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Youth work communities in Europe:

practitioners, arenas and cross-sectoral partnerships

Study based on national realities in nine European countries

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Author: Tomi Kiilakoski PhD, Finnish Youth Research Network

Correspondent to European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy

Co-ordinator: Tanya Basarab

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Introduction

Youth work communities in Europe share similarities, but recent research and history reports on youth work have also shown that there are considerable differences in the infrastructure of youth work in Europe. Training and education possibilities, the possibility of having a sustainable career path and the legislative basis of youth work vary across Europe. Moreover, the term "youth work" itself has not until recently existed in all European countries. The funding of youth work varies as well. There are differences in the way youth work relates to the wider service system. Some countries view youth work as being attached to youth social work; some would see youth work as a non-formal part of the education system; and some countries would like to view youth work as an independent agent in its own right. In some cases, youth work is seen from the perspective of civil society and community work instead of public services. In some countries youth work lacks social and societal recognition altogether.

Despite differences, there are also similarities inside the youth field. All over Europe there are people working with the young in their leisure time, often in youth clubs or in community centres. Non-formal and creative methodologies are used, the action is based on voluntary assent of young people and the content of the work is based on the needs and cultures of young people themselves. One way of defining youth work is by analysing its purpose (Pozzoboni and Kirshner 2016: 72). The purpose of youth work is highlighted in many European documents. The declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention defined youth work as the "the provision of 'space and opportunity for young people to shape their own futures'". The purpose of youth work is to offer young people opportunities and to locate young people at the centre of the work (cf. Sercombe 2000). The methods to achieve these goals are harder to describe.

The Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work states that "Despite different traditions and definitions, there is a common understanding that the primary function of youth work is to motivate and support young people to find and pursue constructive pathways in life, thus contributing to their personal and social development and to society at large" (Council of Europe 2017). There is undoubtedly diversity, but there is a shared sense of unity as well.

Based on the existing literature, it can be argued that there is a shared understanding of the purpose of youth work. There is also knowledge that the governance of youth work varies considerably, as do the facilities, methods and career opportunities. Prior analysis reveals that youth work is affected by political, social and cultural traditions of the country. Since youth work is about working with

young people so that they can engage with each other and with society at present and in the future, youth work is also affected by the youth cultures and living conditions of the young in a given country. Navigating the divergent paths and also pointing out the similarities will likely shed light on the nature of youth work communities around Europe. In this paper, the perspective is on the nature of youth work communities in different European countries[1].

Aim and methodology of the study

To further understand the nature of the youth work community, this paper investigates three different perspectives. The first question concerns the youth practitioners themselves. This involves two dimensions: analysing who are the youth workers in a country; and how do they become recognised as youth workers. The second question concerns where the youth workers work, in other words what are the arenas that youth workers mostly use in their work. The third question concerns the relations of youth workers to other professions.

Each research question is analysed from three perspectives. First, the questions are analysed based on the categorisation of youth work practice architectures (Kiilakoski 2019). The categorisation itself is based on analysing different education and training possibilities. Second, the results are analysed based on what can be said about the recognition of youth work in different countries. Third, the relationship between explicit and tacit knowledge on youth work is examined. Any practice always includes things which are said and unsaid, things which are clearly explained and things which are assumed. Analysing how youth work is documented reveals the scope of explicit knowledge on youth work, and shows what features of youth work remain on the level of tacit knowledge[2].

The country examples have been chosen to represent different European youth work practice architectures. The countries studied are – in alphabetical order – the Czech Republic, Estonia,

[1] The author is indebted to professor Howard Williamson who provided necessary criticism and useful suggestions. The author is solely responsible for the remainining errors.

[2] Tacit knowledge refers to those dimensions of knowledge which are difficult to articulate and which are often unspoken. The role of tacit knowledge in youth work is claimed to be significant, first in practice when workers interact with the young, for example being able to sense a mood of a young person following subtle hints. And second, from a more general perspective, trying to develop youth work as a practice may be difficult, since in some cases even the basic information may not be found and the explicit knowledge is scarce (Kiilakoski, Kinnunen and Djupsund 2018).

Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, the Republic of North Macedonia, Sweden and Ukraine. The criteria for selection were geographical diversity, the availability of information and the need to get examples from each category of practice architecture on youth work analysed in a prior study (Kiilakoski 2019). To complement the analysis of youth policy and youth work policy structures in Europe, the study aims to look more closely at what is known about the background of youth work practitioners, both voluntary and professional; to map the main areas where youth workers work; to find out the most important partnerships and networks of cross-sectoral co-operation; and, as a secondary goal, to analyse how youth work community is documented in different countries.

This study uses different data sources. Since in some cases relevant information is hard to obtain, the use of a variety of sources is needed to spell out a more nuanced picture about the countries examined. The main sources for this report are country reports on youth work from the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP), a thematic survey to EKCYP correspondents and relevant ministries in 2018 and an additional survey to the EKCYP correspondents in summer 2019. In two cases (the Republic of North Macedonia and Ukraine), interviews with relevant stakeholders were conducted using digital tools. One interview (with a Moldovan expert) was conducted using e-mail. These serve as primary data for the study. Secondary data for the study consist of government reports, research reports and descriptions about youth work in a country if this sort of information is available in a language accessible to the author of this text. Different sets of data supplement each other. For this reason the country descriptions are based on a combination of available sources.

Background of voluntary and professional youth work practitioners

The practitioners are a key element in any practice. In youth work "youth workers with their experience and competence of working with young people are at the heart of the organisations and services working with and for young people" (Siurala et al. 2016: 181). The questions of who does youth work and what is their professional background are vital to understanding how youth workers' communities develop in different European contexts. In this section, relevant information on the insiders of youth work community is gathered. The aim is to enquire what common features, if any, there are in the background of youth workers. Some contextual knowledge, such as professional requirements or funding mechanisms, can spell this out.

Czech Republic: There is currently no national law on youth work in the Czech Republic. The Youth Strategy of the Czech Republic for the period 2014-2020 sets strategic goals for national policies in

relation to young people. It reflects the needs of the youth, especially in the areas of education and mobility, employment of young people and entrepreneurship, culture and creativity, the participation of the young, health and a healthy lifestyle, young people with fewer opportunities and volunteering. It also addresses environmental and global development problems, including young people's access to rights and information. It does not specify or define what youth work is. It does, however, set up strategic and operational goals which serve as guiding principles for youth work at national and local level. The overall target group of the strategy is young people under 30 years of age, but the primary target group is young people between 13 and 30 years of age. Act 563/2004 on pedagogical workers defines standards for qualification, scope of professional work and in-service training of so-called "leisure-time-based educators" who provide non-formal education in the Czech Republic (Czech Country Sheet). Youth Work in the Czech Republic is carried out by different entities**,** including NGOs, municipalities, research institutions, leisure-time-based educators, professional youth workers, volunteers and non-organised young people (Czech Country Sheet). There are professional associations such as the Czech Association of Outreach Work (streetwork.cz).

