

Youth Partnership

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COUNTRY SHEET ON YOUTH WORK IN CROATIA

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1 Context of youth work

Despite relatively a well-developed youth policy framework in Croatia, interestingly, youth work itself is not so well developed. For the first time, in 2014, youth work found its place within a national youth strategy. The National Youth Programme stipulates that an analysis and definition of youth work in Croatia was supposed to be completed by the end of 2017, as a starting point for its professionalisation. However, this process has not been finalised. In the draft of the National Youth Strategy 2018-2024 youth work is indicated as being one of 10 priorities.

Nevertheless, youth work on the territory of Croatia has a long tradition, as it is stated in the recent text on the development of youth work as such (Kovačić, Čulum 2018). In this publication three major developmental stages are referred to, which lead to a contemporary understanding of youth work in Croatia. In the next few paragraphs we will describe these stages and their main characteristics.

1.1 Yugoslav period

As explained in the paper on the history of youth work in Croatia (Bužinkić et. al., 2015) the inception of youth work on the territory of Croatia can be found in the former Yugoslavia under the direction of the communist party. Three types of youth work existed in the former Yugoslavia – youth organisations, Youth Work Actions and youth sections of other organisations.

The most important entities within the youth sector in the former Yugoslavia were youth organisations, formally constituted as the youth wing of the Communist Party (Šarić 2016). The two most prominent such youth organisations were the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije*) and the United League of Anti-Fascist Youth of Croatia (*Ujedinjeni savez antifašističke omladine Hrvatske*), from 1946 known as the People's Youth of Croatia (*Narodna omladina Hrvatske*). The main idea, as argued by Šarić (2016), was to transmit the values of the communist party and create an enabling environment for an ideological upbringing. The League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia and the People's Youth of Croatia through debate clubs in schools, science groups, rural organisations and particularly Youth Work Actions, promoted socialist values and strengthened dominant societal norms. In the article by Šarić and Jurić (1992) *The Contribution for Studying History of the Youth organisations based on the Fonds RK SSOH (1942-1990)*, the authors elaborately describe the negative effects of such organisations on young people and society as whole. They claim that the aforementioned organisations suppressed liberty and creativity, at the same time promoting repression and centralisation. On the other hand, these organisations supported culture via young people's cultural organisations, sport activities, technical education and the youth press. Despite the detailed description of youth organisation activities in Yugoslavia, there are certain positive aspects lacking in these authors' analysis. Firstly, the authors ignore the development of social cohesion and social capital as a direct result of the youth organisations' activities (Senjković 2016). In addition, the positive effects of volunteering and young people's socialising with other young people from different background are not recognised at all. Lastly, the authors do not explore the effect of the aforementioned organisations on professional development of young people in

enough depth. To sum up, even though the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia and the People's Youth of Croatia were without any doubt an important link in promoting undemocratic practices within the communist regime, their activities had, without any doubt, quite positive effects on young people and society as a whole. Hence, their heritage has facilitated present-day youth work.

Perhaps the most famous type of youth work in Yugoslavia was Youth Work Actions, popularly known as ORAs (*Omladinska Radna Akcija*). In her anthropological study on these actions, Senjković (2016) portrayed them as "the most Yugoslav social phenomenon of all". Youth work actions were in fact public activities conducted by young people and organised by the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia, with the aim to (re)build public infrastructure (roads, bridges, railways, etc.). Such activities were a source of cheap labour for the state and a kind of free holiday for young people. Participation in such activities was strongly encouraged by the state and one of the goals was to spread communist propaganda. However, there are several positive effects of such Youth Work Actions. Socialising with various young people, deliberation and interpretation of the socialist doctrines, and vocational out-of-school education are just some of them. When comparing contemporary youth work and Youth Work Actions of that time, three major differences are noticeable. Firstly, in Youth work Actions in the communist era there was no co-creation of activities with young people – all activities were planned and structured by the state. Secondly, unlike contemporary youth work practice where voluntary participation is highly praised and desirable, in the Youth Work Actions the voluntary aspect was lacking. Lastly, contemporary youth work is (or should be) inseparable from educated and professional youth workers, whereas the Youth Work Actions operated with so-called brigade commanders – personnel in charge of the output with no training in youth work, pedagogy or educational field. Regardless of these differences, the Youth Work Actions had an immense impact on the development of youth work in Croatia.

