, has developed a database with trainers, called *Trainers Online for Youth (TOY)* which intends to address "the problem of finding available trainers for international youth training courses with the right mix of competencies" (SALTO-YOUTH1, *n.d.*). Based on their documents, SALTO seems to promote Youth Worker as Trainers. Concerning the needed competences of those trainers the ET Strategy of the EC, SALTO has recently developed a *Set of Competences for Trainers* in youth work. This document was created to develop a set of competences for trainers in order to provide a common

reference when developing training courses for and to enhance quality training, as stated in the study of Yael Ohana and Hendrik Otten "those who are providing training to other deliverers of non-formal education are [also] those likely to be most interested in competence profile." (SALTO T&C RC, p. 3, 2013).

For SALTO the set of competences highlighted in this document are:

"Understand and facilitate individual and group learning processes

Learning to learn

Design educational programmes

Cooperate successfully in teams

Communicate meaningfully with others

Intercultural competence" . " (SALTO T&C RC, p.4-5, 2013).

Another approach from SALTO is the EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering (2010-2018) which clearly emphasizes the importance to recognize and support youth, to equip youth workers with professional skills and its validation through the appropriate European instruments (Europass, EQF, ECVET); development of mobility programs for youth workers and innovative services, tools and practices of youth work (SALTO, 2010).

To conclude on SALTO-Youth perspective about the Youth Worker, it strives to ensure developments and quality of their training programmes, which at the same time reinforces the main work developed by the Youth Worker as Trainers (SALTO T&C RC, 2013). In other hand promotes, as mentioned before, studies/policy documents/information, meetings, etc. (SALTO, *n.d.*). As for the recognition of competencies it uses the Youthpass as an instrument to confirm participation, to describe an activity, and to validate learning experience gained under Youth projects. The Youthpass certification "shall support the employability of young people and youth

workers, active participation of young people as well as a greater recognition of youth

work throughout Europe" (SALTO, n.d.).

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) is the Platform that represents more than 90

YO in Europe. It has developed a broad policy work, in advocacy, in education, human

rights, youth participation and social development in several areas of the youth work

and youth development that enhance and recognize the work done by YO, which puts

various stakeholders working together for the recognition of skills and competences

acquired in non-formal settings of participation and learning that are on the basic

principles of the youth work.

In this context YFJ defends that "Recognition of real competencies builds on the

basic principle that the individual can build upon and use skills and competencies

acquired through NFE schemes, in the formal education system and in employment

situations." (YFJ, p.3, 2005)

In other hands the YFJ promote projects and processes that works toward the

development of the recognition of the youth worker and NFE. As an example it was

involved on the creation and multiplication of the European Portfolio (EP) for Youth

Leaders and Youth Workers; YouthPass; European Processes with the main

Stakeholders (EC, CoE, etc.). It also promotes research studies such as: "Study on the

impact of NFE in YO on young people's employability" (YFJ, 2012).

This platform uses other tool to support the development of its member

organizations and to promote the field and its practitioners which is the Pool of Trainers

(PoT). The PoT contributes to the development of the field, empowering young people,

developing methodologies and recognizing skills through NFE programs (YFJ, 2010).

The YFJ as a platform that represents its members with different beliefs and

approaches refers to the youth worker as an educator, facilitator, trainer or a moderator

(YFJ, 2010). It is not really clear their position towards the Youth Worker but that it recognizes that should be ensured the recognition of the skills/competences acquired in the academic, voluntary, participatory and non-formal learning experiences of young people YFJ (2005).

On national level, the Portuguese National Youth Council (CNJ) recognize the youth worker as an educator and work for development of the youth work (CNJ, 2013). It refers that trainers, facilitators, animators, monitors and social workers develop the role of promoters of non-formal learning processes. All those actors integrate their work with the domain of methods, approaches and principles of NFE (CNJ, 2013). The role of educators involves educational responsibility they have with young people and in building a European society of knowledge (CNJ, 2013). They emphasize that recognizing the social role of the educator, it is equally important to take firm steps to his individual, political and formal recognition (CNJ, 2013).

viii.   Looking through Projects that have been implemented on Youth

Worker Development

a. *Learning Badges Project - Unique Network.* This project involves 6 organizations from different European countries (Lithuania, Spain, Slovenia, Portugal, Germany and United Kingdom). It develops the UNIQUE Learning Badges that will be a web-based accreditation platform which offer youth workers online tools and solutions to design individual recognitions systems for their non-formal learning programmes. This project tend to contribute to the recognition of youth workers qualifications, and the system will be implemented in nine local, national and international youth workers' qualification programmes (Unique Network, 2013).

b. The project *"NFE South R-Evolution - empowering NFE in Southern Europe"* is promoted by the Southern European Youth Councils, that agreed on a common educational strategy to create and implement national PoT in each council with the aim of activating participation and supporting the policy strategies with a non-formal learning approach (SYC, 2013). The description of the project underlines that a NFE trainer has become a highly qualified profession in the European youth field, a human resource that is not recognized either mainstream in our societies and educational systems as a support in the LLL for the development of soft skills in adults and pupils (SYC, 2013). Therefore, the recognition of NFE and its professionalism at national level is a priority that the partnership aims to address with this project." (SYC, 2013).

To conclude, the concept of LLL became as an asset to develop new opportunities, stimulate individual's engagement and participation in different learning contexts throughout their lives. As a consequence it has influenced the decision making structures to recognize competences acquired from different educational settings as the EC created the eight key competences and improve their funding program towards a more inclusive and open projects to develop individual's competences in different areas of work and complementary to their learning pathway. On the other side, civil society in the context of this project played an important role on developing learning programs to young people preparing them with a large diversity of competences, skills and knowledge to the labor market. From other perspective it seems that the EC and YO are walking together on the need to create new opportunities to increase skills and preparing people to face the current challenges of a society and also to prepare them to have a more "multitask" attitude regarding with their professional or volunteer pathways. However it's clear that developments have been taking place but the main objective which the effective recognition of the youth workers and their competences seems to be

very vague or even not concretely approach. There are different perspectives of the Youth worker around Europe but not a common definition and therefore not a standard of competences to determine the profile of this professional.

In general organizations seem to have preference to recognize competences acquired by individuals in different learning settings then work towards the recognition of the youth worker as a specific profile for a specific position. Might be also linked with a large diversity and representativeness of the youth field. Recognizing formally the youth worker could actually mean limiting the youth work and its potential? Maybe is true but, coming back to the main topic of this research it might also interest the field to see their professionals recognize since they advocate that they are the main drivers of youth empowerment providing learning opportunities.

IV – Research Question's

This research will try to answer:

How YO see Youth Workers as educator? What are the core competencies of the Youth Worker? How Youth Workers as educator can stimulate LLL? What frameworks exist in Europe that recognize YW as educators?

In order for the research questions to be answered the questions which were addressed to the focus groups are:

1. How do you see Youth Worker as an educator in your organization?

2. What are the core competencies of a Youth Worker as an educator?

3. How Youth Worker as an educator can stimulate LLL?

4. What frameworks/ways exist in Europe and recognize competencies for Youth Workers as educators?

V – Methodology

v.   Focus groups as a method for this research

"The most common purpose of a focus group interview is to provide an in depth exploration of a topic about which little is known" (Stewart, 2006)

For the purposes of this research three FGs took place. Each one addressed different population towards a more holistic overview of the topic including all the key actors working in the youth field and directly with youth workers.

YO as the main providers of a complementary educational program of the formal education and the main actor stimulating LLL was the target for this research study. Thus were invited youth leaders/ workers to bring clearly inputs and contributions regarding with the guided questions.