Estonia: Youth work is regulated by law at the national level in Estonia. There is no regional or local-level legislation on youth work. The Youth Work Act was adopted in 1999 and amended in 2017. There are occupational standards for youth workers. An occupational standard applies for a range of specialists who work with young people (e.g. youth worker, career counsellor, youth information specialist, youth camp manager-teacher). The professional standard for youth workers was approved in 2006. The standard describes youth work as a profession and sets the qualification requirements for the professional qualification of youth workers at Levels III, IV and V. A new professional standard for youth workers was approved in 2012 and amended in November 2017 (Estonia Country Sheet). Although no official qualifications exist besides requirements for those working in the youth camps, some municipalities prefer to employ youth workers with recognised qualifications (Estonia questionnaire).

There are currently 7 500 youth workers in Estonia (OSKA 2018). Slightly more than 30% of youth workers are employed by youth centres and a bit less than 30% by schools. Many youth workers work at different youth organisations, hobby schools, and for local government. In Estonia, professional youth workers are highly educated: nearly 70% of Estonian youth workers have higher education, including 12% with an MA degree. Around one fifth of the youth workers have

professional training in youth work. Every tenth youth worker is a qualified social worker. Most of the youth workers are trained teachers, which can be best explained by the popularity, high quality and long tradition of hobby education in Estonia. Youth workers in Estonia are predominantly female and are themselves quite young (Estonia Country Sheet).

There are strong structures for youth work, such as: 1) Estonian Youth Work Centre (Eesti Noorsootöö Keskus); 2) Archimedes Foundation/Erasmus+ Youth Agency; 3) Estonian Association of Youth Workers (Eesti Noorsootöötajate Kogu); 4) Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (Eesti Avatud Noortekeskuste Ühendus).

Finland: There are 310 municipalities in Finland, which are the main providers of youth work in the country. The number of youth workers in an individual municipality ranges from 0 to 271. According to a recent estimate there are currently 2 800-2 900 youth workers in municipalities. This number also includes outreach youth workers and youth workers working in workshops (see Arenas of youth work) which are generally seen as belonging to the youth field and are financed from the state budget (Kuntaliitto and Kanuuna 2019). 1 200 youth workers are employed by parishes (Hoikkala and Kuivakangas 2017: 10). Around 1 100 youth workers are employed by NGOs. Of these, about 700 work on the national level and over 400 on the local level (Taavetti 2015: 25). This means that there are roughly 5 000 youth workers in Finland, although the number has been estimated to be higher (6 000) by some (Kiilakoski 2019).

There are no official requirements for youth work set by the state. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has official qualifications for youth workers employed by parishes. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland has 378 parishes, a slightly higher number than that of municipalities. Church-based youth workers are expected to obtain an applied university degree in youth work. Otherwise there are no formal requirements, nor is there reliable information on the educational background of youth workers. There is youth work education in Finland on a vocational level, in the universities of applied sciences and in universities. Youth workers usually have a degree in youth work or in related fields.

Luxembourg: The Law on Youth was adopted in 2008 and amended in 2016. There is no definition of youth work and no professional standards. The background of youth workers ranges from educators with a secondary education diploma (with specialisation in education) to university graduates (with a bachelor's or master's degree, for example in the field of educational or social science or in psychology). For professionals working with young people, requirements with regard

to educational degrees are not defined and depend on the specific employer. In 2016, the number of professional youth workers in local and regional youth centres was 132. For other services funded by the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth the number of full-time equivalent professionals is 84. Many youth centres working with young people are managed by associations which are composed of volunteers, which means that the professionals in the field are not only in charge of pedagogical work but are also responsible for administrative duties. This means that they have to invest a lot of time in managerial issues instead of doing actual work with the young (Luxembourg questionnaire).

Malta: The youth work profession in Malta is regulated through the Youth Work Profession Act 533/2014. The act regulates youth work and gives recognition to youth work. It determines qualifications and conditions under which youth workers can gain professional recognition. The act also established a governing board – the Youth Work Profession Board. The Board keeps an official register of all registered youth workers and associations and partnerships of youth workers (Teuma 2017: 105-06; Malta Country Sheet). Maltese youth workers have for the last 20 years sought to develop a professional identity which is unique to the field and is based on an ethos and ethics which is particular to the discipline and which distinguishes youth workers from other professionals. University education for youth workers started in Malta in 1992, and the Maltese Association of Youth Workers was established in 1998. Five years later they were recognised as a professional association by the Malta Federation of Professional Associations (Teuma 2017: 106-07.)

In 2017, 33 youth workers had been warranted the status of youth worker by the Youth Work Profession Board. Among other qualifications, a precondition for obtaining a warrant of youth worker is that an applicant is in possession of an honours degree in Youth and Community Studies conferred by the University of Malta or a masters in Youth and Community Studies conferred by the University of Malta as from academic year 2011/2012 or a masters in Youth Ministry conferred by the University of Malta, or of another professional qualification recognised as equivalent for the purpose by a member state obtained from a university or college, and satisfies the Board that the applicant has received adequate experience in the practice of the profession of youth worker for an aggregate period of at least two years full-time or its equivalent on a part-time basis, following the completion of such degree or such other professional qualification. In 2018, 30 youth workers belonged to the Maltese Association of Youth Workers (Malta questionnaire).

Moldova: Youth work is recognised by the Law on Youth, given in 2016. According to the law, youth work is "any action with and for young people, of social, cultural, educational or civic nature, that is based on non-formal learning processes and of voluntary participation of young people, coordinated by a youth worker or a youth specialist" (Moldova, Law on Youth, § 2). The law differentiates between youth workers, who provide support for the young through activities, and youth work specialists, who are defined as "person[s] who ha[ve] received a special training in the field of youth work and that provide professional services to young persons" (Moldova, Law on Youth, § 2). There is no official training in youth work in the formal education system. The majority of youth workers and youth work specialists complete short training programmes for youth workers provided by NGOs under a variety of projects. Youth work specialists may not always be qualified in youth work and youth work is just a part-time job in addition to their main activity. Currently within the Joint Fund, which is implemented by the Ministry of Culture, Education and Research and United Nations Population Fund Moldova, the process of training and professional development of youth work specialists from the youth centres is underway (Ignatovitch, Fras and Basarab 2020; Moldova questionnaire.)

There are 90 youth workers working in the regional youth centres. Some of the youth workers work in civil society organisations (Expert interview, Moldova). The exact number of youth workers is not known, since there is no national database that would provide information about the number of youth workers. There is an informal database of youth workers who have participated in various professional training courses. There are issues with low salary and limited work opportunities (Moldova questionnaire).

Republic of North Macedonia: Youth work is not formally regulated, standardised or integrated as part of the system of education and protection of young people and it is not equally accessible to young people in different regions of the country. Although youth work is often referred to as a new concept in the Republic of North Macedonia, organised activities to support the development of young people already existed years ago, although in a different form.

The National Youth Strategy (2015) has a chapter on local youth work. In the last years the Union for Youth Work, alongside the Agency for Youth and Sport and other stakeholders, have already accomplished some of the related objectives, mainly through the preparation and adoption of the

National Youth Work Quality Standards, the National Youth Work Portfolio, the Vocational Standard for a "Worker with youth", and an accredited non-formal education programme based on the vocational standard (Republic of North Macedonia, Expert interview). Youth workers are not fully recognised in the country, although the term youth worker (worker for youth) has been recognised by the Ministry of Education and Science since July 2018, when the term "youth worker" was accepted as an occupational standard in the National Qualifications Framework (Republic of North Macedonia Country Sheet). The Union of Youth Workers has changed the public recognition of youth work, and professional standards for youth work have been important in gaining legitimacy for youth work (Republic of North Macedonia, Expert interview).

