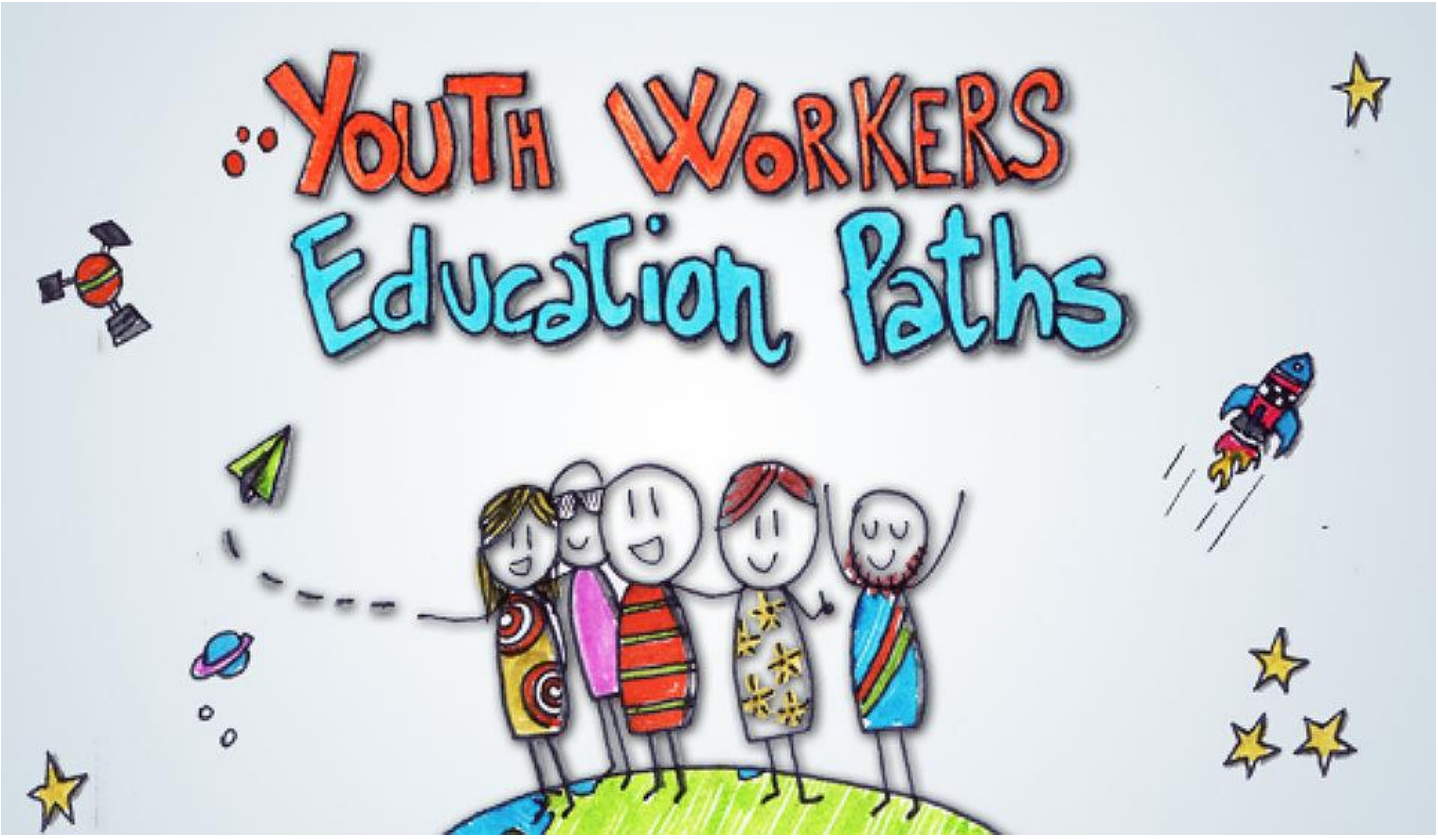

Early career perspectives on the educational pathways of youth workers

Working paper

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1. Introduction

Humans learn as long as they are alive. This point is well put by Professor Peter Jarvis who has spoken about the continuous learning throughout his career. In a recent interview he stated:

> Learning isn't just something which is tugged on to life; it's life itself. I question if there can be any real living without learning, and I don't think there can be any human living without learning, and so to me learning is at the heart of living itself. (Jarvis 2015: 112)

Learning is a continuous process, a lifelong and life-wide concern. Professional growth also involves many different states and learning cannot be confined to formal education alone. There are many different stages before one becomes a skilled expert in any field.

In this analytical paper, the career paths of youth workers are examined using three perspectives. The emphasis in this paper is more on professional youth workers, i.e. those people who identify themselves as youth workers and who have been paid for doing so. This group does not cover all the youth workers in the youth field, since it leaves out a significant number of voluntary youth workers, without whom the youth field would not be able to have the impact it has in different parts of Europe.