The participants of the FGs were from different positions: Youth leaders, Project Managers and Youth Workers with the intention to gather different perspectives of youth workers as educators. Each position, according with their background and experience works in different working areas with specific vision and criteria when it comes to select and work with educators. In practice Youth Leaders normally work on policy level following the political developments in this case regarding with NFE and Youth Work (YW) and are the ones selecting youth workers to cooperate with their organization. Project managers normally recruit youth workers to develop or implement their educational programs, they are following the technical issues and writing positions regarding with political developments towards 3 main topics in this field: NFE, recognition of competencies and managing projects funded by EC or CoE under the same topics. Finally the Youth Workers who work as educational providers and are aware of the current conditions and recognition for their work and competencies as educators.

The questions addressed to each group were four as mentioned on previous section.

vi.   Procedure

For the purposes of the research three FGs took place and for all of them the same procedure was followed. During the three of them a moderator (the researcher) and an assistant (researcher's colleague) were present. At the start of each FG the researcher explained the study to the participants, the purpose that the three FGs will serve for the study, as well as the role of the moderator and the assistant in the process. The moderator explained what is expected from the participants in the process and informed them regarding the recording of the session and the method of data collection. In addition, all the participants signed an informed consent form (Appendix B) and the moderator has kept all the informed consent forms. Finally, the moderator informed all of the groups that a reflection box is available for those who would like to add something more even after the end of the FG.

After this same opening process for all the three groups, the moderator was reading each one of the questions to the participants and she placed them on a presentation board so that they can be visible to everyone during the discussion. After posing a question the group discussions were starting upon the questions. Each discussion was allowed to continue until the participants had nothing else to add and the moderator was feeling that the question had been covered.

The audio recording for each session was recording during the whole process and in addition to the recordings the assistant was taking notes on the basic arising themes from each discussion as well as on the participants' reactions.

At the end of each FG the moderator thanked all the participants and the assistant and gave more information regarding the time and the way that someone can have access to the research and the results.

vii.   Participants:

In the youth sector and especially in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) there are three main positions that work with and for the development of the field and this profession in different ways. For the purposes of this research participants from that background were invited to participate at three different FG (See Fig.1).

Fig.1 Profile of Participants

Position	Experience	Relevant to the Focus Group	Characteristics of participants
Youth Leaders (1 year of mandate in a youth organization)	Recruiting youth workers for their organization as well as following the political discussion on European Level	Bring a political vision on the current discussions about the recognition of youth workers and how their organization seem them as an educational providers	6 Youth Leaders, 3 males and 3 females, from different European countries (RO, SP, D, H, CZ) with ages between 25 and 35 years old.
Project Managers	Working in the youth field. Managing projects in different dimensions, following policy developments and selecting youth organizations.	Close contact with youth workers in two different perspectives: from one side they recruit youth workers to design, implement and evaluate their learning activities and on the other side they count with the youth workers to collaborate on consultations and building strategies towards a better recognition of the Youth work through Education strategies	5 Project Managers, 3 males and 2 females, from RS, FR, RO, CZ and D. With ages between 25 and 35 years old.
Youth Workers	Working in different youth and non-youth organizations, in different educational	Crucial to better understand how these practitioners see themselves as youth workers and educational	6 Youth Workers, gender balanced, from different European countries and with ages between 21 and 33

viii.   Data Analysis

The discussion from each FG was transcript from the researcher using the recordings and a combined reviewing took place in relation with the assistant's notes on the participants' reactions and expressions as well as the key themes which rose.

Thematic analysis was applied on the transcripts. Based on Braun and Clarke (2006), repetitive patterns within the transcripts indicate common themes which appear through all the FGs and allow their description and reporting in the analysis. These common themes are defined as important indications in relation to the posed questions and they are repeated through all the available data. This method was chosen as the appropriate one for a study which intends to explore the common ground among different groups of individuals regarding specific questions, for a topic which is under-researched (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher conducted the data analysis based on the theory of thematic analysis. After the transcription, the reading and the re-reading of the transcripts the researcher moved to "sorting the different codes into potential themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 19). This process allows the identification and isolation of the existing themes. After the identification of the common themes through all the available data the researcher moved to their naming and description and at the end their reporting in relation with the participants' statements (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

VI - Findings of Focus groups

This section intends to describe the relevant findings acquired from the different FGs. It is divided in clusters regarding with the main topics of the research questions that guided those sessions and will be followed by a deeper discussion during the next chapter of this study.

All the FGs started with an introductory question that led the discussion about concept of the Youth Worker as an educational provider within the organizations where participants belong.

Regarding the first question the discussions during the three FGs led to the establishment of two themes related to the role of Youth Workers as an educators, trainer and facilitator with trainer being phenomenally the most preferable. How someone would characterize a Youth Worker for the first group composed from Youth Leaders and the second composed of Project Managers, was mostly dependent on which level he operates, either local or international level as well as on what kind of terminology is recognizable inside and outside the organizations. The third group of Youth Workers, examined the question initially by referring to the age of the group that a Youth Worker is working with each time as the variable which will characterize him/her either as trainer or facilitator. At the end, the group of Youth Workers was differentiated by tending to the role of facilitator for the Youth Worker as educator. According to the third FG, facilitator is a role which fits better with the non-formal learning processes within YO.

Trainer

In the first FG composed from Youth Leaders a participant said:

"Most people who educate in AEGEE are members in the Academy who are trainers and they are full aware that they are educators. But it also comes to the definition of the Youth worker and I think if we take this into account then the clearest definition of the Youth Worker is trainer".

This was a clear role attribution to the Youth Worker. Youth Worker can be a person usually from the Academy who provides training and can be characterized as

trainer and has a clear educative role. Generally, attributing this specific role to the Youth Worker was affected from what is acceptable in terms of terminology within an organization as well as at international level.

For the Projects Managers in the second focus group a debate between the roles of "educator" in general and "trainer" took place with "trainer" being the most dominant at the end.

"- The role of trainer for a Youth Worker might not be so good. Trainers exist also in football! Outside it looks a bit strange. If you call him educator might be the best.

- Educator might be the best because it puts the focus on their educating role and sometimes people who are actually doing it they do not realize that they have an educative role

- Educator is easier to explain

-"Educator" might also be a bit formal and scary because it sounds a bit deeper and it brings this broader social aspect in the trainings which we do not have

- For me educator is more a role of providing information while trainer is more let's say non formal education world"

At the end this group agreed on the role of "trainer" when the factors what is more acceptable in the Youth World and whether we are talking about international or local trainings come to the discussion.

"it depends on the country, some countries call them educator, some other facilitator, some other animator, or trainer. Mostly trainer. In international level is basically trainer"

"People in the field are already used in the term trainer"

In the third group composed from Youth Workers giving a "role" to the Youth Worker was mostly dependent on the age level of the groups that a Youth Worker is working with. In this group a both roles "trainer" and "facilitator" were attributed to the Youth Workers with "trainer" being a rather formal role which comes with the age and experience. One participant shared:

"It is a bit like the difference between training and facilitating. Of course

we provide trainings. There is this expert who teaches young people**"**

Another participant went a bit further on that:

" when you are fourteen and you probably interact with schools and you do

activities with other people of the same age when people stay a long in the

organization and they grow older they may find themselves doing trainings

in their mid twenties to people who are in their sixteen".

For this last group, attributing a role to a Youth Worker seem to be also dependent on whether this role would be in line with the context of non-formal education. According to the participants, even though a Youth Worker can be characterized as a trainer, this would immediately take from him/her the role of promoting or facilitating peer learning which according to them is a basic component of NFE activities.

Facilitator

Facilitator was mentioned as an appropriate role for Youth Workers mainly from Project Managers and Youth Workers in contrast with the Youth Leaders who did not referred to it.