Coupled with youth organisations that were an integral part of the communist regime, the youth service-providing organisations were the third type of youth work in Yugoslavia. Mostly oriented towards organising cultural, technical, sport and leisure time activities, such enterprises were an important aspect of the everyday life of (young) people in Yugoslavia. Youth choirs, women's youth clubs and young people's sports clubs helped young people to develop their skills and discover talents they might have.

1.2 Early 1990s

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, the countries of the former Yugoslavia were faced with armed conflict on their territories. The war heavily impacted different social, political and other spheres of life and the youth sector was no exception. In order to understand the youth work in the 1990s one should be aware of the political situation at that time. From 1991 to 1995 there was a war for independence between Croats seeking independence from Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav People's Army consisting mainly of Serbs. At that time, in 1992 Franjo Tuđman won the first presidential elections, and was president of Croatia until he died in 1999. Franjo Tuđman saw Croatia as an independent and nationalistic entity in which other nations were often seen as the enemies of the state (Kovačić 2011). There are open debates about the nature of the Croatian political system in the last decade of the 20th century. Some consider it authoritarian (Pusić, 1998), others believe that this is an exaggeration, but admit there were some authoritarian elements (Kasapović, 1999), while some (still) claim that in early 1990s Croatia was nothing more and nothing less than a true democracy (mostly politicians attached to the right-wing party – the Croatian Democratic Union).

Nevertheless, there is a consensus among political scientists that Croatia at that time was a highly institutionalised semi-presidential country without extreme right- and left-wing populism (Zakošek 2008: 509).

The civil society arena in the early 1990s was very limited. In analyses of Croatian civil society of the 1990s it is often suggested to use the term “reduced civil society”. It is emphasised that Croatian polity was not liberal-democratic at that time and that civil society could not have been fulfilling all of its roles. Non-governmental organisations that were pro-democratisation and pro-transparency were not usually taken seriously by the government and the president of the Republic of Croatia himself either ignored their efforts or publicly disparaged their work and achievements. In that context the situation regarding youth work should be observed. As Bužinkić and associates (2015, 38) stress:

Youth work in the early 1990s in Croatia was shaped in different ways –the main difference from previous youth work was in treating them as young people in need of various social services, rather than as young people who delivered services following the agenda of a (former) political regime in order to build an infrastructure and mobilise support for the socialist political regime.

The pivotal factor relevant for understanding the historical development of youth work in Croatia is the anti-war Campaign in Croatia.

1.3 Late 1990s and early 2000s

After the end of war, certain factors remained within the youth sector. Youth organisations were thus offering various youth work activities, mostly focusing on different non-formal educational programmes but still with a strong emphasis on non-violent communication, non-violent action and conflict resolution and transformation (Bužinkić et al 2015). Such non-formal activities were intended for young people to engage in community building activities and to develop their leadership skills. One of the specificities of this period was the close co-operation between young people’s civil society organisations and educational institutions. Different youth organisations’ programmes took place in elementary and secondary schools, offering a real-life perspective on the (obviously) outdated official curriculum.

At that time there was a proliferation of youth, cultural and other civic initiatives registered as civil society organisations (ibid, 41). The authors of the report explain that the first serious “gathering of a majority of youth organisations happened in 2002, when the Croatian Youth Network was established as a programme exchange and an advocacy coalition. Bringing together 28 active civic, peace building, cultural, media activism, environmental and other youth organisations, the Croatian Youth Network gathered these main actors to ensure continuous advocacy and support in youth development” (ibid). The focus on the personal and social development of young people, while relying on non-violent communication, peace building and peace-maintaining activities in different contested spaces at the same time helped to strengthen social capital and social cohesion among different youth groups. Despite empirical results showing low values of civic and political trust and participation and high levels of social distance among young people, this started to change to a better-developed civic political culture (Ilišin and Radin 2002). Civil society organisations providing youth work slowly started to consolidate, becoming partners or watchdogs in different governmental initiatives and going in the direction of youth advocacy.