In 2019, there were many emerging developments on youth work in North Macedonia. The Law for Youth Participation and Youth Policies, which includes articles that define youth work, youth workers and youth centres, was in the final steps of adoption. The law states that municipalities should provide conditions for least one youth centre in their territory, at the latest five years after the adoption of the law. The law also states that youth workers are responsible for the work of youth centres. There is a parallel process of preparing a Youth Work Act, which will define in more detail other aspects, such as the profiles of youth work providers, the quality criteria that they need to meet, and the process of assessing the quality criteria (Republic of North Macedonia, Expert interview.)

There are youth workers or youth leaders in the civil society sector. In many cases they are themselves young people. One of the problems of the country is that when youth workers realise that the work careers are not sustainable, they move to work in other sectors, such as community development. This means that volunteers stay in youth work only for a short time. Although systematic knowledge does not exist, youth workers can be estimated to be mainly young people who are interested in youth work. They are students of social work and other relevant fields, such as anthropology, political science, law and general social sciences. This information, however, is an estimate. The educational background of volunteer youth workers is mainly through non-formal education and trainings inside the organisations. International trainings, such as training courses provided by the Council of Europe and those available through the Erasmus+ programme, are important. Volunteer and paid youth workers are both called "youth workers". Not all of the youth workers are employed full-time. This applies to, for example, project managers and mentors of international volunteers (Republic of North Macedonia, Expert interview.)

Sweden: Youth work in the field of leisure is a municipal responsibility in Sweden, both for outreach youth work activities and for universal work done in youth centres and youth clubs. No specific legislation covers youth work in Sweden, so there is lot of local autonomy in deciding which activities should receive financial help and/or other means of support. Youth workers are called recreational leaders (*fritidsledare*) in Sweden. According to a study on the background of the *fritidsledare*, 39% had taken the two-year course at folk high schools, 25% had a university education, 22% had finished high school, and 2% had only basic education (MYCF 2018). In addition to these, there are roughly 500 outreach or detached youth workers in Sweden. They are employed by the social service sector (Anderson 2018).

Ukraine: A new law on youth work is being developed. Youth workers are going to be linked to the educational system and will be seen as educators. The non-governmental sector is important in youth work. Youth workers are mainly civic activists, or formal education system specialists who are doing something out of school time or people who are working or volunteering in youth centres. They are mainly people who have a background as social workers, teachers, psychologists and cultural workers. 15% of the participants in the youth worker programme are librarians. All youth work activities are now under the responsibility of local government (Ukraine, Expert interview).

Main findings – a "wild field" with elements of standardisation

Apart from Malta, the field of youth work is usually not regulated in the examined countries, nor are there exact statistics on how many youth workers there are. Youth work seems to inhabit a terrain between civil society and the public sector, and youth workers can have positions which are sometimes hard to categorise, at least compared to publicly financed professions, such as teachers or social workers. A Finnish researcher and manager of youth work, Katariina Soanjärvi, has talked about youth work as a "wild field", and efforts to bring professional structures to youth work as an effort to tame this wild field (Soanjärvi 2011). By this metaphor Soanjärvi refers to the unclear nature of youth work. The field involves a lot of people with different motivation and skills, their educational and professional backgrounds differ and they work as paid and voluntary workers. The question about who counts as a qualified and/or recognised youth worker is far from settled. The field respects diversity, and perhaps sees diversity as a guarantee of freedom in youth work since the lack of regulation is sometimes taken to mean that freedom to do youth work in local settings is secured (Sercombe 2010). To use Soanjärvi's wild field metaphor, the results of the analysis of this question can be summarised as follows.

The examined countries differ in how strong their youth work architecture is. Of the countries which, according to Kiilakoski (2019), have the strongest architectures, Finland and Luxembourg do not have professional requirements for youth workers. The rough number of professional youth workers can be obtained, but their educational background, years active in youth work and other relevant information are missing. Estonia, which belongs to this group, has professional standards for youth work which are used actively. Of the countries which have strong practice architectures with room for development, Malta has a well-established system for governing youth work, and clearly set out requirements. Sweden finances youth work, but does not have a university-level education on youth work. Basic figures of youth workers are known in Sweden and the educational background of *fritidslerare* is known. In the Czech Republic, information on youth workers is harder to obtain. North Macedonia, Moldova and Ukraine, which are at the stage of developing their youth work structures, have youth workers but information on their background is an estimate. It can be inferred that countries with stronger practice architectures have a more detailed picture of youth work, but even those countries lack information, especially on volunteers. Notable knowledge gap is analysing what is the impact of faith-based youth work on young people and how faith-based youth workers contribute to national youth work communities. Based on the material available, analysing the role of faith-based youth work is not possible at the moment. The backgrounds of youth workers differ, and there is no unifying feature in the examined countries. In this sense, youth work is still a "wild field".

Recognition of youth work differs. In some of the examined countries youth work has received recognition, but there may still be some way ahead before youth work would count as a strong profession. Some countries, such as Malta, emphasise that youth work is an independent profession which has a unique tradition and offers a unique contribution to society. This is a conscious political choice which not all of the examined countries share. In some countries, such as Sweden, Finland, Luxembourg and Estonia, there is a social consensus that youth work needs to be promoted. In most of the examined countries youth work is related both to the field of education and social work. Consequently, depending on the country, youth workers may be seen as being closer to the field of education, or to the field of social work (cf. Williamson 2017; Williamson, Coussée and Basarab 2018). This creates differences in methods and also on the background of youth workers. In all the countries studied, youth workers usually have a formal education. University degrees are common, but not necessarily in the field of youth work.

Interestingly, although the fields of non-formal and formal learning are sometimes claimed to be different, in Ukraine and in Estonia teachers are also working as youth workers. This may point out that the borders of the “wild field” of youth work are blurred, and in different European realities the formal and the non-formal may in fact be far closer than is sometimes understood. The lack of formal qualifications means that youth work backgrounds differ, and even in cases like Estonia, where there is a well-established formal education system for youth work, the majority of youth workers do not have a degree in youth work.

Since information on who the practitioners are is only partial, it can be concluded that a lot of the relevant knowledge on youth work is most likely tacit instead of explicit. Information on youth workers is hard to obtain. This is true of full-time paid youth workers, and especially of volunteers. The easiest information to obtain is unsurprisingly in the cases where clear professional structures have been set up, and there are clear professional requirements. Countries such as Malta and Estonia have created transparent structures, and they have statistics based on these structures. On the other hand, countries such as Sweden, Finland and Luxembourg invest a lot in youth work, and can therefore give figures on the number of employed youth workers in their country. These countries are not standardising youth work and do not place professional requirements on youth workers. In this sense, youth work is still pretty much a wild field, at least compared to other services offered to young people.

The lines between youth workers working in open youth work and outreach youth work are sometimes hard to interpret, especially if no official definitions exist. Also, relationships between these two methods of youth work can be hard to analyse. This also affects understanding where youth workers conduct their work.

The arenas of youth work

Practices are always prefigured by certain preconditions, which affect how a community is able to work. Some of them are of material-economic nature. These preconditions include funding and material sites where the work is done. Material and economic resources do not determine exactly how people are able to work, but they definitely affect what is seen as possible in a given situation (Kemmis and Edwards-Groves 2018: 120). This way they have a power to shape how work is done. Therefore examining arenas where youth works is practiced is essential in understanding how youth work community currently is formed and what youth work is able to achieve.