The Youth Leaders in the first session did not mention the role of "facilitator". As it was stated above they characterize Youth Worker as "trainer" mostly influenced from the fact that this is an internationally acceptable role. Instead, for this group the discussion with regard to the role of Youth Workers was then focused on the fact that potentially everyone can be a Youth Worker, meaning a trainer, as long as he or she has the qualities that this role demands and the willingness to do it. One participant said: "At least the active members and every person who wants can take up this role can do it". With two participants saying:

"-Especially at local level you can ask from people who have more experience to come as trainers. People who have been in AEGEE for a long time and they have experience and they know how things work. Those who have the knowledge but maybe they do not have the methodology.
-Usually this happens because there is no one else to do it but we need to do it!"

However, in one of the following questions one of the Youth Leaders said "there is also a very common mistake happening to confuse trainers with facilitators, in many cases this can mean the same thing but it can be also a person who facilitates the process but the trainings needs certain expertise and understanding of the topics".

It is clear that for the Youth Leaders and the Project Managers the role of "trainers" is most appropriate for Youth Workers as educators while there is some flexibility in terms of who can take up this role given that sometimes simple members of the organization with more experience can take this task and in this case they can be called "facilitators".

The Project Managers' group verified the role of "facilitators" in cases similar to this one below

"Some Youth Workers' role is to empower young people as counsellors and others have an educative role. When we operate as Project Managers we need other people to be educators as well and because of the lack of resources sometimes you can take both".

This statement implies that a Project Manager can accept someone with no clearly educative role to provide educational activities but in this case this person is not characterized clearly as trainer. The term "facilitator" seems to fit better for this case if we take into account the Youth Leaders' previous opinion too. Furthermore, according to the second focus group the role of facilitator is also acceptable for Youth Workers basically because it is commonly used at local level. A participant stated "some countries call them educator, some other facilitator, some other animator".

This question was addressed to the third group from the moderator as "How do you see yourselves as educators inside YO" given that this last focus group was composed of Youth Workers. As it was mentioned earlier, the Youth Workers made a distinction between the role of "trainer" and "facilitator" depending on the age group that a Youth Worker is addressing, with the role of "facilitator" fitting better with the context of NFE according to them. One member of the group stated:

"The best part is peer learning in YO when you learn and share your

experience with the others and there the Youth Worker has a more distant role

and he is more facilitating the learning which comes from the Youth that's

why it is non-formal"

Another participant added to this distinction:

"So we actually have two levels, one where you feel the peer connection and

the other when you are not providing peer-education because there is an age

gap with the group that you are working with".

For this last group of Youth Workers, both roles are acceptable depending on the

age group that The Youth Worker is interacting with. However, the role of "facilitator"

as an educator seemed to be for them a more appropriate role for the context of NFE

since it indicates that his/her role is to facilitate the learning which drives from the

activities with a non-formal way. This is in contrast basically with the group of Project

Managers who saw in the role of "trainer" a better fit with the non-formal world mostly

though from the perspective of what is more recognizable.

Overall the three groups focused around the themes of "trainer" and "facilitator" as

the proper ones for Youth Workers as educators. For the first two FGs "trainer" is

commonly used in the Youth World and it fits better with the educative role that Youth

Workers have according to them. The last focus group of Youth Workers tended more

towards the role of "facilitator". For them it did not to seem to be dependent on what is

more recognizable as a term internationally rather that the role of "facilitators"

highlights the fact that Youth Workers' task is to facilitate non-formal learning rather

than provide learning.

The second Research Question presented in the focus groups addressed the core competencies of the youth worker as an educator which was interesting to see that it caused several reactions such as laughing and distinct body language which indicated that this is a controversial topic for the Youth World. Reasons might be linked with the fact that there is not a common agreement among different organizations and countries concerning the core competencies that the Youth Worker needs to have as an educator (YEU, 2013). Most of the participants in their responses stressed the fact that answering this question depends on two basic factors; whether the Youth Worker operates at local or international level and the characteristics of the provided training. At the end there were 5 themes identified through all the three groups as indicative regarding the core needed competencies for Youth Workers. The 5 common themes could be titled as following; intercultural competencies, experience/familiarity with the field, content/subject knowledge with regard to the provided training, empathy, able to provide NFE activities.

Intercultural competencies

Intercultural competencies were explicitly mentioned from all the participants through the three FGs as necessary for Youth Workers who operate basically at international level. Based on the participants' opinions the term 'intercultural competencies' contains a variety of skills which enable a person to operate within an intercultural environment. In the first group composed of Youth Leaders a participant said:

> "the main difference in competencies needed between local and international
>
> level is that when you are at Academy level you have people coming from
>
> differents parts of Europe and it requires specific competencies on

intercultural communication...you need to know how to interpret and

moderate your comments not to hurt other cultures and take into account

that not everybody has the same background, it is a mix of different

competencies that I would call them kind of intercultural communication

skills".

A Youth Leader added to this set of intercultural communication competencies the

language skills by saying "in trainings at international level you probably need the

ability to express yourself in a different language than yours"

In the second FG of Project Managers this set of competencies was also very

clear. One of the Project Managers shared;

"if we are talking about someone who is working with international team

then we need all these that someone calls intercultural skills"

The Youth Workers of the last FG referred to this set of competencies with the

similar way as the previous groups. One of the participants mentioned that "intercultural

sensitivity and awareness are necessary".

Intercultural competencies was the dominant theme through all the groups and

reasons for that can be the fact that YO have members from all over Europe and

someone with educative role needs to be able to deal with this variety in the audience

(AEGEE-Europe, 2012).

Awareness of the Youth field

All the participants in the three FGs highlighted the fact that Youth Worker must

be someone who has been involved actively in the Youth field, who has been following

all the recent developments in the field and is familiar with the structure and the

audience of YO. This is a theme which appeared as necessary for both of the possible

levels that training can be provided, local and international level. However, through the

three FGs this competency was interpreted differently. For example a Youth Leader

from the first group said:

> "Someone must be able to see also the bigger picture out of the local
>
> training, see where each step fits and be aware of the generally used
>
> process"

One of the project Managers in the second FG, in line with the above statement

mentioned without distinguishing international from local level:

> "He needs to be a person who has experience and has been active in
>
> the field. Not someone who was for example a trainer 5 years ago and
>
> the last 5 years he hasn't done anything. He must be updated, knows
>
> about the programs and policy development for example".

Another participant from the group of Project Managers went a bit further on the

importance of "being familiar with the Youth Field" by saying

> "we have experience in projects where you bring a good recognizable
>
> expert and then they do not know how to connect with young people,
>
> they do not know how to talk to them"

This opinion adds to the general competency of being familiar with the field in

terms of internal processes and developments, the skill of being able to address the

particular audience that constitute the field, meaning young people.

For the third FG where the participants were Youth Workers "being aware of the field" was expressed from the perspective mostly of their organizations rather than generally the Youth Field. One participant said

"it is important that educator will be someone who has certain level of experience in our organization. You first need to organize some events contribute to trainings and then step further and become an educator"

However, one participant also used the sentence "experience in the NFE agenda is necessary" reminding more what was expressed in the second group of Project Managers and the need of someone to be updated and familiar with the recent developments in the field.

"Awareness of the Youth Field" is a theme that appeared through all the groups and it summarizes the participants' opinion that an educator in YO must know and follow the developments related to the field which automatically influence their educative role, their structure and the way that the audience will be addressed at the end.

Content/subject knowledge with regard to the provided training

In all the three groups the fact that the needed competencies for a Youth Worker are also dependent on the characteristics of the activity that he has to provide was also emerged as a theme. The majority expressed a preference to those who have either content knowledge or practical experience on the particular project that is being implemented.

A Youth Leader from the first focus group said "for me if we are talking about local training, than content knowledge on the subject is enough" and in line with the Youth Leaders, two of the Project Managers in the second group mentioned at different

times "for me the first thing is that the person needs to know the topic, the specific

subject of the project" and " I do not know which exactly competencies I would look for

but I would look for someone who basically has experience in the particular training".

Another participant made this more specific by sharing "a person needs to have

experience in the topic, if for example is about inclusion he needs to know about

inclusion!"