2 Strategic and legislative framework of youth work

Croatia currently does not have any official definition of youth work as it is not officially recognised at government level. Even though the government often comments on the importance of youth work it has not published any normative and/or strategic document aimed towards protecting it, developing it or stating its importance for young people. On the other hand there are two aspects of government policy towards youth work which can be stated:

- The government is clearly oriented towards funding youth organisations via special funding schemes. Even though youth work per se has not been mentioned in these calls for proposals, it is evident that by supporting youth organisations, the government is *de facto* supporting youth work.
- In 2015 an expert group on youth work has been established within the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy, consisting of experts and professionals from the public and civil sector with the goal of defining and analysing youth work. Even though this working group has met five times so far, and the only tangible output of its work is an European social Fund (ESF) project whose goal is to analyse and support youth work development, this working group is an indication of the importance of the youth work for the government.

In terms of understanding youth work from the point of view of youth workers, the only data on this is the survey on the youth work profession conducted by the Croatian Employment Service in 2016. That survey discovered that youth professionals understand youth work as project management, running workshops for young people, designing education intended for young people, providing youth information and counselling, and organising activities for young people. From this list it is obvious that youth work suffers from considerable vagueness and can be understood as a “stretched concept” (Sartori 1970). Besides, it seems that the “youth for youth by youth” principle, one that nurtures youth engagement and empowerment, has been used interchangeably and sometimes even replaced more by a “servicing youth” principle.

3 Recognition

Youth work is not recognised as a profession in Croatia, meaning that neither in the national registry of professions nor within the Croatian Qualification Framework is there any reference to “youth worker” as a profession.

According to the Croatian [Agency for Science and Higher Education](#) the Croatian Qualification Framework (CROQF) is a framework which lists every qualification acquired in Croatia. The central element of the CROQF is the learning outcomes or, in other terms, competences acquired by the individual through the learning process and proved after the learning process, where the learning process itself is not crucial, as the learning outcome is assessed. The place of each qualification acquired in the Republic of Croatia is set by the level of the learning outcomes belonging to that qualification. The placement of qualifications at respective levels allows the comparison and linking of different qualifications.

The CROQF introduces qualifications standards. While the same qualification can be acquired at different educational institutions and through different educational programmes, there are certain standards in terms of defined learning outcomes that a qualification needs to have. Educational programmes need to be in line with the qualifications standards which would mean that they lead to the acquirement of leaning outcomes that are defined by a respective qualification standard.

Apart from the qualifications standards, the CROQF introduces occupational standards as well. An occupational standard is a document which contains clearly defined competences required for a certain occupation. It is created through a clearly prescribed methodology and collected data by which the competences for a certain occupation have been defined and analysed.

Youth work still does not have its place in the CROQF even though the afore-mentioned survey is from 2016. It is the first step in the process of developing a qualification standard.

Upon passing the law on the CROQF, one of the requirements of the Ministry of Science and Education is to pass laws on the recognition of non-formal education and informal learning. At this point this has still not been done.

In reference to social recognition, youth work as a term is still not recognised in the Croatian discourse. A literal translation of youth work in Croatian is “working with young people” (*rad s mladima*). However, this is not a coherent concept but rather a descriptive category without a specific meaning. In other words, youth work as such is accepted and understood only among a limited number of youth experts and some civil society professionals. Due to the lack of standardisation in understanding what youth work actually is, it is difficult to offer an unambiguous definition of this practice. Furthermore, this is compounded by the lack of academic texts, empirical research and policy measures about youth work. As a result, there are various interpretations and understandings of youth work, even among people working with young people.