Education and training can be seen from an epistemological perspective, which emphasises the knowledge transmitted and perhaps the activities taught. Education is therefore an initiation into different forms of knowledge. According to the theory of practice architectures, this perspective misses some crucial aspects of learning. Instead of talking about knowledge, this perspective sees education and training as an initiation into practice. When one becomes a competent youth worker, one learns how youth workers talk about their work, how they refer to things, what kind of methodologies they use, what they see as being valuable, how their work is affected by the resources available, how they relate to young people and other professionals, and so on. Initiation into practice does not mean blind obedience to the tradition of a certain practice. There is always room for new developments, but these developments are influenced by preconditions that give practices their shape (Heikkinen et al. 2018). In this perspective, the educational pathways of youth workers help them to initiate themselves into the practice of youth work.

One can further distinguish between becoming a member of youth work practice in general and becoming a member of a certain youth work community, say, for example, learning to work as a municipal youth worker in the city of Oulu in northern Finland. Working in a specific community requires learning the local traditions and learning about networks and the organisational culture of a local youth work community, whereas becoming a youth worker in general refers more to gaining a overall understanding of how youth workers work, what they hold valuable and what meanings and identities exist in the community (Ord 2016: 220.) These perspectives have been studied before in the context of teacher development. The themes covered in this paper are influenced by research analysing professional development in the field of formal education. In this research tradition, one can separate the pre-degree phase, the formal education phase and the early stages of one's professional career before one becomes an expert professional with enough expertise in the field. These perspectives, it is claimed, help when further analysing how youth workers learn their trade.

Three different stages of learning pathways are analysed in the following order. First, the importance of formal education to youth workers is examined. Second, an initial introduction to the youth field and the consequent motivation to join the youth field is analysed. According to the results, most youth workers become acquainted with the youth field before they access education. To some extent, they have already been initiated into practice as participants and as volunteers. And third, induction methods available in the first years of one's professional career are examined. While nothing conclusive can be offered about national structures, the importance of induction systems is covered.

The analysis of the paper is mostly based on an online survey distributed by EU-Council of Europe youth partnership and collected using the Typeform platform. The survey was carried out between July and September 2018. In total, 221 people responded to the survey. Of all the respondents, those respondents who described themselves as youth workers and who worked in the member states of the Council of Europe were chosen for this study. Youth workers[1] from 17 countries[2] responded (there were separate answers from youth workers in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, so 20 countries or regions were included). A total of 82 responses were examined. In this report, the quoted responses were amended when they were grammatically incorrect. Since the study was not representative, I have chosen to analyse the answers qualitatively using a method of content analysis. In addition to the survey, focus group interviews conducted during this research are examined as well.

2. Formal education

Education is different from mere schooling, but formal education paths are usually part of the educational trajectories of professionals. Finding out how important formal education is to one's professional career has been a matter of debate in the educational sciences. On a practical level, most people probably tend to think that formal qualifications are only a part of the story, and one learns how to become a professional by actually doing the work, by learning from colleagues or by attending different seminars and training (which are all examples of non-formal learning events) (Jokinen, Heikkinen and Morberg 2012). From a perspective of social learning, one can talk about learning as participation, which emphasises the importance of becoming part of a larger community of practice (Wenger 2008). In the case of youth work this means becoming a member of a larger youth work community, which in turn is shaped but not determined by a set of

1. The respondents were given three alternatives to choose from (youth work manager; youth leader; youth worker). While there is no way to know exactly if all of respondents who described themselves as youth workers actually work as paid youth workers, there are clear indications that the respondents are working professionally. For example, they talk about the time they were volunteering; they talk about projects and project funding; they have formal education degrees. Because of this, I have chosen to treat them as if they are paid youth workers.

2. Youth workers from Austria, Cyprus, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Montenegro, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Romania, Scotland, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Wales answered the surveys. Some of the respondents said that they are from the United Kingdom. Other categories of respondents, which are not analysed in this paper were youth leaders and youth work managers.

arrangements that affect how youth workers are able to talk about their work, take action and relate to other professions inside and outside the youth work field (Kemmis 2014).

The majority of the youth workers that took the survey view formal education as either important or even vital to their work. The answers emphasise different perspectives on why formal education is useful in youth work. These can be grouped into four categories: formal education helps one to become reflective and/or critical; it provides one with skills, tools and knowledge that can be applied to the work; it helps to convince financial decision-makers; and in some countries it is simply needed to get paid work in the youth field.

The first perspective emphasises the ability to look at youth work from the outside. The importance of formal education helps one to look at practices differently, in a critical manner, a point expressed by a youth worker from Northern Ireland in the following way: “I'm studying for my degree in youth and community work and I definitely believe that it has helped me become a more effective and reflective practitioner.” A similar point is made by a youth worker from Austria, who thinks that formal education is “really important”. “Reflection is one of the most important things in my work and you can only learn it with a good education.” The idea of reflective practice has been important when thinking about youth work education, which helps youth workers to engage in “multi-faceted, dynamic, messy, and unpredictable work that requires expertise that cannot be rote learned following rules and instructions” (Bessant 2012: 62). It seems that this idea is reality at least for some of the respondents. Besides reflexivity, other respondents talk about criticality and cognitive flexibility as well.

The second perspective addresses the applicability of theories. Compared to the first perspective this point emphasises that theories are important not only because they are helpful in reflecting on the practice but actually doing it. A youth worker from Cyprus who has studied political sciences talks about the importance of university studies in the following way. “Being a political scientist is really helpful [for] my youth work career (youth policy). Mainly due to the fact that all the theories I came across during my academic years have been transformed into practice.” A youth worker from Austria who has a degree in vocational education states that “Formal education gave me knowledge and skills that I can use in my daily work in youth information.” In these perspectives, the dichotomy between theory and practice is overcome by pointing out that these two actually go together.

A similar point was expressed in the focus group interview conducted by Tanya Basarab and Tomi Kiilakoski. The respondents said that they needed theories which would connect their learning experiences in youth work to wider frameworks. This way, they were able to understand better what is happening in the field. At the beginning of their career in particular they did not get enough support to understand the processes.

> I used to be a Scout, and we had these experiences but we never reflected on them. … I started as a volunteer, as an animator, kids with social difficulties and so on. And I always lacked this social support system as well. It was really difficult for us, we were like 19 or so and not having education. You learn by putting yourself in a position where you just have to cope as a human being in the end. So, when I did EVS in X for ten months, I always kind of learned by doing this. It felt really good when I started working as a trainer: all these theories of how groups work and how to help the young, there actually were some frameworks that

> taught me why the group was working in a certain way. And I spent five years working in a network for youth centres.

Youth work, as a practice-oriented field, is usually about doing. Training is also needed to understand the reasons for doing things in a certain manner.

The third perspective concerns how formal education can help one in securing resources and convincing decision-makers that youth work is important. This can be a health issue as well. A youth worker from Greece makes a connection between being able to acquire resources for youth work and being able to describe what the job is about. Without formal education this might eventually lead to burnout. Human qualities and the ability to work with young people are important, but formal education brings an added element to the picture.

> [It is] very important; without it I couldn't do my job and I would suffer from burnout. Partly all you need for good youth work is being there, motivating the youngsters and showing them how precious they are. But in most fields, particularly supporting youngsters with fewer opportunities and taking care that your projects get enough funding and are supported by politicians and stakeholders, you need to know what tools can be used and how to use them. Further, it is essential to be able to write scholarly articles on the work (to be) done.

The fourth perspective on formal education emphasises the fact that formal education is important because it is a basic requirement to be able to do the job. Formal qualification is the "entrance ticket" needed to enter the field of youth work. A youth worker from Northern Ireland says that he needed formal education because "it was essential to get in as the career is limited to those who are professionally qualified here in Northern Ireland." However, he also emphasises the importance of understanding the core principles of youth work, which can be gained through youth work education. "It is also essential in creating a common philosophy and understanding with the profession and a commitment to some fundamental principles." A Finnish youth worker formulates his view in similar vein. "Education is important since you need a qualification to do this kind of work. Of course, it is also important to be qualified and know what you are supposed to do as a youth worker."

For the majority of the respondents, formal learning seems to be important and beneficial to doing the work. However, the value of formal learning is not always clear in youth work. Some of the respondents were sceptical about the value of formal learning and emphasised practical issues more. A youth worker from Youth UK states this point in the following way: "I wouldn't say that anything you can learn in a book will prepare you for youth work. It's a quality you either have or you don't." Others respondents take a more moderate perspective, like a German youth worker who says that formal education may not be helpful in working with young people but might be helpful in fulfilling the more managerial aspects of the work.

> It is complementary – allowing me to efficiently find funding for youth activities, manage funds and projects from a technical point of view. Therefore, it is not essential to youth work itself, but enables me to be more rigorous and efficient when it comes to [managing] the overall framework supporting youth work.

Another respondent from Hungary notes the importance of knowledge about wider society, but most of the relevant information comes from the training: "So, I use some of my knowledge about minorities and society but mainly I use what I have learned through experience and youth training."

What should be noted is that all of the above respondents have degrees outside youth work: in sociology, in advertising and in political sciences. Given this background it should not come as a surprise that these studies do not help in becoming a competent youth worker.

The responses about the importance of formal education show some hesitation about the importance of formal education in youth work, but the majority of respondents see it as important.[3] Formal education provides a theoretical background and helps one to think about youth work reflexively. Therefore, it is a useful step in getting initiated into practice (Heikkinen et al. 2018), since it helps understand the language, the practices and the relationships of the field (Kemmis 2014) more deeply. This perspective helps in developing professional skills and competences. This ideal is shared by many scholars outside Europe as well. At least from the perspective of United States of America, "a concern in the field of youth development is that many frontline staff begin with little training and develop their professional skills in isolation." (Ross et al. 2016: 132) Describing the Australian experience, Judith Bessant writes that good youth worker education helps individuals to become reflective and contributes to creating a reflective practice (Bessant 2012). The perspectives concerning the benefits of formal learning emphasise that through formal education one can learn the primary skills needed to work with the young or how to manage a project, but also secondary skills such as thinking critically about what is needed to develop youth work.

1.1. Education is continuous

With regard to the development of youth workers, Laurie Ross and his team of writers talk about the professional development of youth workers that focuses on the importance of practical wisdom and being able to be reflective. Formal education is important, but other learning environments are important as well.

> While professional identity is at least in part associated with the acquisition of formally recognised qualifications such as college and advanced degrees, there has been acknowledgement in many fields that achieving education requires more than a degree (Schön 1990). Higgs et al. claim that professional expertise in human service "resides in practice wisdom and practice artistry (2001: 4)." (Ross et al. 2016: 5)

According to the above quote, education is more than academic achievements or a degree. Perhaps one problem is the connotations implied by the word "education". One might confuse education with schooling. "Education is the practice that goes on in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Schooling, by contrast, is a process that goes on in the formal settings of

3. The focus of this paper is on professional youth workers. Tanya Basarab and James O'Donovan, who interviewed participants and volunteers in different youth organisations, found out that the formal learning in youth work was not important for them and some even saw formal qualification in youth work as not necessary for youth workers.

educational institutions" (Kemmis 2014: 46). If this perspective on education is adopted the answer might be fairly straightforward: we need the full scope of education, including formal education, to develop as professionals. In some cases in Europe, formal education for youth workers is even not available.

According to the earlier study, "Mapping of the educational pathways of youth workers", 17 of the 44 countries or regions studied have university-level education in youth work. This means that in most European countries there are simply no opportunities to learn the principles of youth work within formal education. (Kiilakoski 2018) For them, learning how to be a youth worker is about on-the-job learning, training, dialogue and different induction systems provided by organisations (see Chapter 3 of this paper). As has been noted above, some of the respondents who have studied outside the field of youth work are also happy about formal education and see it as beneficial to them. Is there a need for youth work education, then?

As has been noted above, some youth workers see education in youth work as beneficial for many reasons. At the individual and employment level youth work education seems to be fruitful. One can also take a wider perspective and look at formal education as a societal system which is used to transferring valuable traditions in a systematic manner to a generation of new practitioners. From this point of the view, the importance of the availability of formal education in youth work could be formulated this way: the availability of youth work education implies at least three things. First, there is a social field of youth work that is recognised as a profession and that has a distinct character. Having an education is an indication that youth work is seen as an independent social entity and not as a sub-category of some other field, such as social work. Second, if a formal education system exists, this implies that there is something valuable that needs to be transmitted to younger professionals. There are probably theories, concepts, research and reflections on youth work which are manifested in the youth work curriculum. And third, the existence of formal education in youth work is an indication that a government is willing to spend resources on youth work. Besides financial resources, it is of symbolic value as well: giving academic prestige to youth work implies that youth work is valued in society. Formal education is one of the cornerstones of youth work professionalism, but is also an indication that youth work is recognised.

The whole story is not so simple, though. A critical perspective on education is justified as well. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has analysed educational institutions from the perspective of power. He has said that "The act of institution is an act of social magic that can create difference *ex nihilo* [out of nothing], or else (as is more often the case) exploiting as it were pre-existing differences" (Bourdieu 1991: 119-120). Education in youth work enables one to treat youth work as a distinct activity and to expect a certain amount of social recognition. It may also create a distinction between educated, professional youth workers and youth leaders working on a voluntary basis. Unity in the field requires recognising and valuing different actors in the field. According to Ellen Gannett, higher education will have an important role in legitimising the youth work field in the way other institutions probably cannot do. This will stabilise the youth work field to some extent. However, the "social magic" of education should not prevent the youth field from realising that the question concerning youth work as both a vocation and a profession is likely to come from the youth field in the future as well (Fusco and Gannett 2012: 12). Formal education

may be helpful in professionalising the field, but questions about vocation and voluntary work should not be forgotten if formal educational qualifications are to be encouraged.

Vocation and voluntary work are connected to the values and goals of youth work. The theory of practice architectures also highlights the ethical basis of practices. A practice is based on the idea of how to live a good life. The value basis of youth work which emphasises democratic participation, human rights and the importance of young people as a resource not as a problem is an example of the connection between a good life and practice. Therefore, any talk about education needs ultimately to include talk about education as helping individuals to learn but also to develop societies. This point is well put by Stephen Kemmis:

> Education is a process of individual and collective self-formation, a simultaneous process of growing good citizens and good societies.(Kemmis 2014: 47)

The above point addresses the individual and social significance of education. Education helps individuals to develop, but it also makes communities stronger. Youth work education is therefore both an individual and social enterprise: it helps a younger generation to learn the practical and theoretical wisdom of older practitioners and helps communities to go on and become more reflexive. Kemmis's point also concerns humanistic values and democratic principles: it points towards the need for youth work education that helps individuals to learn how to become members of youth work communities while also influencing European societies to take better care of their young people.

As a conclusion, formal education has helped the respondents in many different ways: in adopting a critical, reflexive attitude towards the work; in understanding the methods better and even in doing them; in convincing decision-makers and in getting the resources; and in some cases, where formal qualifications are needed, in getting employment as a youth worker. Most of the respondents have some form of higher education in youth work or related topics. These perspectives therefore present the opinions of the people who have higher education themselves. Based on the research literature, the availability of formal education is likely to help with gaining recognition for the field and in creating reflexive practice. Because of these reasons, promoting the availability of higher education in youth work is most probably beneficial to the field. However, since there are many in the youth field who work on a voluntary basis and who contribute to the well-being of young people in many ways, it is important to note at the same time that youth work can be done on a voluntary basis and different approaches to youth work should not be forgotten.

3. Motivation to become a youth worker

Personal experience in the youth field prior to entering education or becoming a professional youth worker seems to play a strong role in the educational pathways of youth workers. Their initiation into youth work practices seems to have begun when participating in youth work activities at a young age. This can be taken to mean that young people entering the field of youth work already have knowledge of youth work at least from the perspective of their local youth

clubs or organisations. If they have worked as voluntary youth leaders, they have both the participant and the leader perspective, which means that they already have experience of different roles available in youth work.

Most of the youth workers seem to have prior experience of youth work, either through having had a role model youth worker which they viewed as an ideal professional, or through other useful experiences as a participant in activities. This probably tells us something about the social status of youth work as well: you have to be "in it" to appreciate it, and must choose to devote your time or part of your life to it. Giving back seems to be an important motivation to become involved – to engage in a reciprocal relationship – and giving to others what one received is a common motif when entering the youth work field.

Some of the respondents have followed the route from participant to a professional youth worker. This can be interpreted as a variant of linear career modelling: entering a youth work activity, volunteering, getting education, becoming a paid worker. At least for some respondents this seems to their professional narrative. An Irish youth worker expresses the point accordingly:

> I was involved in a youth club as a teenager. This provided me with an opportunity to take on leadership roles, to have different informal learning opportunities and to grow as a young person in a safe environment. I volunteered with the local youth club as an adult to give something back because of the positive experience and confidence the youth club had given me as a young person.

The same type of narrative is expressed in the interview conducted by James O'Donovan and Tanya Basarab. The interviewees express commitment to the youth field and talk about participating and being part of the community. This is an example of a learning process Etienne Wenger calls "learning as belonging" (Wenger 2008: 5). Through becoming a member of a community, one learns the necessary professional skills. In the process, one develops a strong commitment to the community.

> When you are a child or a teenager and you are participating in some voluntary youth programme you see some models in other people and you want to become like them. You feel that you belong to the organisation and you want to give back to the organisation what it has given to you.

None of the participants in the group interview conducted in Mainz in March 2018 came to youth work through student guidance counselling or other paths outside the youth work field. The participants stressed their personal growth and subsequent motivation to contribute to the field:

> My first motivations were training [sessions] that I did in outdoor education which led me to a personal realisation about myself.
>
> I guess it was personal experiences, as it is the case for most or many people. For me it was through youth participation and the opportunities to be a student leader and youth leader on a national level, and school level first, etc. I guess the question in my mind was "how can I make a more systemic impact in this field?". Studying youth work and becoming a youth worker was a way to make a more long-term impact even when I am not a young person anymore.

The initial motivation for many seems to originate from personal history and experience. To put the matter in more theoretical terms, the introduction to the youth work field seems to stem from personal experience and individual meaning instead of shared social values about the significance of youth work.

In a focus group interview conducted by Marti Taru and Sladjana Petkovic, one motivation to become a youth worker was based on actually wanting to work with young people. However, the survey seems to suggest that a societal motivation is important as well. A lot of the responses mention wanting to work with the young and to help the young in the current social situation: "to change society and bring peace" was the goal of one Serbian youth worker. This seems to be an important motivation, especially for those respondents who have studied subjects other than youth work.

> I'm a humanist psychologist and I like to be with teenagers, help them, understand their motivation. (A youth worker from France, who had studied psychology)
>
> Using my EU-related skills while refocusing on field work, i.e. working directly with young people. (A youth worker from Germany, who had studied political science)

The two motivations, personal and societal, are in no way mutually exclusive of course. They can certainly be combined, as in the case of a German youth worker who states that his motivation comes from the "desire to impact young people the same way I got impacted, a desire to change to world." The methodology of youth work and the experiences as a participant in youth work can help youth workers to become motivated to enter the field. For many of the youth workers who were interviewed and who took the survey the learning process for youth work began as a participant. Therefore, their lifelong learning in youth work had already begun at an early stage in life.

4. Induction systems and mentoring

Practices are shared and social. They are based on co-operation. Youth work, like any other practice, is based on a community. Practices involve an active commitment from their members, who participate in social communities and who construct identities in relation to these communities. The social theory of learning details how our learning is always related to participating in these practices. Etienne Wenger talks about communities of practice, which exist because people are doing something valuable together, they are "engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with each other" (Wenger 2008: 73). Through participating in these practices, we become members of larger communities and consequently learn how other members of these communities do things, how they talk about what they do and what they hold valuable. Practices are shaped by traditions, they have a history, a common narrative and identity.

The social theory of learning highlights the importance of paying attention to how a person is able to participate in communities of practice. This way learning is not about specific activities, skills or dispositions, it is about becoming "a full participant, a member, a kind of person" (Lave and Wenger 2011: 53). Through becoming a member of a community, one learns new tasks, activities

and functions, which are part of the larger set of relations within a community. In the case of youth work, one learns how to become a competent youth worker by participating in the youth work community and becoming a member of this community.

In the early stages of one's professional career one needs to learn how to create a personal way of doing the job, but one also has to become familiar with the work community, its values, ethos and tacit knowledge and the whole working culture. Even if one knows theories and general ideas about how youth work is done, one needs to learn how the local youth work community does things. In the research on teacher development this point of the career is called the induction phase, which is seen as a bridging period in a professional career between formal education and one's own professionalism (Jokinen, Heikkinen and Morberg 2012). At least at this point one starts a journey to become a full member of the community.[4] This involves three different things:

1. Personal dimension. One must come to terms with motivation, skills, competences and values – and integrate these into the development of an identity as a youth worker. One also develops professional self-esteem and self-confidence.

2. Professional dimension. The community of practice emphasises certain sets of characteristics and methodologies that one must become familiar with and learn to master.

3. Social dimension. One becomes a member of an organisation and learns the culture of the local community. (Geeraerts et al. 2015: 361)

In youth work the community context is important, since the voluntary participation of young people requires paying attention to the needs of young people in their surroundings (Ord 2016: 95). The local knowledge requires getting to know the local youth work culture, but also the local context where one works. In youth work an added difficulty is that the cultures of young people themselves can be both global and local. Researchers Sue Cooper and Anu Gretschel (2018) claim that young people and the communities they live in are unique, so youth work should be responsive to the local needs. Learning how to do this is not always an easy task and is probably one of the things learned in the process of professional development.

In the induction phase of the professional career, different mechanisms are needed to help new workers to develop. One can talk about an induction system which is seen as a cluster of organisational activities and an organisational culture of support for helping the learning processes of the new members of the organisation. Mentoring can be part of this system. Mentoring by a more experienced worker helps a new member in a dialogue based on practical issues (Jokinen, Heikkinen and Morberg 2012; Geeraerts et al. 2015).

Mentoring models in general can be divided into collegial models, which highlight the importance of peers providing guidance and support, and hierarchical models, where mentoring is formally required and evaluations are part of the mentoring process (Kennedy 2005). The collegial models are based on bottom-up approaches where the emphasis is on communal learning and collegial dialogue. Hierarchical models are based on top-down structures and they can include different elements of control. When offering useful comments on the paper, Professor Howard Williamson

4. The induction phase model suggests a linear professional trajectory; first education and, after that, work as a paid professional. It is fair to assume that in youth work career models might be more fragmented.

pointed out that a positive perspective on induction systems as ways of enabling youth workers can be adopted. Induction systems can also mean increased control outside the local communities. This way induction systems can be seen as instruments for ensuring the quality of youth workers, for example. Following the literature on mentoring used as a source material the positive sides of induction systems can be appreciated.

4.1. Supporting a new worker

According to the results presented in the previous chapter, there are many routes one can take to learn how to become a youth worker. There is formal education, the experiential learning gained through participating as a voluntary youth leader in the organisations and by actually doing the job. If a professional life course is seen as a trajectory, the early stages of one's experiences as a paid worker are meaningful when one learns how to be a youth worker. According to the perspective of the theory of communities of practice, this concerns the question of becoming a youth worker and developing a professional identity, as well as learning the methods and tools used by the local youth work community and the values that are important to the community. It is about sharing a practice (Belton and Frost 2010) as well as developing a personal identity. For a new worker, this can be a process of growth, and the aim of the induction systems is to help in this growth process by offering things such as mentoring, training, advice on how to reduce workloads, exchanging practical knowledge, collaborative work, consultations or providing a safe environment in which to talk about issues a new worker may face (European Commission 2010).

In the survey, youth workers replied to the question: How did your work community support you as a new youth worker/youth leader/youth work manager? The answers to these questions can be grouped into two categories. In the first, youth workers were offered support by an organisation, either through collegial help or in a more systematic manner. In the second group, no induction systems existed.

The first category describes situations where the practice is shared through helping the new workers to learn the saying (cultural-discursive preconditions) and the doing (material-economic) dimensions of the work (Kemmis 2014). These ways of supporting the new workers range from personal contact to more organised induction procedures. Based on the answers it seems that some of the organisations have a well thought-out, formalised system while others rely more on informal interaction between the workers.

More informal induction systems can be based on getting support from one particular colleague. "My co-worker trained me during the first months," says one youth worker from France. The role of managers can be vital as well. There are examples of cases where a colleague or a manager or combination of both describe the induction phase as consisting of delivering information about the work field and offering professional and emotional support to a new worker.[5] The survey offers examples about sharing knowledge and providing a safe environment where one can ask questions. The role of managers seems to differ considerably.

5. The importance of having a community which provides a safe environment for sharing ideas also featured in the focus group discussion conducted by James O'Donovan and Tanya Basarab for this project, as described by O'Donovan: "In considering the ongoing on-the-job or in-house training of youth workers and their retention, participants pointed to the need for 'space and time' to tackle issues."

> They explained the ground principles of youth work and youth information, introduced me to the international, national and regional networks and gave me feedback and answered my questions. (Youth worker from Austria)

> It's supportive in terms of exchanging knowledge and good practices. (Youth worker from Cyprus)

> When I started full-time youth work it was as part of a new team that had just been set up; we had no support from our manager but a lot of support from each other. (Youth worker from Wales)

> I have always felt hugely supported by management and the wider staff team. (Youth worker from Ireland)

Some respondents describe more systematic ways of supporting or supervising the worker. Training is offered, a learning path for the new worker is identified in the organisation and support is offered on many levels. Some of the organisations seem to have a coherent system for induction. On the other hand, in one case organisational support is described as supervision on a monthly basis.