It is interesting to include one of the opinions that a project Manager shared and

puts on perspective the very general skill of "having content/subject knowledge of the

provided training" in relation with the field of NFE:

"We do not look so much in the academic background as the only way to

acquire experience in a subject, since we are the ones promoting that

there are different ways to learn...so we can have people who work on

languages but maybe they study mathematics. So you really do not

somebody who has good academic background but for someone who a

general view and participation in a similar project that you might now

want to replicate to address young people"

The third group of Youth Workers was more specific with regard to the familiarity

with the topic of the training adding that the characteristics of the Youth Worker should

be in accordance with it. One of the participants shared:

"A Youth Worker can meet explicit criteria such as experience and

knowledge on the training but is also important to meet some implicit

criteria, if for example the topic is on gender discrimination there should

be a gender balance in the team that leads the group"

For all the three FGs, it was expressed as important for a Youth Worker to have content knowledge and practical experience in the provided training. In addition, experience in the particular topic comes from the participation of the Youth Worker in a similar training rather than academic general knowledge on it

Empathy

Being empathetic was present in all the FGs as necessary for a Youth Worker. The Oxford Dictionary defines being empathetic as "the ability of someone to understand and share the feelings of the other" (Oxforddictionaries.com, 2014). Through the three FGs this was interpreted mostly as the ability of a Youth Worker to understand and, as a participant from the first group said:

"have a certain level of empathy, meaning be able to read your

participants and give them the necessary support because a training

course can put sometimes psychological pressure".

Another participant from the first group also said "for me is important for the trainer to be able to understand the participants and also understand what the participants are going through".

In line with the above, a Project Manager from the second group said "a trainer should know and understand his target group, if he is working with young people, or students or people with disabilities etc."

In the third group of Youth Workers this was slightly expressed initially as

"I do not know how to say it, but sometimes a person feels better with one

person than another, so it is important to know what to do in the group".

In this case the participant was not an English speaker and he expressed his difficulty to state it exactly as he wanted. However, another participant added to his statement the following

> "I believe what you were trying to say is empathy. That person is able
>
> to create empathy with the other. Make the other comfortable to share
>
> and make connections"

This is a rather abstract theme to translate it to a specific competency however, through the three FGs there were references to more specific skills that a Youth Worker should be able to demonstrate which also contain the ability to be empathetic. A Youth Worker is "able to facilitate a group" and "coach the possible group, know their background, able to transfer but not get involved" were mentioned in the first group of Youth Leaders. "He must be a counsellor because he needs to empower young people" as a Project Manager said in the second FG. "He should be able to provide support to those who are stressed" and "be able to listen" as a two Youth Workers mentioned in the third one.

These general characteristics and behaviors that were expressed repetitively through all the three FGs as necessary for Youth Workers as educators and indicate the existence of a theme around the concept of being empathetic, can be connected with some of the skills that the literature attributes to *coach* or a *mentor* (Deans & Oakley 2006) Coaching skills were indeed mentioned from some participants in all the sessions but it did not came up as a theme through all the FGs.

Competencies in providing NFE activities

Through the three groups there was a constant referring to the ability of the Youth Worker to "be able to provide NFE activities". In the NFE context learning is occurring as the result of social interaction and social modelling while each individual self-regulates this process (UNESCO 2006). The participants used repetitively phrases similar to this one from a Youth Leader "you should know the NFE methodology". A Project Manager from the second session referred also to the fact that a Youth Worker "needs to know the non-formal methodology and how to deliver the topic". Two Youth Workers from the last sessions also said "he should have "NFE skills" and "be able to provide NFE activities".

It is important that the participants from all groups did not refer to specific activities that are particularly in the sphere of NFE neither when the moderator tried to retrieve more specific elaboration on what this could mean. Trying to narrow down this rather general theme, it could be connected with the participants' perception with regard to the first question and the role that a Youth Worker has as an educator, as well as with their opinion that a Youth Worker should be "empathetic". Based also on how UNESCO (2006) has described it, "NFE skills" can be connected at first place with the Youth Workers' role as it was described from the participants in the first question. As a trainer or facilitator his/her role is to facilitate peer learning within organization rather than provide learning. Being empathetic was elaborated from them basically as being able to support and understand the members' needs while they are going through the different process of training. An attempt to connect these themes with the literature could be lead someone to the theory related to skills and competencies that a coach or a mentor should have (Deans & Oakley 2006). A Youth Worker who is able to facilitate learning as a trainer and he is also able to understand and support the participants while they are going through this process seems to be responding to what "provide NFE activities"

means. In the formal education literature similar competencies can be found as necessary for a coach or a mentor should have (Deans & Oakley 2006).

The 3rd question of the FGs was related with this topic from where was a general convergence in the responses to this question. Most of the participants stressed that the fact that YO hence Youth Workers are promoting NFE, is already major work in promoting LLL. This was a theme appearing steadily through all the FGs. The fact that educational activities are taking place in the non-formal context is, according to them, it is stimulation for the youth to continue and sustain their learning. Stimulation of LLL appeared to be by-product of the contact with NFE as well as the product of specific interventions in some cases. The groups of Youth Leaders and Project Managers seemed to have a better overview of interventions at European/policy level since their position gives them more access to development of policy processes compared with the Youth Workers who are mostly operating in the field.

Stimulation of LLL as a by-product of the contact with NFE

All of the participants stressed the fact that stimulation of LLL can come as a result of the youth's contact with the field of NFE. The majority highlighted this as a fact rather than focusing particularly on Youth Worker's role in the process. LLL and its stimulation emerge as the result of participating in YO who can offer alternatives in terms of learning outside the established formal education institutions. In the first session one of the Youth Leaders shared:

"the fact that YO promote learning outside formal education and helps you understand that learning is possible, it is already something very important.

They can motivate this attitude towards LLL and inspire this interest to young

people."

In line with the above a Project Managers from the second focus group said:

"In many cases only the contact with the field of NFE opens many doors.

Many people see that education is not only the books that we know in

schools and Universities and there are many possibilities to find different

ways to educate yourself which can then create the need for someone to

continue learning and keep educating himself"

One of the Youth Workers in the third session emphasized this role of Youth

Workers and YO in comparison with what formal education can offer in terms of

stimulating LLL.

"We can break the stereotype that learning can happen only in the formal

environment. This mindset that you can only learn at school and then stop

after your graduation".

In the last statement the notion that LLL is also result of the disappointment or even

rejection of the formal educational system was expressed. Something which becomes

apparently after the contact with the work of Youth Workers. One of the Project

Managers during the second session shared:

" when we plan educational activities they are very much different from

the formal education, we do not only provide information, knowledge and

also work on the skills but we also work on the attitude of young

people...when you do the training you motivate people to continue being

active in their organizations and in their lives"

However, the third group of Youth Workers elaborated further on the content

difference of the NFE alternative and how motivating it can be for someone to continue

and sustain his learning. One of the Youth Workers said:

"You can continue learning for example while working without having

to start a course or something like this. Also Youth Workers can cover

the gap that seems to exist in formal education, by educating about

topics such as differences in gender, diversity, the concept of citizen, the

importance of voting and that is a big contribution"

Specific interventions

During the first two FGs among Youth Leaders and Project Managers there were

specific suggestions on how LLL is stimulated through the work of Youth Workers

through interventions at policy level. The suggestions had in common basically their

effort to take advantage of the funding programs that run internationally. The third

group seems to not have an overview of these processes, most likely because their work

as Youth Workers is limited in the field and as a result they referred mostly to some of

the methods they themselves use within the trainings. Generally each group shared the

methods that their positions allow them to use. In the first group one of the Youth

Leaders shared:

"AEGEE has been in the process of developing external tools for quite

a long. And we use as many tools as possible, mainly the youth funding

programs. High level Youth Workers use any kind of tool that can

stimulate LLL, for mobility programs to funding programs like Youth

in Action, Erasmus program, Leonardo program. By joining this

international environment you can see all these new opportunities and

the Youth Workers give sessions regarding all these opportunities

during our trainings."