Croatia, as a member country, has actively participated in the Erasmus + project, hence the National Agency promotes the Youthpass as a tool for self-assessment. In 2018 the City of Varazdin applied to become a European Youth Capital and has the support of the government.

4 Funding youth work

Relevant sources (Bužinkić et al. 2015; Croatian Employment Bureau, 2016) reveal that youth organisations are forced to deliver a number of projects in order to secure basic (and usually only one-year) funding from the government in order to offer activities to young people. Due to such inadequately developed institutional support for youth organisations, youth work activities are mostly (short-term) project activities and heavily influenced by the criteria of different donors and calls for proposals. Such project dynamics make activities less sustainable and it becomes more difficult to focus on the process of engagement with young people, which is one of the key principles of youth work (Young 2006). On the other hand some (Spence 2004; Zeldin 2004) argue that while the process is important, it is outcomes that actually count. Moreover, the project dynamics of youth work do not allow youth workers to focus on developing their competences due to extensive administrative tasks that the management of projects requires (Croatian Employment Bureau, 2016).

In 2018 the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy published a call for project proposals for civil society organisations in the following fields:

Violence prevention among young people and children

Youth organisations (in total – 6 priorities, budget allocated – HRK 6.3 million):

- active participation;
- information and counselling activities – local and regional information centres;
- youth clubs or leisure time organisations;
- youth centres;
- capacity building in the fields of (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) NEET population, self-employment and social entrepreneurship, young people in rural areas;
- local and regional youth programmes.

Supporting organisations aimed at supporting families and protecting childrens' rights

Erasmus + programme is another funding scheme for youth work. According to the national agency these are the data for youth field projects

2017:

allocated: EUR 3.899.239,00

contracted: EUR 3.895.015,87 (99,86%)

2018:

allocated: EUR 3.581.111,45

5 Structures, actors and levels in youth work provision

5.1 State structures/public authorities deciding on or providing youth work

The ministry officially in charge of youth work is the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy. Within the ministry there is a Department for Youth and Volunteering. Within this department there are four people working at the topics of youth and two on the topics of volunteering.

The national agency for the Erasmus + programme is called the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes. Currently there are two departments in the field of youth – the Department for Youth Mobility and the Department for Strategic Partnership and Structured Dialogue in the Youth Field (a new systematisation is being expected by the end of 2018). In total there are 17 employers working in these two departments (assistant director for the youth field, two heads of department and 14 officers)

5.2 National or local youth councils

The Youth Council of the Government of Croatia consists of ministerial, civil society and academic community representatives whose goal is to supervise youth policy in Croatia

According the Law on Youth Advisory Boards, each local government unit (municipalities, counties and cities) should have a youth advisory board whose goal is to direct local youth policy. Data collected in 2017 for the year 2016 show that 18 out of 20 counties (80%) have youth advisory board, 67 out of 128 (52%) cities and 66 out of 428 municipalities (15%) despite this being their legal obligation. When it comes to active youth advisory boards, data are even more worrying – only 21% of all local government units (126 out of 576) have active youth advisory boards.

5.3 Youth and youth work NGOs

There is no official number of youth and youth work NGOs

5.4 Other relevant actors

There is an active academic community in the field of youth (work) research.

6 Forms and examples of youth work in your country

Youth organisations, youth clubs and youth centres are the three most important places where youth work actually happens.

Youth organisations offer various programmes for young people. There is evidence of youth organisations offering digital youth work but this is more the exception than the rule.

Youth clubs in Croatia are understood as entities at local level, where young people create their activities together. Youth club programmes are based on the needs of a specific community, and activities should be free of charge and open to all young people. Youth workers supervise these activities. In addition, youth clubs should have their own space exclusively intended for the club's activities and should promote healthy lifestyles for young people (Kovačić and Čulum 2015). In other words, youth clubs are the embodiment of youth work – autonomous spaces and incubators of ideas and initiatives, seen as seeds of (youth) active citizenship (Williamson 1995, 2007).