Czech Republic: Leisure-time-based education is provided by leisure-time centres for children and youth, by after-school clubs and by after-school childcare facilities, which are fully or partially financed from the state budget. They are runby municipalities, unions of municipalities, regional governments, churches, other legal entities, and physical persons. In 2017 there were 321 leisure-time centres in the Czech Republic whose activities were attended by 296 248 participants. There were also 591 after-school clubs attended by 47 149 pupils. The Regulation allows specialised school facilities to provide school remedial activities as well as tutoring activities to children in order to prevent early school leaving. These facilities also serve as a platform for children and youth to engage in a variety of local, national or international projects (Czech Republic Country Sheet).

Youth work in the Czech Republic is understood as “actions directed towards young people regarding activities where they can take part voluntarily and which are designed for supporting their personal and social development through non-formal and informal learning as well as through so-called leisure-time-based education”. Youth work in the Czech Republic takes place in many different forms (youth centre activities, youth projects, outreach/detached youth work, informal youth group activities, youth camps, providing youth information, youth participation, youth organisation activities, youth movements and campaigns, organised digital and online activities etc.), and in different settings (youth clubs, leisure-time centres, clubhouses of youth NGOs, schools, churches, street environment, museums, libraries, youth work in open air settings). There is a national network of certified youth information centres (Czech Republic Country Sheet). Paid youth workers work mainly in leisure-time centres for children and youth (Střediska volného času) and after-school clubs, in youth information centres, in youth and child NGOs and in youth/children summer camps. When youth workers work for NGOs, the sustainability of the work career is an issue (Czech Republic questionnaire).

Outreach work has been traditionally done on the streets, but since the rise of social media in the world of the young, new digital tools are needed (European Commission 2014). Digital youth work development is currently the priority for capacity building of youth workers and youth leaders in the country. Youth organisations and leisure-time centres are supported in developing digital youth work practices in their local context (Czech Republic Country Sheet).

Estonia: Estonian youth work is multifaceted, and youth workers work in different settings. Hobby education which in Estonia is seen as being part of youth work consists of extracurricular activities in young people's spare time. It takes place in designated indoor arenas (hobby schools) and is financed usually by municipalities. Hobby activities are less structured and organised than hobby schools. They are offered in youth centres, hobby centres, youth associations, NGOs, and in schools.

Estonia established its first youth centres in 1998. In 2016, there were 263 youth centres. A range of activities are offered for young people at youth clubs, including games and hobby activities, as well as youth information and counselling. Many youth centres are closed at the weekend. Targeted youth work with at-risk youth has been growing in recent years in Estonia. In 2016 there were 26 licensed youth camps in Estonia. Youth workers operate in these settings as well. Youngsters stay overnight in camps. Youth workers are required to hold a first-aid pass and have special competences for outdoor activities. Youth camps offer leisure-time activities to approximately 30 000 kids and young people a year. Children from 7 to 12 is the largest age group. Also 13- to 15-year-old youngsters go to youth camps (Personal communication 20 April 2020).

Work brigades use youth work methodologies to promote employability of young people. Work brigades combine youth summer project camps with holidays (Taru 2018: 65-69).

Smart youth work is a recent development in Estonia (Estonia Country Sheet). Smart youth work refers to a broad concept which is not an activity or a method. Smart youth activities take into account changing needs of the young and the youth workers, which are shaped by changes in society, technology and culture. One of the key possibilities of smart youth work is the use of digital media and digital technology (Schlümmer 2019: 21-22).

Finland: There are currently 816 youth clubs in Finland. Youth clubs are traditionally seen as centrepieces of municipal youth work, but the number of youth clubs is decreasing. Youth clubs remain the most important arena of youth work in Finland. The second most important arenas are schools. In addition to these, youth workers work in digital settings and in mobile settings. It should

also be noted that youth clubs can be located inside other arenas, such as schools or libraries (Kanuuna and Kuntaliitto 2019). Youth work is becoming increasingly networked. In a survey from 2019, the majority of youth workers replied that their level of multi-professional co-operation has increased and that the arenas of youth work are widening (Kanuuna and Kuntaliitto 2019). Recent trends include, among others, school-based youth work, digital youth work, mobile youth work done, for example, on trains and in stations (Malm 2018) and on the "youth work buses".

There is a well-established network of youth work shops, which are targeted at young people outside education and training. The workshop activities are based on learning by doing through coaching and practical work. The workshops are work-oriented learning environments. Youth work shops are located all over Finland. In 2018 there were 220 youth work shops, with 14 620 young people attending the workshops (Bamberg and Hilpinen 2019). Youth workers also work in one-stop shop guidance centres (Ohjaamo). In 2018 there were 60 such arenas (Määttä 2019).

Luxembourg: According to Schroeder, youth work in Luxembourg has moved from a political role to a more educational and social work oriented role. Youth work in Luxembourg can be divided into two types, one working in youth organisations (active in the field of leisure-time opportunities) and open youth work conducted in professional youth centres (working with young people with fewer opportunities). Besides these, youth parliaments cover the more political aspects of youth work (Schroeder 2014: 67-69). Municipalities support local youth clubs and take part in the quality development process (Luxembourg Country Sheet). The main job opportunities in Luxembourg for youth workers are: educator in one of the 49 local or regional youth centres; collaborator in associations or NGOs working with young people; collaborator at youth information centres; collaborator at the National Youth Service; collaborator in ministries or public administrations on the national or local level or in formal education, such as secondary schools and higher education (Luxembourg questionnaire). There is also a project on outreach youth work targeting young people with limited opportunities, inactive young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and have low motivation and resources to manage their professional integration. Educators of local youth centres play a key role in this project (Luxembourg Country Sheet).

Malta: The main employer for youth workers in Malta is Aġenzija Żgħażagħ or the National Youth Agency. A number of youth workers are employed in schools and with social welfare providers

(Malta questionnaire). Examples of arenas of youth work in Malta are youth activity centres, which provide spaces and facilities for youth organisations, and also indoor and outdoor activities. Kellimni.co is targeted at young people who are in the need of emotional, moral and practical support. The service is available 24/7. Eurodesk provides opportunities for learning mobility and encourages participation. Youth.Inc is an education and learning program for young people aged between 16 and 21. Youth cafes provide a youth-friendly space. Youth hubs are informal recreational spaces in non-formal education settings (Malta Country Sheet).

Detached youth workers work in street corners, playgrounds, amusement arcades, parks and cafes (Malta Country Sheet). In 2018, detached youth workers provided different services for young people in different locations. These activities included, for example, youth information and supporting young people in schools, in addition to organising activities, supporting young people's projects and conversations with young people (Aġenzija Żgħażagħ 2018).

Moldova: The youth centre network in Moldova started developing in the 2000s with the help of international donors. Youth centres play a major role in youth policy implementation, youth work development and delivery. These youth structures have always been reflected in the national policy documents. The legal status of youth centres remains unclear. In 2007-2009 the number of youth centres was 60. The number has, however, decreased (UNFPA Moldova). There is a network of youth centres in the country. There are 23 youth centres in place at the regional level and more than 20 local (rural) centres (Expert interview). The youth centres provide educational and methodical activities such as cultural activities and service provision, including training and access to information; civic participation with a focus on decision-making process, and human rights advocacy and social reintegration; skills training and professional integration; entrepreneurship development; volunteering; promotion of healthy lifestyle; leisure time; outreach/mobile youth work (Ignatovitch, Fras and Basarab 2020).