Another Youth Leader also added:

"People who are not from AEGEE can also have access to the

opportunities...AEGEE can act as information student point and that way

other people can have access to many learning initiatives"

Project Managers referred as well to the above programs and in addition, one of

them brought as an example an intervention at local level which despite the resistance

that it faced it showed that they are also trying to target formal institutions such as

schools

"In a project that I was working recently at local level we went to the

schools to inform about the project and make selections of participants but

the teacher in the school kept sabotaging the process by asking many

questions in a not nice way"

Project Managers also stressed a lot the fact that it is necessary to follow up any

activities that Youth Workers implement in the field in order to make sure that learning

is occurring and by following it up you can contribute in sustaining it. Most of the

participants agreed on the following statement:

"It is important also as an educator to follow up the activities by

implementing some actions, apply mentoring processes, assessments,

reflections when someone comes back from the training but this works

more at local level"

As it was mentioned earlier Youth Workers choose to share some of the methods
or attitudes they adopt during the trainings which according to them are significant
contributors in promoting LLL. One participant stated:

"when you have the coaching role you can learn to a person how to learn

and this something that stays for life. In a very early stage of someone's

life a Youth Worker can work on this core aspects of human development"

Another one also added:

"we make sure that the activities are fun. The Youth Worker has this role

to make learning fun, a fun activity which can then motivate people

continue learning"

Overall the important conclusion with regard to this question is that it is a dominant
perception among YO that stimulation of LLL from Youth Workers comes as the result
of the contact with NFE at first place. In addition to this, each one contributes
differently depending on their job tasks and the tools that their position gives to them.
Either by taking advantage and promoting international programs or targeting formal
institutions with specific events and interventions or by adopting a role as an educator
which will show a different side of learning, more fun and supportive.

The intention of this research was also to raise discussion about what exists to support the recognition of the educators in the youth field and how it can be used by the different stakeholders.

Addressing the 4th research question to all the three FGs caused reactions such as sarcastic laughing and jokes basically because the issue of recognizing the competencies of the Youth Workers in Europe has been a controversial topic and referring to specific framework might be "tricky". One of the Youth leaders in the first FG shared:

> "When it comes to NFE and the competencies of the Youth Worker it can be tricky because there are many different definitions of the Youth Worker...in these processes you have to fight with high formal education workers who simply do not accept that someone outside formal education institutions can have a certain or same level of knowledge as someone who has a masters for example"

One of the Project Managers also started by saying "there are many tools but the problem is that there is not only one" while Youth Workers were slightly differentiated with one participant in the third session sharing "we ourselves (YO) we do not have a specific concept and everyone has a different perception on what is Youth Worker".

Overall the participants' responses had in common the EP from the CoE as a framework which seems to be, according to them, in a good direction regarding the recognition of the Youth Worker. In addition to this, participants from all the three sessions tended to bring into the discussion examples of frameworks from specific countries. This behavior might be attributed to the fact that at macro level there is still work to be done in order to reach a consensus on a framework which will effectively recognize the Youth Worker as an educator and at the same time, initiatives at local

level seem to be more coordinated and more representative regarding Youth Workers'
role as educators. Their responses indicate a tendency to focus the efforts at the local
initiatives with a broad European one as the general political umbrella.

For the first two FGs this question brought some suggestions regarding the
existing frameworks in Europe while for the third FG the Youth Workers seemed
initially to either not knowing the topic or not being interested enough. When the
moderator expressed this as an observation in the third session, one of the responses
which followed was "I never had the need to be recognized, this would bring many
barriers in developing the field and expanding the activities". The rest of the participants
agreed on that showing that although the recognition is an important process it seems
that it is not the priority at least for the practitioners in the field.

Nevertheless, the three FGs referred to the EP from the CoE as an existing
framework which is in the good direction concerning the recognition of the Youth
Worker as an educator. Youth Leaders in the first group shared the following:

"The CoE which is always a pioneer when it comes to NFE and Youth Work

has the European Portfolio which is currently being revised. The EC as such

has some initiatives for example the European Qualifications Framework

(EQF) even though it is not totally linked"

One of the Project Managers shared:

"You can have this informal assessment from the CoE this EP. There are also

national ways to certify yourself, meaning your state can recognize you. And

then through your CV, Europass and Euro-experience that they are preparing"

In the third session a Youth Worker simply shared "there is the Portfolio and the actions from the CoE" with the majority supporting this as the most indicative framework.

Initiatives at local level

As it was mentioned earlier, through the three session's participants after referring mostly to the EP, they shared some of their experiences from frameworks and initiatives at local level as movements which according to them, seem to grasp better the concept of recognizing the Youth Worker as Educator. There are no common references among the FGs to specific frameworks. However, what appears as a pattern among all the three of them is that the relative initiatives at national level can lead at the end to a more broadly accepted framework at European Level. In the first session one of the Youth Leaders shared:

> " I personally think we will never have one European Certificate because each country wants to decide how they will manage their education and certificates...I think the most that we will arrive is 28 frameworks with one European logo. An European that will recognize the qualifications. So we can have harmonization"

Another added to this "like many other things in Europe we can have one common thing which will then allow national particularities"

One of the Project Managers in the second group, in line with the above, shared:

> "The Europeans would be nice to know what the Youth Workers is and I think the CoE and the EC have more or less the same idea but when it comes to the countries we have very different traditions. The Youth Work

in UK is different from the Youth Work in Belgium so I think it is not

possible to find one for everybody. A European perspective would be good

but the concept of Youth Worker is more at national level and starting to

combine it at this level seems better"

As it was mentioned earlier the Youth Workers of the third session did not to seem

to share the need for recognition so much as the previous groups. One of the

participants shared

"I do not care for the recognition of a specific framework. I am much more

concerned with the recognition of formal education and that members and

participant will recognize this learning process. The need for recognition

does not come from the base, it is a top-down need"

However, as the discussion was progressing, the Youth Workers in the third group

seemed to be in line with the notion expressed in the previous groups that initiatives

from the states seem to have much more importance in the process of recognizing

Youth Workers as educators. One of the participants said:

"It is fair to propose global frameworks but not formalized these

frameworks. Only to propose to the different countries what they could

chose and then make what they want using them"

The fact that there were not particular common references to specific existing

frameworks from all the groups seems to be the actual finding. The Youth World is still

skeptical towards the existing frameworks and slowly directs its attention at national

level showing that all the efforts should start from there and Europe needs to be the

advocator and supporter of all these local initiatives by creating a general framework which will provide a much needed European political umbrella.

VII – Discussion

This chapter will present a discussion on the relevant findings of the FGs approached in the previous section.

From the data analysis was clearly that the ***Youth Worker as an educator*** is characterized as a trainer or a facilitator. However, a trainer and a facilitator can have different roles depending on the context of their practice. The literature review indicates that different institutions have different understanding of the youth worker as an educational provider. A study from the Estonian National Agency refer that a "trainer in the youth field is the designer and implementer of educational activities based on the values and principles of youth work, who creates conditions that promote the learner's diverse development and shape the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for youth work in a targeted learning situation." (Jeedas & Enn, p.5, 2011). On the other hand "a facilitator is commonly defined as a substantively neutral person who manages the group process in order to help groups achieve identified goals or purposes (Thomas, p.239, 2010). Schwarz distinguish "facilitator" from a "facilitative trainer" arguing that this last practitioner has knowledge and expertise to share with his participants but still uses the same core values and ground rules of a facilitator (Schwarz, 2005).