Youth centres, on the other hand, encompass many more services, and include not only youth work activities but may offer various cultural, media, sports, social, voluntary, socio-political and other programmes, under a more diverse “umbrella” of “working with young people”.

Apart from these entities, an example of a very well established and developed form of youth work is the information centres for youth. Their goal is to provide information for young people in a youth-friendly way and to advise young people on their career, mobility or leisure time and choices. Most information centres (local and regional) work within the Association of Youth Information Centres in Croatia network, which follows the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYCA) proposition when it comes to this specific type of youth work.

In terms of targeting young people with fewer opportunities, there are youth organisations providing services in that area. Given the fact that the tendency of Croatian social policy is to outsource services to civil society organisations it is no surprise that in youth work a great deal of youth work is being done by civil society actors. The state financially supports this organisation and the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy is in charge of this type of funding scheme.

7 Quality standards

Croatia does not have any type of quality standard in terms of youth work.

8 Knowledge and data on youth work

So far, there has not been any relevant empirical research on youth work per se. There is a large body of research on young people conducted by various academic/research organisations or civil society organisations.

In terms of youth work studies, there are two academic papers on youth work in Croatia:

Bužinkić, Emina and Ćulum, Bojana and Horvat, Martina and Kovačić, Marko (2015) [Youth work in Croatia: collecting pieces for a mosaic](#), *Child and youth services*, 36 (1). pp. 30-55. ISSN 0145-935X (Print), 1545-2298 (Online)

Kovačić, Marko and Ćulum, Bojana (2018) "[A new kid on the block: youth work meets youth policy in Croatia](#)", in *The history of youth work in Europe: youth work and social work: connections, disconnections and reconnections – the social dimension of youth work in history and today*, Volume 6, Youth Knowledge (23), Council of Europe, Strasbourg, pp. 149-161, ISBN 978-92-871-8513-6.

As mentioned previously, in 2016, the Croatian Employment Bureau conducted an online survey on youth work providers and their competences.

Sample description: micro organisations (up to 9 employees), mostly focused on education (72%), information and counselling (71%), prevention (67%), leisure time (62%).

Main results:

Key competences necessary for youth workers: communication and organisation, data analysis, individual and group counseling, human resource management, information technology skills, basic teaching competences.

Most necessary key competences: (intercultural) communication, respect for others and openness to other cultures.

Most necessary generic skills: responsibility, focus on young people.

Most suitable level of education: graduate diploma.

The Institute for Social Research in Zagreb is a focal point for youth data collection and analysis because it is the Youth Wiki contact point for Croatia.

9 European and international dimension of youth work in the country

Youth workers are encouraged to use Erasmus + and European Solidarity Corps opportunities. Apart from this, there are almost no other options when it comes to European and international dimension of youth work.

Croatia is participating in the European Youth Card through the Croatian Youth Hostel Association. It is called Europska iskaznica za mlade, it is intended for persons between the age of 14 and 30, and valid for 12 months.

Croatia has signed Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work, however the impact of this document is limited.

10 Current debates and open questions/policies on youth work

- In July 2018 the ESF project Support to development and Spreading of Youth Work in Croatia was launched. The general idea of the project is to familiarise different stakeholders with youth work. There are two main pillars of the project. Firstly, the idea is to conduct the first empirical (both quantitative and qualitative) research on youth work, and secondly to organise a campaign aimed towards the popularisation of youth work per se.
- At the University of Rijeka, a lifelong learning programme [Young People in Contemporary Society](#), jointly conducted by the University of Rijeka and Institute for Social Research was launched. This first academic programme in the field of youth studies brought together 31 people interested in the field. There are three pillars of the programme: youth research, youth work and young people and the community.
- Croatia is participating in the project Europe Goes Local – Supporting Youth Work at the Municipal Level, in which 12 local government units, under the mentorship of youth workers and the national delegation are developing local youth work systems. Numerous activities such as study visits, seminars, self-evaluations, etc., have resulted in increased interest in youth work by the municipalities and cities across Croatia.

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