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MoECR) of the Republic of Moldova has developed the Youth Centres Development Programme 2017-2022. The purpose of the programme is to provide financial and methodological support to youth centres so that they can strengthen the institutional capacities that would allow territorial development and extension of youth services. In 2019, there were 22 youth centres in the programme. Nearly all the youth centres thus have the status of a public institution. They are founded by the local public authorities (UNFDPA Moldova). Besides youth centres, youth workers may work in youth organisations and projects, international

organisations that have youth-specific programmes or local or central public administration (Moldova questionnaire).

Republic of North Macedonia: Usually youth work happens in local NGOs that deal with youth – no specific locations or facilities for youth work exist. To a large extent, youth work relies on whatever is provided by civil society organisations, youth-led organisations and non-governmental organisations that implement projects and programmes for improving the quality of life of young people (Expert interview 2019). Examples of arenas of youth work are facilities managed by youth NGOs. These include youth information and counselling centres (established in Prilep and Kavadarci, managed by the Coalition of youth organisations SEGA), Multi Kulti (established in Kumanovo, managed by the Centre for Intercultural Dialogue), Youth Centre (in Gostivar, managed by Democracy Lab) (Survey June 2019). Quality standards for youth centres are currently being prepared. These standards will be adopted in the near future, and based on them the Union for Youth Workers and the Agency for Youth and Sport will work on building an assessment process (Republic of North Macedonia, Expert Interview).

Sweden: Sweden has 900 youth centres in 290 municipalities. These youth centres target young people aged from 13 to 16. In addition to these, there are roughly 150 youth clubs, which are intended for young people between 17 and 25. There are also community centres where young people can join other generations (Sweden Country sheet). Youth work in Sweden is based on universal principles which aim to reach all young people and meet them from a positive standing point where they are seen as carriers of resources and possibilities rather than as carriers of problems. Youth work is done in the youth centres, and also in schools, sports centres and churches (Youth Wiki Sweden 4.7). 500 outreach youth workers in Sweden work in different settings, which according to a definition by the National Association for Detached Youth Work, youth workers do not control or organise. Outreach youth work can be done in places where the young gather informally. Detached and outreach youth work is done on the streets, but can also be done in institutional settings such as schools or youth clubs (Anderson 2018). Several municipalities and civil society organisations have started mobile leisure teams in different locations in the country in recent years. A mobile team on wheels may be a minibus or a trailer with materials for various indoor and outdoor activities (Sweden Country Sheet).

Ukraine: The main task of youth work in Ukraine is to provide civic education for young people. There are currently nearly 700 youth centres. They are organised differently, sometimes on NGO

platforms, in municipalities, by charity organisations and so on. Since 2018 there is a national recognition process for youth centres. This applies to the youth centres which are set up with government funding (Ukraine, Expert interview 2019).

Youth workers can be employed by regional and local public administration responsible for implementation of youth policy, by regional or municipal youth centres, regional youth NGOs, libraries for youth, youth and children's clubs, and the NGO sector (Ukraine questionnaire). Currently, outreach youth work is not a strong part of Ukrainian youth work (Ukraine, Expert interview).

Main findings – practice architectures and recognition define the focus of youth work arenas

If youth work arenas are recognised by society, recognising the role of youth work in societyis easier. One element of strong practice architectures of youth work is knowing where the work is done. Overall, data on youth work arenas is inconclusive, which affects how far-reaching conclusions can be made. It can be safely concluded that youth workers practise in a variety of settings. All of the countries have youth or community centres. It can be concluded that youth clubs are the best recognised arenas for doing youth work. . There is exact knowledge on the number of youth centres. The information on the activities or the methods used in youth centres or the quality of equipment is not available, though. Digital or smart youth work is currently being developed. The universal youth work open to all the young people and targeted youth services happens in a lot of countries. There are many rationales for targeted youth work. Exact descriptions are hard to offer. Bearing this methodological difficulty in mind, the main arenas of youth work can be categorised as follows (based on Kiilakoski 2015).

Public indoor arenas designed for youth work

Practically all the examined countries have youth centres or community centres or youth clubs which are used to work with young people. They are important sites for youth work, since they are age-specific public spaces and learning environments created, decorated and designed for the purpose of youth work. Some countries have a strong public emphasis on building and developing youth centres while in the Republic of North Macedonia the development of youth centres as a public initiative is only just beginning to emerge.

Conflicting trends should also be noted. Finland and Sweden are examples of countries where the number of youth centres has been decreasing, while in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Ukraine the

networks of youth centres have been increasing steadily. There are also youth work facilities targeting young people with fewer opportunities.

Interestingly, the development of mobile youth work has meant that the arenas designed for the purpose of youth work do not necessarily need to be physical spaces, and they can be built on digital platforms as well.

Public indoor arenas not designed solely for youth work

In these settings, youth work coexists with or needs to adapt to an existing organisational culture. Youth workers work, for example, in schools or other locations in the formal education sector, churches, community centres and as the cases of Czech Republic and Ukraine point out, in libraries. Detached work can also be done in public and private settings, such as cafes.

Public outdoor arenas

Detached youth work in the streets can connect youth workers to young people who are not usually reachable through other forms of youth work or public services. Street youth work is pretty much alive (although not in all the countries). Also, summer camps are mentioned occasionally as a site for doing youth work. Countries such as Estonia, Finland, Malta and Sweden do youth work in public outdoor arenas. While the indoor arenas are best documented, public outdoor arenas are of importance as well in youth work.

Digital spaces

Digital or smart youth work is mentioned as a point of development, although it can perhaps be mentioned that most information testifies to development of such programmes than the actual methods and methodologies. Aside from the rather obvious fact that youth work must reach young people in the settings where they like to be, developing digital youth work is seen as a way to respond to the changing needs of the young and also to make youth work more effective.

The countries with stronger practice architectures (Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, Sweden) share notable similarities. They all have publicly funded youth clubs which cover different parts of the country. All these countries also do outreach youth work. These two forms of youth work, one intended for all the young people and the other for the young in vulnerable conditions, seem to be shared by the field. There is context-specific development, such as the strong role of hobby education in Estonia, the importance of schools as partners in Estonia, Finland and

Sweden or the development of digital youth work. Ukraine already has a network of hundreds of youth clubs, Moldova has dozens of regional and local youth centres, and North Macedonia is in the process of establishing a network of youth centres. In these countries, outreach youth work is at least not yet a priority. Interestingly, the role of libraries is far more important in Ukraine than in other countries.

There is available information on youth centres and youth clubs. They are recognised as important arenas of the young which have to be publicly funded and/or managed. However, information about what happens at youth centres and why it happens is not easily available. Outreach youth work is recognised in most of the countries. Other forms of youth work activities, such as work brigades in Estonia, may be harder to analyse. Many countries report an increase in multi-professional co-operation, which means that arenas of youth work also change. Some of these arenas are not yet recognised. These similar observations apply to how explicit the knowledge about youth work is. Youth centres are documented with more care than in other arenas of youth work, which facilitates more information but may not necessarily mirror the representation of youth work in the field.

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that the balance between other forms of youth work and the work done in youth clubs and community centres is at least partly dependent on the practice architectures of youth work. Developing outreach, mobile and digital youth work (going where young people like to be) combined with the decreasing number of formal public spaces of youth work (such as youth clubs or youth centres) shows that the focus of youth work may shift if youth workers are able to work in many settings. In countries where youth work systems are being established or are in need of development, as in Ukraine and North Macedonia, high focus is placed on the importance of strengthening the quality (and contribute to better recognition) of youth work services in the available public arenas.

Partnerships and networks of cross-sectoral co-operation

Practices are never isolated, and they are related to other practices in both formal and informal ways. To borrow a term of Stephen Kemmis, practices are part of a broader practice landscape where many other practices are likely to occur (Kemmis and Edwards-Groves 2018: 123). There are different professions working with young people, civil society organisations provide services and activities and so on. Analysing how youth work relates to other services sheds light on youth work communities and the role of youth work in the landscape of practices surrounding young people.

Czech Republic: Youth work is covered by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the Czech Republic and is seen as distinct from social work. Linking youth work and social work has been a point of development for the Czech Republic. Youth workers deal more and more with young people's social needs while doing youth work, and social workers are challenged to provide non-formal education to their clients (Czech Country Sheet). Traditionally, detached youth work has carried out in streets. Outreach work is done in drop-in centres for youth. Lately there has been a shift towards working with families. Also, there is a growing willingness to engage in cross-agency work with other social services for young people (European Commission 2014).

Estonia: 30% of the youth workers are employed by schools. Child welfare, social services, sports (trainers, who work in youth camps), culture, business (recreational activities), and police force some of the other sector partners to youth workers (Estonia questionnaire). On the national level, the most important partners in conducting cross-sectoral youth policy are the Ministries of the Interior; Social Affairs; Education and Research; and Culture (Youth Wiki Estonia 1.5). The Estonian Youth Development Plan 2014-2020 specifies co-operation in implementing different strategies, and mentions co-operation between schools and youth work twice (Estonian Youth Development Plan 2014-2020).

Finland: Co-operation in the youth field has increased in the last five years. In municipal youth work, the most important partners are formal education, sports services, employment services, cultural services and social services for children and young people (Kuntaliitto 2019). In youth work shops, co-operation is done with other youth work facilities, basic education, vocational education, employment services, social services, health services, military, the police and other actors (Bamberg and Hilpinen 2019: 30-33).

There are different professional networks in Finland that are required by the state. According to the Child Welfare Act, each municipality has to have a plan for the well-being of children and young people which describes services for promoting well-being and prevention of problems. The Youth Act states that local governments are required to establish a steering and service network or appoint a co-operation team whose activities target all the young people living in the municipality. The mission of this team is to gather information about young people, to co-ordinate services for them and to promote co-operation in the implementation of youth activities. Youth work also takes part in other networks concerning children and young people, such as teams for co-ordinating student welfare at schools. The emphasis at schools is on the preventive welfare that supports the whole

school. In general, there is a trend towards promoting multi-professional networks instead of sector-based youth work only (Nieminen 2014: 42). The most important partners for youth work outside municipalities are NGOs and associations.

Luxembourg: Especially in youth centres, youth workers have taken a more social work oriented role, although in Luxembourg youth work is seen as part of education (Youth work country sheet). There are also other professionals who deliver services to young people, such as social workers within the Social Welfare Offices on the local or regional level, psychologists at secondary schools, aides-animateurs in the field of organised leisure-time activities (non-formal education) and social pedagogues in schools (Youth work questionnaire).

One of the issues in Luxembourg has been the integration of youth work and work with children. While there are similarities, the objectives of the work and the resources differ, since more resources are given to out-of-school services for children (Schroeder 2016: 69-70). This was an important issue especially when youth work came under the Ministry of Families. Currently, youth work comes under the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth.

Malta: Maltese youth workers are increasingly working in multi-professional conditions, and the ”youth worker has increasingly become a facilitator and a mediator, and a negotiator between young people seeking knowledge and professionals/practitioners who have such knowledge” (Teuma 2017: 109). The role of the youth worker is to build bridges between young people and different professionals they are likely to engage with. This is especially visible in the youth.inc programme, which is an educational and learning programme for young people between 16 and 21. The programme is based on the principle that success can be achieved if young people are engaged and motivated to participate in applied learning environments, which are based on practical approaches (Teuma 2017; Malta Country Sheet).

Moldova: Youth work in the Republic of Moldova is closer to the educational sector than to social work. A large number of youth workers come from education – schools or hobby schools, such as creative schools, music schools, painting schools, etc.). Therefore, by default, youth work is closer to education. Currently there are efforts to bring youth centres closer to the school by organising joint activities between youth centres and schools; initiating joint projects between teachers who are responsible for civic education and youth workers; carrying out non-formal education activities and practical lessons within the youth centres; and carrying out joint community youth projects

(Expert interview). The main partnerships for youth workers in Moldova are social work and social welfare, civil society organisations, sports, cultural work and education and the field of volunteering, which in Moldova has its own legislation (Moldova questionnaire).

North Macedonia: Usually youth work happens in local NGOs that deal with youth – no specific locations or facilities dealing specifically with youth work are in place. To a large extent, youth work relies on whatever is provided by civil society organisations, youth-led organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that implement projects and programmes for improving the quality of life of young people (Republic of North Macedonia, Expert interview 2019).

Sweden: In Sweden, leisure-oriented youth work has had the mission of increasing social inclusion and promoting young people's transitions from school to work. Some youth houses and all-activity centres already work in this way, in close co-operation with the local community (Sweden Country Sheet). According to a study conducted in youth clubs and youth houses, the most important partners are schools. 84% of supervisors thought the level of co-operation with school is important. Other important partners included NGOs (50%), police (49%), social services (44%), enterprises (22%) and religious communities (19%). However, when asked if co-operation works well, the answers differ. Two thirds (67%) say that co-operation with the police works well. Second best co-operation is with schools (59%), followed by social services (50%), NGOs (29%), religious communities (17%) and enterprises (11%) (MUCF 2018). Outreach youth workers also co-operate with local churches and mosques (Andersson 2018).

Ukraine: The main partners to youth workers are educational institutions, civil society organisations, charity foundations and the culture infrastructure such as children and youth clubs, cultural clubs, and libraries. There is also co-operation between youth centres and the police (for example information campaigns; educational campaigns; health campaigns). The level and number of partners depend on the quality of youth work in the youth centres. Work orientation also affects co-operation: if youth workers see their job as consisting of working at the youth club, no partnerships are developed. The level of co-operation depends on the local decision makers as well (Ukraine, Expert interview 2019). There are other professions which are doing youth work or other related work, such as social workers (at centres for social services for families, children and youth), social pedagogues in schools, specialists of municipal clubs and centres for children and youth in the system of out-of-school education (Ukraine questionnaire).

Main findings – cross-sectoral co-operation navigating between education and social inclusion

Based on the above descriptions, three things can be pointed out. First, in many countries where youth work practice architectures have been developed, the level of multi-professional co-operation seems to be rising and the goals of the co-operation seem to be explicitly stated on a policy level. Often this appears to move youth work closer to social work, since youth workers are dealing more with transitions and social problems. These goals are debated and the role of youth work is changing. Youth work and social work are converging, partly due to the increased participatory emphasis of social work (Williamson, Coussée and Basarab 2017: 185). The possibility of youth workers to work with other professions probably indicates that youth work is recognised as having knowledge and skills in working with young people, and partners are willing to devote time to co-operation.

The recognition of youth work affects how deep multi-professional co-operation can be. This can be interpreted to be a manifestation of the notion about interdependencies in youth work: through interacting with other professions the profile of youth work may increase compared to a scenario where youth work autonomy is secured only by isolating youth work practices from the rest of society (Siurala 2016).

Second, the interdependencies between the formal and the non-formal learning environments are important in some of the countries. Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Ukraine mentioned the importance of schools and educational institutions as co-operation partners. In practice it seems that the line between formal and non-formal learning can be and is commonly bridged in some of the countries when youth work and schools co-operate in a systematic manner. In youth work architectures such as Sweden and Finland, co-operation is based on the interaction between two professions, and in Ukraine, for example, the teachers may engage themselves in doing youth work when providing extra-curricular activities.

Third, social work aspects of youth work seem to be rising. While the data do not provide reasons for this, it may be speculated that youth policy emphasis on young people not in education, employment and training has meant that youth workers are able to contribute to the network of services for young people with fewer opportunities. As an example, in the Czech Republic and Luxembourg, where youth work is seen as part of the field of education, the social policy concerns

are becoming more relevant. The increasing relevance of social policy concerns may also change the role of youth workers, and finding out what are the changing capacities needed from youth workers would be an interesting point to study.

Although it is clear from the data that youth work is not an isolated practice in the examined countries and that youth work is engaged in different professional networks, there is a scarcity of in-depth knowledge on co-operation. Finally, the research aimed to look in more depth at some aspects of cross-sectoral co-operation and partnerships, but lack of data did not allow for these to be effectively explored. Based on the data, it is not possible to analyse, for example, the following key questions: what are the national and local networks youth work takes part in; what is the exact role of youth work in these partnerships, what type of synergies exist; how does the traditional role of youth work change if more co-operation is done; how are the networks financed; how do these networks and partnerships actually benefit young people? This means that more needs to be invested in collecting such knowledge, analysing it and sharing it with the youth work field.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to analyse the role of youth work communities in different European conditions. The conclusions of the paper can be grouped into three different perspectives. First, the study highlights some features of the existing communities of practice of youth work. This part analyses what is known based on the data of the study. Second, the study also highlights difficulties in gathering information on youth work even when each country correspondent has an in-depth knowledge on the management and studies on youth work in their local context. The second part of the conclusions explains what the lack data means. Lack of reliable data shows that the knowledge basis of youth work remains somewhat inconclusive, which in turn has consequences to recognition and to the perennial identity issue of youth work. The data collection for this analytical paper also highlight what is not known on youth work atthe moment. The third part of the conclusion makes a modest proposal on what type of information would be helpful in articulating what youth work is about and how it fulfils its societal mission.

Youth work communities in Europe

Communities are affected by the background of the practitioners, since they bring forth their personal histories, ideas about proper methodologies and their understanding about the practices; by the material and virtual spaces people work in, since these economic-material resources

prefigure but do not determine what the community is able to do and also by how the practice is seen by the local community, both by the young and the adults; and by the co-operation with other professionals (Kemmis and Edwards-Groves 2018). The study sheds light on some of these features.

In all the examined countries there were arenas designed especially for the purposes of youth work, often in the form of youth centres. Interestingly enough, youth centres were also the best documented in the data of the study. This seems to suggest that the low threshold activity which is based on creating space for peer interaction, doing something nice and having fun without the pressures of the competition society has remained important in the digital era. Moreover, the countries examined have either taken or are willing to take concrete steps in giving public resources to youth clubs and have taken measures to explain the competences of youth workers or quality youth work in youth clubs. It also shows how that type of youth work can be documented without the fear of becoming too standardised: the countries were able to give exact figures on how many youth clubs or youth centres they had, although more precise information on the actual practice within youth centres could not be obtained. Detached and outreach youth work is done in most of these countries, and multi-professional co-operation is considered important. The knowledge of what youth workers are doing in other settings is considerably lower compared to what they do in youth clubs. It has been suggested that increasing collaboration is likely to result in increasing visibility of youth work (European Commission 2014: 180). While this is probably true on the local level, exact national level information is hard to obtain.

There were differences in the background of workers working in youth work settings and also in how networked these settings were. The information available was largely on professional youth workers, who are paid to do youth work or manage it. The background or even numbers of the volunteers was not available. This means that explicit knowledge on the voluntary component of youth remains rather thin. It can perhaps be concluded that youth work which is closer to the public service system is more explicit, and the youth work which is closer to civil society is not documented properly. What does this mean for the supposed unity of the youth work field, if some parts of the youth work practice remain tacit and maintain their freedom to do youth work based on the ethos of the NGO or their personal preferences, and other forms of youth work will face more pressures to be explicitly documented, transparent and evidence-based?

There was an emphasis on the need to respond to changes in society. The need to develop smart or digital youth work was also a common concern, especially in those countries that had already

developed strong structures for youth work. The fact that digital youth work development is an objective in youth work related policy shows that the state is taking a lead in responding to this topic, rather than expecting that civil society will create solutions to these dilemmas.

Training and education on the one hand, and social work on the other, have been traditionally seen as the closest fields to youth work. Sometimes it takes effort to distinguish youth work from these fields and to explain the uniqueness of youth work (Williamson 2017: 18-19). Some forms of youth work are closer to social work, while others have more to do with learning, education and growth. This division is manifest in the data of the study as well. The question about the balance between outreach/detached/targeted youth work – which might be closer to social work and more inclined to target young people with fewer opportunities – and universal youth work for all young people is a common issue in most of the countries. The common European challenge to help young people forward in times of austerity and economic hardship also affects youth work and brings about more co-operation. This perhaps creates tighter links than before between youth work and social work. Another co-operation partner most frequently cited is formal education.

With the societal and economical changes, youth work has to negotiate its place between different services, most importantly between formal education and social work. Establishing a more nuanced picture about how youth work co-operates is not possible based on the data of this study. It has been previously noted that youth work is recognised not by the exact outcomes it achieves with the young, but by what it can supposedly contribute to society in general (Zentner and Ord 2017: 24). The analysis of this study shows that it is easier to gain information on the level of youth policy than on the level of what is actually done with the individual young people and their peer groups.

Despite differences in youth policy, it is assumed that youth work has a common core, which can be defined by the purpose of youth work in society or by emphasising that youth work is essentially a value-based practice (European Commission 2014; Slovenko and Thompson 2016; Schildt, Vanhee and Williamson 2017; European Charter on Local Youth Work). However, finding descriptions of how youth work is able to fulfil these principles is difficult to obtain. There is a lack of both rigorous research and on the description of bottom-up processes led by youth workers. The wish that “youth work and youth workers become the driving force within the development of youth work across Europe” (Zentner and Ord 2017: 28) would require building professional networks and describing the processes explicitly in a manner that also convinces people outside the youth field. Producing both scientific studies and a description of how youth work is done is likely to be needed if youth

work is to gain further recognition, and as suggested by the quality project on youth work done by Intercity Youth network, gain wider credibility (Intercity Youth). At the moment, information about quality issues on youth work is hard to obtain.

Scarcity of information on youth work

Deliberate efforts were to made to gather in-depth knowledge on youth work during this study. Three main sources of data were used. The EKCYP country sheets on youth work were used to gather information. The questionnaires on educational and career paths on youth workers gathered in 2018 were further analysed. When it became apparent that these two sources would not be adequate for answering the research questions, EKCYP correspondents were asked to provide links to information, or give the contact details of the persons that would be able to provide information. Even this data collection in June 2019 proved not to offer enough data. The main conclusion to be drawn is that there is not much material on youth work available, especially in English, if one wants to understand the micro level of youth work in different European countries and further understand the practice architectures of youth work. The macro level structures are, on the other hand, easier to analyse. One of the main conclusions of this study is that there is not enough information on youth work on the country level.

It has been previously acknowledged that there are only a limited number of robust youth work evaluations available, that the identity of the field is not shared and that there are no clear frameworks in terms of professional development of the youth workers (European Commission 2014). Also, compared to formal education, where there is a lot of information available on teachers, educational facilities and the quality of offered services, youth work remains “a wild field” (Soanjärvi 2011) which is characterised by its value-based approach (Schildt, Vanhee and Williamson 2017), and also diversity and even vagueness. For this reason, it is hard to get a clear picture about youth work communities in different countries and the exact contributions youth work brings to society in general.

This lack of explicit knowledge has been acknowledged in the youth field, and there have been conscious efforts to explain the nature of youth work, to demonstrate the value of youth work (European Commission 2014), to analyse the value of youth work using indicators (European Commission 2015; Intercity Youth) and to explain the common principles of youth work which can be agreed by all European countries (European Charter on Local Youth Work). The process of better

explaining youth work is clearly on the way. At the same time, there have been cautions that youth work should maintain its process-oriented nature and be open enough (Zentner and Ord 2017). The task has been described as respecting diversity and at the same time improving co-ordination and finding common ground (Williamson 2017). At the moment the knowledge basis to achieve this goal seems to be rather thin, at least compared to other more professionalised fields.

While there is a case to be made towards preserving the "wild field" nature of youth work, on the other hand it is hard to justify why youth work should be recognised if the field itself is unable to communicate the relevant features of youth work to wider audiences. Practices require recognition, since the practice is meaningful only to those who are capable of recognising it. Recognition has two aspects: both of these are relevant for this study.

First, there is cognitive recognition, which means that citizens have to have an idea of what the practice is and how it looks. There is cognitive recognition if the practice is known, and if there is relevant information available in a language that is intelligible to people working outside that practice as well. Second, recognition also has a descriptive aspect. Practices have to be accepted, valued and seen as beneficial to society if they want to gain recognition. There is descriptive recognition if the practice is accepted as constituting an independent field of work, and seen as being good for the clients (Nicolini 2012: 93). According to this perspective, youth work recognition is about having relevant information about the role of youth work available to society in general, and convincing the wider audience that what youth work does is beneficial and of use to society in general. This requires taking into account the national context, since youth work as a practice is shaped by history and the political and cultural context of the country.

Based on this study, it can be claimed that youth work recognition may still be a work in progress. On the level of cognitive recognition, some of the basic elements of youth work are still hard to find out, such as number of youth workers, especially volunteers, or arenas of youth work besides youth clubs. The cognitive recognition of youth work requires explaining what youth work is about and how it is done. Since documentation about the relevant aspects of youth work community are hard to come by, explaining the nature and value of youth work outside the youth field may be difficult. Descriptive recognition may also be hard to get, since we lack information on how youth work benefits society. For example, little is known about the number and background of young people attending youth work activities, about how inclusive youth work is, how young people participate in the youth work activities or how youth work operates in collaborative networks.

The need for additional information

Transparency, measurability and predictability have become more important in information societies. Against this background, some aspects of the youth work communities look like a "wild field" (Soanjärvi 2011), since it is hard to form a total picture about youth work and its impact. Knowledge on youth work does not cover all the relevant aspects of the work. For this reason, it is probably hard to convince those who do not share the commitments of youth work community. A large body of youth work remains invisible, since the issue of voluntary youth workers or youth leaders is hard to analyse due to a lack of data. Providing more information on youth work will likely shed light on the practice and is needed, especially in cases where youth work systems need to be developed.

While it is important to recognise the diversity of the youth field, improving the knowledge base on youth work would make it easier to highlight the value youth work brings to society, and also to analyse the European differences in accessing youth work. Below is a suggestion of 10 different indicators which would be needed to better analyse youth work. The suggestion is based on the experiences of this and a previous study (Kiilakoski 2019). The division to preconditions, work processes and outcomes is taken from the EU report on the quality of youth work (European Commission 2015: 18-19).

10 suggested indicators to start the debate!

Indicators about the preconditions for youth work

Facilities and equipment. Presently there is adequate knowledge on the number of youth centres available. There is scarce knowledge on the available equipment within these clubs or on what counts as a well-established youth centre. Knowledge on the other facilities of youth work would paint a more complete picture.

Youth workers and their background. There is currently little knowledge on the work trajectories of youth workers. Some countries mention that youth workers are in the field for a limited time when they are young. More information on the age, educational background, professional competences and prior working experience would help in answering questions on how to promote initial and continuous professional education of youth workers.

Collaborative networks. Horizontal youth policy emphasises the need to integrate different services. It is difficult to analyse the precise role that youth work plays in the activities provided by these networks.

Information on the professional platforms of youth workers. Practices are dependent on how the practitioners can interact, exchange ideas, experiences and good practices and achieve shared understanding. The professional platforms, both digital and face-to-face, of youth workers create possibilities for shared cognition. At the moment it is not possible to analyse the meaning of these arenas for informal and non-formal learning of youth workers.

Information on volunteers. Volunteers make a huge contribution to the youth field, but this contribution remains largely invisible due to lack of documentation. The definition of volunteers and concensus on their role in youth work practices also needs clarification if the impact and the proper role of volunteers is to be explained.

Indicators related to youth work processes

Methods of youth work. Currently there is a lack of knowledge on how youth workers map the needs of young people, how they balance the policy requirements and their practical concerns, how they make non-formal and informal learning visible or how youth work is evaluated.

Indicators related to outcomes of youth work

The number of young people and gender aspects in youth work. Even rough estimations on how many young people benefit from youth work services do not currently exist in most of the countries. Also, distinguishing between intensive, regular and random contacts would point out the deeper processes of youth work. Documenting this would contribute to promoting the recognition of the value of youth work.

Target groups reached and inclusiveness aspects of youth work. Youth work should reach young people in disadvantaged conditions and ensure that access to youth work is equally possible. Information on how youth workers reach different groups of young people would help outline and gain further support for the contribution of youth work to social inclusion of young people and to supporting young people when they negotiate their place in society.

Learning outcomes. There is increasing recognition that youth work has a role to play in supporting young people, but the information on the impact of youth work on young people is limited. Gaining

knowledge and information, learning hard and soft skills, developing attitudes, and learning about peer activities are all results of quality youth work. Evaluating the impact may take the form of statistical information or narrative approaches, and both of these approaches require policies and support.

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