Summing up with the perspective of Meyerson in an article on the website Management Consultancy International (2014): a Trainer applies to the transfer of skills and knowledge and center in one subject to improve specific knowledge, skills and attitudes, while the facilitator uses different methods to ensure strong and impactful discussions to lead for a concrete result.

Considering the Youth Work with the role "to provide opportunities for young people to shape their own futures (...) a summary expression for activities with and for people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature" (CoE, 2013, p.10) it's easy to understand that the educational activities can happen in different contexts and have different dimensions therefore their providers also have to adapt accordingly. Is this diversity of the field that can actually bring up the both categories - facilitator and trainer - as educational providers.

From the FGs were other findings that can influence the definition of the Youth worker as an educator in YO as the different understandings of these practitioners from different positions in the field and also different levels that are inherent to the practice of youth workers.

According with their working scope and professional relationship each position has its own understanding of their profile and recognize them from different perspectives allocating them according with the needs to fulfil the educational objectives of the activity. For example on the FG for the Youth leaders, was given to much relevance to the dimension of the trainings, if it happens on international or on local level and for that different skills and experiences should be addressed, on the contrary for the Project Managers was more obvious that the youth worker that provides educational activities are trainers, the facilitators was not even mentioned this might be related with their positions. A project manager have the role to select different experts or practitioners according with the objectives of the activities they have to implement so they tend to find references that have good domain of knowledge on subjects of the project and skills to implement an educational activity. The youth workers gave relevance to the characteristics of the trainer or the facilitator according with the group of participants and context of the learning session.

Answering to this question, a youth worker as an educational provider in the youth field is indeed generally recognized as a *Trainer* that works according with the characteristics of the learning initiatives and is selected depending on the educational and content needs for each session. Concretely he proceeds from the principles of youth work in his work, applying different activities, methods/models and content depending on the peculiarity, objective, target group of the learning activity, dimension and subject of carrying out youth work and the topic of each session. These practitioners are aware of the reality of the life of the youth and local conditions, able to assess the situation and needs of the young person, choose and apply suitable methods and content.

*C**ore competencies of the Youth Worker as an educator*** in the youth field can be considered as basic skills, experiences and knowledge that an individual has to perform or generate his work. From the FGs was clear that is important that the educator analyze the diversity of the field, its dimension, the organizational method of work and the general aims of the youth work as part of their work. Those aims are "the integration and inclusion of young people in society and towards the personal and social emancipation of young people from dependency and exploitation." (CoE, 2013, p. 10). Participants of the FGs also mentioned that dependent variables as initiatives developed on local/international level can also claim specific competences.

The EP for Youth Workers (CoE, 2013) proposes a mind-map which illustrates what distinguishes the field of NFE from other sectors; methods, learning, practitioners and values are the distinguishable factors. The EP claims that learning in this field is intentional, voluntary, participatory which has strong links with the field of NFE. Concerning the learning methodology in NFE, the EP describes it as experiential learning, with the learner in the center, focused on knowledge, skills and attitudes. The practitioners should have knowledge about youth and youth culture, be aware of the

intercultural dimension, and be self-reflective and critical. These characteristics were also highlighted through all the FGs as competencies that youth workers should demonstrate. Equally important is the personal, social and ethical development of individuals and of the field. The diversity of the youth work also implies its scope on different dimensions on different levels, depending on the structure of the YO and on their representatives. Therefore the trainer also has to adapt himself, according with the working needs. This was a finding from the FGs when referring to the international/ local dimension, knowledge and the experience of the trainer to provide training sessions.

Regarding with the main results of the FG there are some interesting common themes appearing which are indicative of the competencies that YO consider essential for Youth Workers although, the scope of the institutions are generally different. From the FGs was clear that there are always questions about a common agreement for standard basic competences depending on the context of each organization and also was felt somehow that interests YO to have references flexible enough so they can work and develop their strategies according with their own culture.

From the FGs, 5 common themes derived with regards to the core competencies for the youth worker as an educator - *Intercultural competencies / Awareness of the Youth field/ Subject knowledge with regard to the provided training/ Language skills/ Empathy/ Competencies in providing NFE activities.* Indeed these competencies are not far from the existing common understanding concerning this issue. They are the result of a more realistic overview that the participants hold from their positions regarding and their interaction with the trainers. The fact that they are also met to the relative literature stresses more their importance and the purpose they can serve by facilitating the establishment of effective communication, interaction and engagement with the

participants, management and development of learning sessions as well as their

evaluation.

Furthermore, all the three groups the themes of being "empathetic" and "be able

to provide NFE activities" emerged as indicators of needed competencies for Youth

Workers as educators. In order to narrow down, a connection with the literature around

other learning environments and educators was attempted. Based on the findings, the

participants see Youth Worker in their organizations as either trainer or facilitator. The

terminology which will be used differs depending mostly on which term is more

familiar to the context that the Youth Worker will operate. However, his actual role

remains the same, to facilitate learning rather than provide someone with knowledge and

learning. Based on Deans and Oakley (2006) "coaching and mentoring are two personal

development methods that nurture a person's own abilities in order to improve behavior

and performance" (p. 4) and as learning methods they have similarities and differences

as well.

Although Youth Workers were not explicitly characterized as possible mentors

or coaches, some of the competencies that are met for them could be borrowed in order

to elaborate further on the findings. Deans and Oakley (2006) again claim that "coaches

and mentors need a wide range of attitudes and skills to be effective – such as excellent

listening and questioning abilities, sensitivity, empathy and understanding" (p. 23). They

also support that for someone who takes up this role, the ability to work effectively

across different cultures is vital in order to ensure that an individual will be able to

develop his own learning path and avoid misunderstandings and empathy.

Although the FGs did not bring the roles and the skills that a coach or a mentor has as a

dominant theme, an implicit connection with the relative literature can be attempted in

order to enlighten the competencies that YO consider important for Youth Workers as educators and were expressed as be empathetic and be able to provide NFE activities.

Was interesting that the *intercultural competencies* were emphasized a lot by all participants. Indeed the participants came from NGOs based in Europe representing thousand members throughout the continent and where the educational activities take place on different dimensions. In line with this, it was also mentioned that is important for the trainer to have the appropriated skills, to lead a session with participants from different cultural backgrounds, to work in a multicultural teams. As mentioned by Hosni "from the combination and from the dynamics of different cultural elements, the actors elaborate a new common space of communication and cooperation, the "third culture ", an "intermediate world". The complementarity of the various points of view and the skills can ideally end in a capital gain, as the intercultural synergy, for example in project management or within the framework of the reorganization of a service" (2012, p.36) and this is also one of the main capital gains of the youth work and NFE, a combination of different dynamics, contexts, experiences and knowledge.

Youth Worker stimulating LLL remains to the 3rd research question addressed within the FGs intended to get the vision of the main practitioners and leaders in the field on this topic. With this there were 2 main findings:

a) Stimulation of LLL as a by-product of NFE

In the beginning of this research the developments of LLL pointed out that it came as a political strategy aiming to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training, to promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship and to enhance creativity and innovation at all levels of education and training (EC, 2013). It's true and was clear from the FGs that YO and its workers see stimulation of learning throughout

individual's lives as a priority. Their vision of LLL differs depending on the position

they have and therefore they stimulate LLL differently. What seems to be in common is

NFE as a strategy and methodology that stimulates active participation and engagement

of young people in learning opportunities and consequently stimulates the work

dynamic of the YO and the funding programs to develop this concept of learning. On

the other hand and also in common for the participants was the importance to develop

and implement learning opportunities as a complement of formal education as well as to

approach different social topics that are not normally part of the formal curricula of

educational systems and are crucial throughout life. They considered those reasons as

part of their work stimulating LLL.

Rather how the youth workers as educators stimulate LLL with and for young

people. And here the key seemed to be the methodology used by the youth workers/

trainers to implement their learning activities as well as how it can stimulate the

motivation of individuals on learning opportunities throughout life, the so called NFE.