> They are very supportive: financial, training opportunities, feedback, appreciation, materials, challenges. (Youth worker from Romania)

> There is great support within our organisation; initially there is induction training for new members of staff, in-house supervision and ongoing professional upskilling. (Youth worker from Ireland)

> We have monthly supervision provided by the organisation that I work for. (Youth worker from Serbia)

Besides these positive examples there are cases where the initial support was not available for the workers. Also, some of the respondents did not answer the question. The lack of support in the initial stages of one's professional career does not seem to correspond with the strength of the youth work practice architectures of the country (Kiilakoski 2018) and is likely to be based more on the culture of the organisation itself. In some cases, there are accounts about organisations changing the induction systems to better support new workers.

> They did not understand too well that I had just graduated, so I had to find my own way of doing things. (A youth worker from Finland)

> I have no support. (A youth worker from Italy)

> Not that much, but since I initiated the opening of the youth club in [the local] municipality, my role is much more visible and supported. (A youth worker from Montenegro)

> Not supportive for the first year but supervision and other networks were developed. (A youth worker from the UK)

In a focus group interview conducted by Tanya Basarab and Tomi Kiilakoski, youth workers talked about the need for induction systems, but also about providing support in the later stages of one's professional career. The absence of proper support systems was seen as a factor which diminished work satisfaction. The lack of adequate measures for supporting youth workers on the professional and personal level was seen as especially harmful for those youth workers who work with the young in sensitive conditions. A youth worker with a lot of expertise from working in southern Europe described the situation as follows:

> We do not have support systems for people who are doing it [youth work]. There is no mentoring system for people who work on the ground with young people. … Working with young people with fewer alternatives is more demanding than working with all young people. A youth worker in X is quitting because she cannot take it anymore. A pure youth worker who does not have a safety net around her. Mentoring and emotional support and I would say insurance [are lacking for youth workers].

The quality of the induction systems seems to be based on the organisational culture, not on a systematic policy in a country or region. The importance of induction systems has been noted in the field of formal education and the need to offer systematic help for the new teachers has been articulated in the policy discourse (European Commission 2010). Induction systems are also seen as a way to help professionals to avoid burnout and to not change jobs. Since very little seems to be known about the induction systems in youth work, two suggestions seem to be evident. The induction systems available should be studied further. This study should also pay attention to whether there are effective ways for countries to promote the development of induction systems with the help of existing organisations, networks and training providers.

4.2. Mentoring

Mentoring is an important part of the induction systems. Mentoring can be based on the collegial model, where peers help each other. It can also be hierarchical, if mentoring is a requirement in the initial stages of one's professional career (Kennedy 2005). The data of the study do not allow me to make informed conclusions about comparing or classifying the mentoring systems available in Europe. The classification of the mentoring models will have to be a task for future research. The data of the study, though, can be used to pinpoint the significance of mentoring and other elements of induction systems in the educational pathways of youth workers. This point has relevance for the European perspective on at least the following three points: it shows that attention needs to be paid to the induction phase of professional development in educational pathways and that there is consequently a need for adequate induction systems; it shows that there are informal and non-formal ways of mentoring new members of the work community that are important for educational pathways; and it shows that the competence-based professional frameworks capture only one, albeit a very important, aspect of professional development: in the induction phase the professional elements are only part of the story, and the personal and the social aspects are important as well.

The significance of mentoring was considered important by the vast majority of youth workers who took the survey. As far as mentoring goes, "experience is essential" according to one youth

worker from Italy. The professional role of the youth worker might not be the easiest thing to learn, and mentoring was described as a way to learn about professional relationships with young people. “Mentoring is imperative to this role. It takes time to build relationships with young people and it would be very hard to jump in without support from a mentor,” says one youth worker from Wales.

Some of the respondents say they benefited from an older colleague who helped them to learn the craft of youth work. The important feature was that a more experienced colleague provided help in reflecting on how to do youth work and in helping one develop a professional identity. Having mentoring seems to be really important in the induction phase, and in some cases it provides a lasting impression on one’s professional career.

> Mentoring is hugely beneficial to practice. Had excellent guidance during my initial years (Youth worker from Wales)

> I had an older colleague who helped me reflect on my actions through the day. (Youth worker from Sweden)

Besides mentoring, one can have other important sources of support, for example by talking to other people who work outside the field of youth but in related areas. This point was raised in the interview held in Mainz, which was conducted by Tanya Basarab and Tomi Kiilakoski. In this interview many youth workers described how they talked about their work with colleagues and relatives and received feedback and peer support.

In the survey, one youth worker from Greece talks about mentoring and about other people giving feedback and ideas:

> Mentoring is more than important. I had a mentor and a coach who supervised my path. For four years I was working close to him; nowadays I still refer to him as a mentor. I also have other support systems like people outside of the field to give me outside perspectives and people from within the field [who provide] ad hoc support according to the expertise.

The answers are not clear on the matter of whether the mentoring was officially agreed on. A mentor certainly does not have to be formally nominated. The crucial thing is having a relationship which helps newcomers to the community to develop their competences and understanding by providing advice, a listening ear, support and role models (Jokinen, Heikkinen and Morberg 2012). Some answers describe mentoring relationships as evocative affairs which are both professional relationships and deeply felt experiences on a personal level as well.

> Even if you don't realise there is a person that acts as a “mentor” for you, it is very useful to feel supported by a person you trust. Fortunately, I found a person who I would love to call a “life mentor”, as his help was always there for me. (Youth worker from Greece)

Others feel a need for a more formalised process of mentoring. A youth worker from Ireland who says that she works in an NGO, not a youth organisation, talked about the need to gain support from other youth workers:

> I had informal mentoring from a youth worker in our national youth council. I always intended to formalise this, but it didn’t happen. I would have really liked a more formal mentoring arrangement.

Besides mentoring by a more experienced colleague, some respondents mention team structures that provide support for doing the work. If team structures are working there might not even be a need for a personal relationship between a new worker and a mentor. "I didn´t feel a need for mentoring since the team supported me in the initial phase," says one youth worker from Austria. In this case professional and social support are provided by a team. Support and encouragement can be available in the form of team meetings and officially acknowledged roles within the organisation. Also, more informal peer support was seen as an important part of professional development.

> I did not have a mentor but there is a system in place to provide support if I want. For instance, we have a team meeting once a week to plan and to discuss, among other things, how we are doing and of course how we perform our work during the week. There is a team leader you can talk to in case you need help or support. The director of the centre is also available if you need help. (Youth worker from Finland)

In some cases, mentoring had more to do with the official roles of the organisation, not necessarily deeply personal interaction. In these cases there seem to be formal procedures for providing support. "I did feel the need for mentoring, and I got it in the form of formalised conversations with senior youth workers and youth managers in my organisation," says one youth worker from Serbia. In some cases, a manager or the head of an umbrella organisation provided professional support. As an example, a youth worker from Ireland says: "My line manager was of tremendous support from the outset. She supported me with situations that were new to me and guided and directed me to best practice and safe practice at all times."

In some cases, respondents say that they would have needed mentoring but this simply was not available for them. In hindsight they think that mentoring would have been good for their professional career.

> I did not have any kind of support, even I needed it. (Youth worker from Montenegro)

> I have not had mentoring but I think that it would be much easier if I had one. (Youth worker from Slovenia)

> I did not really have mentoring, I was sometimes at training and learned from others, but all in all I learned by myself. But mentoring is really important, so you can work better from the beginning. I have worked there for seven years and I have been really good for four years. With mentoring, maybe I would have been good for six years. (Youth worker from Austria)

Based on the responses to the online survey and the interviews it seems that the induction phase is of importance to the educational paths of youth workers. In some cases, mentoring and other forms of induction systems seem to happen informally, based on the relationships available in the organisations or with colleagues in and outside the youth field. Sometimes mentoring is offered non-formally, based on the rules of the organisation and hierarchical structures. In youth work mentoring seems to be based on the collegial model, with no official evaluations or supervision. Most of the respondents talk about the need for induction systems.

This study only hints at what good practices in the induction phase for youth work might be. Analysing good practices in induction systems would probably shed light on how the youth work

community helps younger members to develop and could also shed light on the available support offered to youth workers. This probably relates to the issues of occupational satisfaction and occupational health. Mentoring is one of the key factors of induction systems (European Commission 2010). Since relatively little is known about mentoring, different mentoring systems should be further developed. Also, looking at the opportunities provided by European mentoring networks might be helpful in uniting the field.

5. Conclusion

Professional learning paths can be divided into different phases. All of these phases are distinct steps in getting initiated in practice. In this paper, three phases were examined. The pre-degree experiences of youth work and the motivation to become active in youth work were analysed and the results show that many people in the field had personal experience of youth work before they began to study it or started to become professional youth workers. The motivation to become a youth worker can start from satisfying personal experiences, following a professional role model, wanting to contribute to building a better society or wanting to work with young people. If youth workers already have experience of youth workers and participants their educational paths start from the informal and the non-formal experiences in youth work.

Most of the youth workers involved in the study thought that formal education was important. It helped in becoming a reflective and critical practitioner, in understanding the methods of youth work better, in convincing people outside the youth field and in getting labour market qualifications. The perspective of reflective practice offers an interesting insight into developing youth work. Analysing the induction systems in youth work showed that there is a lot of variety in how new youth workers are supported on their professional paths. No systematic national or regional strategies for helping youth workers to learn to become professionals were found. This leaves a lot of room for innovative bottom-up approaches but will most likely mean that some youth workers do not get proper guidance at the beginning of their professional careers.

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations can be made.

1. According to the respondents, formal education in youth work has benefited them in many ways. Research literature also suggests that formal education helps in legitimising the youth work field. Setting up formal youth work education in those practice architectures that lack formal education is likely to be beneficial for youth work.
2. The motivation to become a youth worker can be individual (based on positive experiences as a participant in youth work activities) and social (wanting to help young people). Individual experiences seem to play a strong role in entering the profession. Spelling out the social benefits of youth work might help in encouraging those young people who do not have youth work education to consider youth work as a profession.
3. Induction systems, and especially mentoring, play a strong role in the initial stages of one's professional career. The mentoring experiences vary considerably. This theme should be studied further, since, based on this information, mentoring models or induction systems in general cannot be classified. No systematic descriptions of mentoring systems were found. Creating models for bottom-up induction systems, perhaps with a European dimension, could be useful in promoting the continuous education of youth workers.

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