Indeed over the past years within YO a lot of synergies have been discussed between

formal and non-formal systems in order to develop a comprehensive learning system

with the intention to provide new learning opportunities to all and stimulate this in all

cycles of individual's lives. Which is clearly in line with the essence of LLL as an

educational pathway for everyone that should happen throughout life, in different

contexts through different learning approaches.

For the youth NFE is an "organized educational process that gives young people

the possibility to develop their values, skills and competencies and competencies that

they would not receive in the framework of formal education" (YFJ, 2010, p.6). Which

links with the core competences of the youth work highlighted in the previous section.

The participants of the FGs pointed out that the educational activities that are taken in

non-formal settings are stimulating to foster sustainability of the learning to young people. Considering this as a dynamic cycle within this specific field where educators prepare and provide training courses to multiply their scope of interventions using a non-static format and methodology that can be adaptable to different target groups and contexts as NFE we can than say that those are the practitioners that indeed stimulate LLL in and out of the sector. As also mentioned in the FGs most of the organizations have or intend to create their pool of trainers, academy or group of animators to stimulate LLL opportunities in and out of the sector. However practitioners and organizations face other challenges as NFE is not formally recognized in the different member's states and in different sectors which turns difficult their formal recognition as educators.

Youth Workers are the effective dices of the promotion of LLL but also the ones ensuring that learning happen in complementary contexts and according with needs and expectations of individuals and organizations by using NFE as their weapon to change.

b) Specific interventions that stimulate LLL in the youth sector

Above was clarified that for this learning providers the biggest concern is regarding with the methodology, but for project managers and youth leaders were stressed the need to appeal European funds that it self also provide opportunities for youth organizations develop projects and opportunities under LLL priorities. Those funds are normally the main drivers of political priorities and Program Managers seem to pay attention on that. Reasons might be from where the organizations have to adapt their approach if they want to benefit from financial support, get more recognition of their work, to give opportunities to their trainers and consequently to young people. On the other hand was stressed the need to follow-up learning activities as a way to ensure

continuity and sustainability of education throughout life and the need to be a complement of formal contexts as mentioned above.

However from the educational point of view Michael Fullan's (2007) theory on Managing Educational Change can be a way to be better frame especially regarding the factors that affects the different cycles of an educational process - initiation, implementation and continuity. As the youth work and learning in this sector appears to be in a constant changing process. Fullan (2007) stresses the fact that Change Management in Education is not just a matter of using new approaches or new materials in Education but getting a holistic vision of the process and understand what real change means. Through the main phases of this cycles the author explains how they are interlinked and how the decisions taken in the initiation can actually influence the implementation of the process in various aspects and consequently on its continuity. The participants of the FG highlighted the fact that there's a need of following up activities implemented by the youth workers/trainers to foster LLL. A very important aspect of change is the continuation of the process/project meaning whether it is sustainable or not. Fullan points out important issues regarding the continuation that should be considered, such as the lack of money for professional development and staff support which can influence the continuity of the learning processes and affects motivation and engagement by the practitioners (Fullan, p.101, 2007). Successful change is not just about being right, it is also about engaging diverse individuals and groups who likely have many different versions about what is right and wrong (Fullan, 2007), not forgetting the importance of the motivation of individuals or institutions on the process of change. Even if his arguments are more focused on formal educational structures they can be easily translated in non-formal settings as well.

Summing up, it seems that the Youth Workers face a new challenge where NFE is combined with LLL in various aspects, they privilege the methodology of active participation and engagement of young people in learning activities but at the same time they have to be aware of the political influences that drive their work and their recognition so the concept itself can be stronger and effective. Therefore is important the correlation between positions in the youth sector to reinforce the purpose and stimulation of LLL.

Frameworks to recognize the competences of the Youth Worker was the topic of the fourth research question presented to the FGs. As an outcome from the FGs, there's no specific framework that recognizes the youth worker as an educator. However the EP produced by the CoE seemed to be the one that better fits the youth field in general. This framework does not make a distinction between types of youth worker but it was created for individuals, organizations and teams working in the youth sector. As mentioned above in the competencies sector it is based on the main and basic principles of the youth worker. Education seems to be a transversal approach of the document that well explains the youth work and its dimensions helping users to proceed on a process of reflection to get a holistic vision and awareness of their competences and its impact throughout their lives in the organization and in private life. In the end this tool does not provide a specific certification of competences. But it's created by a European institution and in cooperation with the EC, YO, etc. (CoE, 2013). This can bring some institutional recognition but not enough yet to be formally recognized.

Through an online research of good practices from YOs developing frameworks to recognize competences of youth workers, different tools and instruments were found. Also some participants of the FGs made references to what their organizations are

internally developing. However most of them lack in providing a certification that is formally recognized, others try to create partnerships with companies or public institutions to move further on getting an official recognition. But seems to be still a very difficult process and not fully agreed by the youth movement, because of their differences and some concerns that it could limit their scope.

From the FGs was clear that a possible common framework should consider the different national realities and formats that influence the recognition of such instrument on policy level. Within that idea exists the EQF - a common reference framework which assists in comparing the national qualifications frameworks and their eight reference levels that describes what a learner know, understand and can do (EQF, 2014). This European instrument is "monitored by the EQF Advisory Group, which brings together representatives from national authorities and other European stakeholders" (EQF, 2014). It applies to all dimensions of education (formal, non-formal and informal, vocational) to each its qualifications levels. The constraint in using this framework in the youth field and specially for their trainers is that not in every country they are officially recognized as a profession (YEU, 2013) therefore does not appear in all National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) and consequently not on the EQF.

This explains the suggestion from the participants, recognition needs to be something coming from national levels and on European level would be European Institutions such as EC, CoE in closer collaborating with the YFJ advocating for a common understanding on the recognition of the Educators.

On the other hand was clear from the FG there are still doubts how it could be done and if YO and youth workers wish to have a common European Framework of competences or not.

VIII - Conclusion

The purpose of this study intends to enlighten more an under-researched topic, Youth Workers and YO and their educative role from the practitioners' perspective. More specifically, intends to bring results regarding the common ground that exists within the diverse YO in relation with the following research questions: How do you see Youth Worker as an educator in your organization?; What are the core competencies of a Youth Worker as an educator?; How Youth Worker as an educator can stimulate LLL?; What frameworks/ways exist in Europe and recognize competencies for Youth Workers as educators?

From the results of the study is clear that Youth Workers and YO are operating in the sphere of NFE and so far their contribution to the Youth's further development is considered a controversial topic. YO as well as formal educational institutions hold different definitions of what NFE means, what is the role of the providers and whether any benefits from such processes could be considered formal qualifications in someone's job research (Schwarz, 2005). This is one of the barriers which limits the existing research so far and affects the current one.

Within this different strategies can be taken to contribute for the development of the above mentioned limitations: investment on scientific research, Launch European consultations and discussions on the recognition of educational practitioners in the youth field. Their formal recognition and advocacy strategy on national and European level to fully integrate these main subjects on the political discussion/agenda. These strategies have a holistic scope and vision to intervene on different dimensions and purposes - political, social, scientific and educational – in order to generate resources that can work better together ahead combating the limitations and challenges of the youth field.

Therefore some recommendations are needed to implement those strategies: New publications and more coalitions appear as some possible methods to make more people aware of what is happening currently in the European youth and the relative educational political agenda. This constructive approach can contribute to the current discussions and creating new ones as well. YO are fighting for the recognition of NFE along with the competencies of the Youth Workers as educators as an attempt to stimulate LLL for youth and establish this valuable educational processes at political level. However, while this very broad and difficult debate goes on there are initiatives in the background which work or intend to work beneficially with regard to the stimulation of LLL and bring as a result valuable "recognition" at least from the participating Youth.

On political and social intervention level the Structure Dialogue (SD) seems to be a possible practical and political model for further developments. It facilitates communication, foster top down and bottom-up discussions and synergies between different actors and decision makers on European and on National levels involving young people in a forum for continuous joint reflection on the priorities, implementation, and follow-up of European cooperation in the youth field" (EC, 2014). This has been a successful instrument under the European Presidencies where the YO have seen some of their recommendations approved and integrated on the political agenda of the EU Presidencies (AEGEE, 2014). In the case of this research this Model could be a tool on national level managed by youth platforms as the NYCs. This could foster initial discussions in working groups involving actors from different sectors about recognition of the youth workers as educators and strategies for the integration of these profiles within the NQF. The national dynamic of the process and its main results could be brought for discussions and sharing of good practices to the European level using

channels, such as the national agencies of the EQF and the YFJ who could advocate for its integration on the youth agenda for the SD.

Educational science, policy development and youth work practices are keys elements to the development of the field, to turn it formally and conscientiously recognized among the different sectors stimulating for a sustainable change.

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        Taylor and the "Reflexive Project of the Self" (pp.332-350). Adult Education
        Quarterly 62 (4).

X – Acknowledgement

I would like to dedicate my first words for two of the great mentors I had during the current academic degree: David Ferreira (my husband) who was the great motivator believing in my capacities and skills never letting me give up. And Tiago Soares the initiator for taking this Master program.
From them I have learned the importance of investing in our careers and never leave behind an desired ambition.

I have also to thank my Colleague Athanasia Panoutsou for being always willing to support me during the 3 focus group as assistant, give assistance in the methodology part, give critical opinions and be incredibily available all the time. There are no words to describe how grateful I am for her friendship and contribution.

A sincere Thanks to my Mentor – Prof. Dr. Koen Lombaerts – who was always available to assist and support the thesis process. Was a long way and when I had some burns-out regarding the ways I should take to lead my analysis he made remarks and questions that enabled me to get back on track. Professor Koen always believed in the subject of the thesis and gave me strength to continue.

I would like to thanks AEGEE-Europe for all the institutional and logistical support for the focus groups, and for some of its Youth Leaders, Project Managers and Youth Workers being able to participate and actively contribute during the Focus Groups.

Generally I would like to Thank the Participants of the Focus Groups and all the contact people that were disseminating the invitation for the sessions within their organizations.

I could not conclude this part without making reference of my Master Colleagues that indirectly were always available and open to discuss my doubts and questions I needed to clarify. Moreover they were part of my successful path during the Master programme. A Special thanks to Cathryn Benett, Karen Triquet and Paula Altenberger.

XI – Appendices

Appendix A

An example of the invitation email:
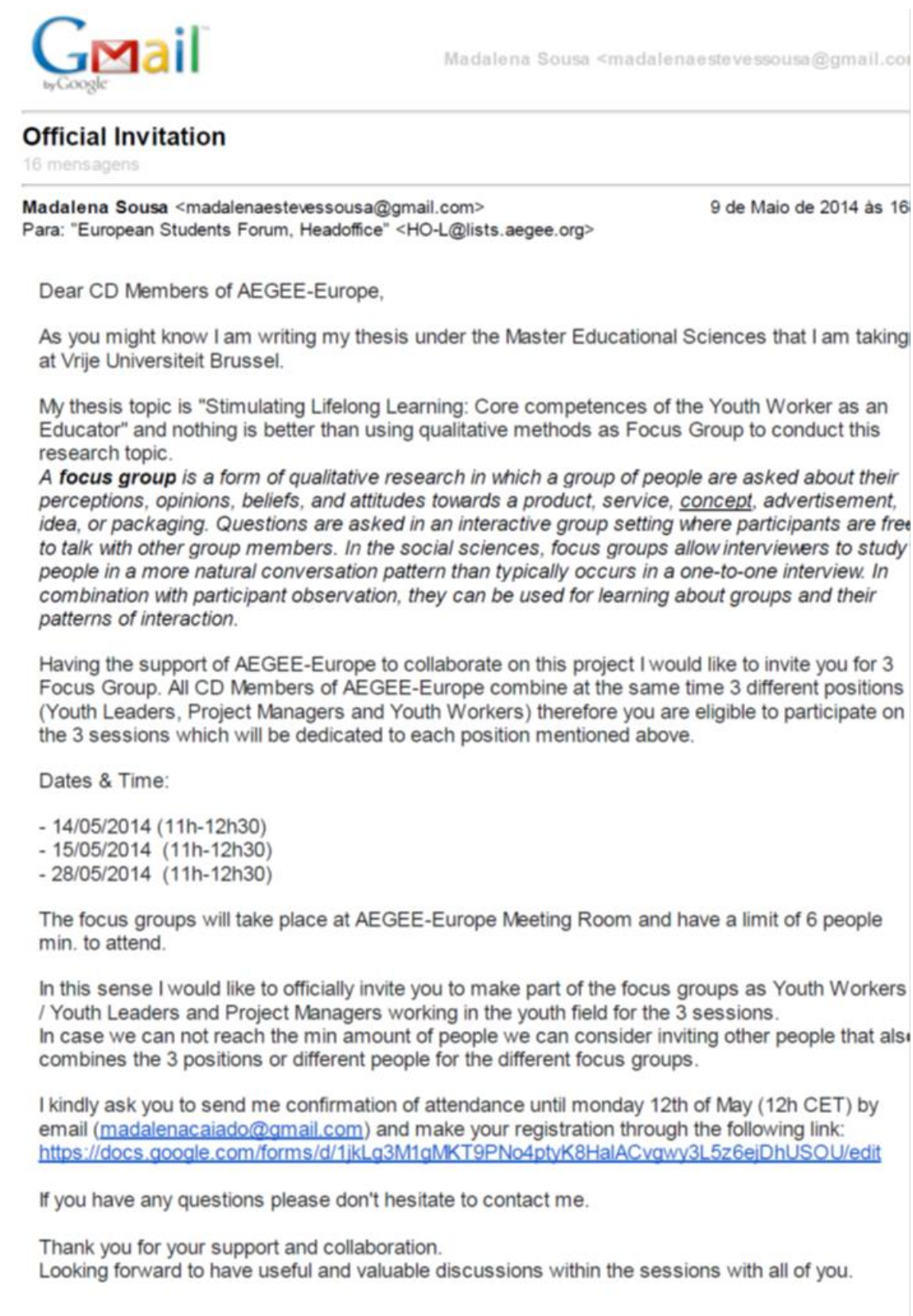
Appendix B

Consent to participate in Focus Group

You have been asked to participate in a focus group on behalf of the Master Thesis of Madalena Sousa in Educational Sciences taken at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The purpose of the group is to understand what are the competences of the Youth Worker as an Educator. The information learned in the focus groups will be used to design a standard reference of core competences that the Youth Worker should have to be considered as an educator.

You can choose choose whether or not to participate in the focus group and stop at any time. Although the focus group will be tape recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect for each other, we ask that only one individual speak at a time in the group and that responses made by all participants be kept confidential.

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above:

Signed: _____   Date: __/__/____

Appendix C

An example of a thank email sent to the participants after the 3rd FG:

6/8/2014   Gmail - Fwd: Focus group on YW competences

GM**ail**
by Google

Madalena Sousa <madalenaestevessousa@gmail.com>

Fwd: Focus group on YW competences
1 mensagem

Madalena Sousa <madalena.sousa@aegee.org>   6 de Junho de 2014 às 13:27
Dear All,

First of all let me thank you for coming and participating on the focus group for youth workers.
I am sure that will bring an added value for the analysis of the thesis.

I also would like to take the opportunity to forward you the email I received form Olivier with the Scouts references he mentioned during the discussion.

If you would like to share some references or good practices under the topic of the thesis or something else that you think could be from our interest please feel free to do it through this mailing list.

As requested at end of the session please find below the details of the pax's: