

Youth Partnership

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MOOC – ESSENTIALS OF YOUTH WORK

Podcast on quality and standards in youth work

TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:03] **Dariusz** Hello, welcome to our podcast. Today, we are going to talk about quality and standards in youth work, and we have invited Jonas Agdur from Sweden and also Sabine Klocker from Austria, Jonas and Sabine - can you say a few words about you?

[00:00:22] **Jonas** Okay, you mentioned my name first, so I suppose I will start. I, my youth worker experiences that I started as a municipal youth worker in suburban Stockholm in nineteen eighty. And there I stayed for 18 years working as a street worker, youth worker, head of youth centre, project leader, etc. I then moved down to the Gothenburg region and became head of a local department for youth work between 1998 and 2007. And after some years, I founded a network called KEKS, which I'm still working for today. We have 70 local departments for youth work as members, most in Sweden, but also some members in Slovenia and Finland. I've been also quite active on the European scene. I'm chair of inter-city Youth Studies, a European network of local municipalities, and for two years I was chairing the expert group on youth work quality systems. And that's between 2013 and 2015. I've been a member of the Council of Europe High Level Task Force on youth work. I'm currently a member of the Europe Goes Local Steering Group and doing some work also for Europe Goes Local. And I'm part of the Third Youth Work Convention steering group since it started planning this big event in December. So short intro.

[00:01:58] **Dariusz** Thank you Jonas. That's quite a quite a lot. Sabine, can you say a few words about you.

[00:02:03] **Sabine** Yes, indeed. Hello, everyone. Well, I started youth work in tiny little village in the south of Austria, somewhat up in the mountains, so to say. So, I started with rural youth work, first on a local level, then on national level. I founded an international committee and then did lots of European youth work from there on. I've also been secretary general of the Rural Youth Europe, which is the umbrella organisation of rural youth organisations in Europe. I've also worked for many different organisation as as a trainer within the network of the Council of Europe Youth Department, where I've been a member of the trainers' pool since 2005. I also worked at one of the European Youth Centres as temporary educational advisor. I've done lots of work in the field of human rights education, intercultural learning, youth participation, personal and organisational development. I work for many different NGOs and institutions at the moment. That has left me not only to many countries around Europe, but also to Africa and the US. And next to training and youth work, I'm also a psycho-social coach. So, I also combine this with my coaching practise in Vienna, Austria, and I've been all over the place.

[00:03:29] **Dariusz** OK. Thank you. Thank you, Sabine. I'm going to run this podcast together with my colleague and friend, Katya Sherer. Hi, Katya.

[00:03:36] **Katya** Hi Darek. Hello everybody.

[00:03:37] **Dariusz** Today we will be talking about quality and standards in youth work, which is probably a very wide topic to discuss. There is a lot of talks about what is quality in youth work. What do we mean by quality youth work. There is a lot of documents actually you can read on the European level, meaning, for example, a competence model for youth workers to work internationally from Salto. There is a lot of national frameworks or quality frameworks developed in different countries. There is also this the part of the declaration from the second European Youth Work Convention that very much talks about quality of youth work practice, saying that however, whatever method to youth work is using is that the delivery of youth work has to be done... has to be of high quality simply. So let's start maybe with a very simple, but maybe also at the same time very difficult question. What do we actually mean when we talk about this quality youth work. What is it? What is it - quality youth work.

[00:04:48] **Dariusz** Jonas if you can if you can say what you think about it.

[00:04:52] **Jonas** First of all, I must say that this term quality youth work. I don't really like it. I mean, we could talk about the quality in youth work or the varying quality in youth work but quality youth work as a term is quite strange since I mean, we don't talk about quality social work or quality schooling. So, I prefer talking about youth work and then we could talk about what is quality in youth work. And to me. What we mean by quality in youth work, if you ask me what I mean. I would say that the currently quite recently published European Charter on Local Youth Work very well describes what is quality in youth work, since it also defines what we actually mean when we talk about youth work. This charter on local youth work starts with nine core principles of youth work, which I think is to me what constitutes youth work. I mean, when we talk about democracy, we're talking about the principles of democracy, what constitutes democracy, I mean, freedom of speech, one person, one vote, et cetera, et cetera. And to define youth work and what is quality in youth work, we must talk about what are the principles that we must follow if we should call something youth work. And yeah.

[00:06:21] **Dariusz** And what are these principles?

[00:06:24] **Jonas** What these principles are?

[00:06:26] **Dariusz** Yeah.

[00:06:27] **Jonas** OK. I'll have to, I should open the document on my computer because...

[00:06:31] **Dariusz** I know just what do you consider the most important principles?

[00:06:34] **Jonas** The most important principles? It is that it's based on voluntary participation. It is based on non-formal and informal learning. It's based on the principle that it's done. I mean, it's created. It's planned, carried out, evaluated by young people, and it's actively inclusive. And I would say that these are the real core things, the learning perspective, the participatory approach, the fact that it should be offered to all young people. It's not a compensatory activity. It should exist in its own right, so to speak. And it should definitely be voluntary.

[00:07:23] **Dariusz** OK. So it's very much repeating the kind of the unique features or unique characteristics of youth work, this voluntary character, this non-formal and informal learning, this putting young people in the centre of youth work practice. Sabine, what is quality youth work or quality in youth work, as Jonas said, for you?

[00:07:46] **Sabine** Well, for me, I think one of the important things is that it's really based on the non-formal education principles of which you've already mentioned quite a few, Jonas as well as yourself, that it aims at developing competencies and that it's really a participatory process, literally starting from a sort of needs assessment and then literally leading through an entire process. And yeah, ideally, it should be accessible to everybody. And things like that would also be in there. And yeah, and it's based on individual and group learning as such. And it's usually a quite process orientated and holistic approach. And yeah, participatory was mentioned several times, based on experience, actions and definitely on the needs of participants and what they bring along. So that's what I would see as some of the basics of good youth work or quality in youth work.

[00:08:47] **Dariusz** OK. Thank you, Katya, you want to continue?

[00:08:51] **Katya** Yes. I just was reflecting on the course quality and the principles of the youth work. And then my question that I have to ask you is about the standards of... the quality standards of your work. Are the quality standards different from the principles? And are there any quality standards that, you know, for example, in some countries or on the European level that are existing, so and who is setting the standards? Jonas, for example, in KEKS, I know that you have the quality system for the use by all the member organisations, no, and employers.

[00:09:36] **Jonas** Yeah.

[00:09:38] **Katya** Can we call it quality standards?

[00:09:39] **Jonas** So I wouldn't call that. I mean, quality standards is a bit a tricky word. Also, I would say that these are quality indicators. They are things that we consider important. For example, we do follow up on young people's participation. And then we have indicators saying, for example, that young people should be part of planning, young people should be a part of the evaluation and so on. And these is I mean, quality in youth work is indicated by a couple of different things that we've already been talking about. And then you could break this down into indicators. And the important thing is when we talk about quality in youth work, that we should have a sort of a developmental approach to it. So, I wouldn't say that we have quality standards because we have indicators and then we have aims. For example, we say in our organisations that we have an index on participation that we mentioned to follow up on. There are, of course, in different countries. I mean, Ireland, for example, has a set of quality standards, but they are also about not only the outcomes of youth work, because now we're talking about outcomes in terms of learning, in terms of participation and so on. But these quality standards are also related to preconditions for youth work, for example. What is needed in order to be able to run quality youth work. What is needed in terms of, I mean, facilities, in terms of work processes and so on. But I think the most important thing here is to talk about indicators related to outcomes. What do we want to happen? Well, we want people to learn, young people to learn. We want young people to participate, for example.

[00:11:28] **Katya** So it's about preconditions. It's about the process, how we organise youth work. And it's also about outcomes. Yes.

[00:11:35] **Jonas** Yeah. I mean, these are the three things that could have more or less quality: the preconditions, the work process and the outcomes. And, of course, to the bitter end, the outcomes is the most important thing, of course, because that is what actually gives young people added value to their lives.

[00:11:53] **Katya** Thank you Jonas, and Sabine, from your experience?

[00:11:56] **Sabine** Well, I've dealt a lot with quality standards for youth training at non-formal education training, and there have been a lot of developments on European level. So, for example, the Council of Europe Youth Department does have their quality standards for non-formal education training, which is a list of fifteen points, or Salto Youth Resource Centres. You know, they've brought out the European training strategy with competence models and the seven key competencies, competence models for youth workers and trainers as such. And then, of course, others which go almost into a criterion what not, would be the Youthpass, which is used as a recognition for Erasmus plus funded youth projects, recognition and certification, or from Council of Europe side would also have the youth worker portfolio, which again looks at the competence development for youth workers. So, those are all support materials which are there on European level. In Austria as such, we also have aufZAQ, which is also about quality standards for youth workers and youth training. So, those are just a whole lot of different frameworks that which could be interesting. Yeah. For somebody who was active in youth work, in youth work training to have a look out.

[00:13:27] **Katya** So it's when we come when we talk about the system of standards, it's again, it's more for trainers and for those who work with young people. Yes. So, this is another side of this.

[00:13:42] **Dariusz** Jonas wants to say wants to say something.

[00:13:44] **Jonas** Yeah. I think that would be no discussing. I mean, there's a difference, as I think it's important to make clear that quality standards is often about preconditions, about the work process. What is needed in order to provide good youth work, whereas indicators and aims are sort of on the other side of the process trying to do follow up and evaluate and assess and improve youth work based on how what do we actually achieve through having these preconditions. So, I think that this difference is quite important to make clear. Thank you. Thank you.

[00:14:25] **Katya** Thank you. I have just a small one last question. And who's who is setting the systems? From where this quality system, quality standards, whatever we call it is coming out?

[00:14:42] **Jonas** I mean, that there are a lot of different as, as Sabine mentioned. I mean, the Council of Europe has quality standards. The Irish government has set quality standards in Ireland and so on. So, I mean, it's up to every organisation to, of course, set their standards. If you look at the European Charter on Local Youth Work, you can look at the very many of these sections also, as could be used, as quality standards regarding work process, regarding competencies of youth workers and so on and so on. So, I mean, there are different authorities and organisations setting quality standards, I would say.

[00:15:22] **Katya** I think I just said, yeah Sabine...

[00:15:24] **Sabine** I would just say they come from practitioners in the field. So even though they might be the ones from the Council of Europe or Youth Salto. But after all, they were put together

with practitioners in the field, with youth workers, with youth trainers and so on. So, I always see it coming from the practitioners as such who agreed and develop those together. So, then it started in the institutions. But in the end, it always comes from the field. It always comes from the practitioners and the experience we've made in youth work over the past 20, 30, 40 years, you name it.

[00:15:57] **Katya** So this is important that it's not the institutions that set up from UP, but also that they're involved practitioners and the practice that is existing in their field. Thank you very much.

[00:16:09] **Dariusz** Are you also saying that, for example, if I if we have, for example, a small youth organisation that is running youth work for a small number of young people because we are located in, let's say, a small place, can we also set our own quality standards?

[00:16:28] **Jonas** Yes, of course. Yeah, sure. I mean, as Sabine says, I mean, this is one of the strengths of youth work that also I mean, look, look, look at the European Charter. I mean, it's been a huge process of developing it, which has reached over 70 organisations throughout Europe. I mean, NGOs, youth work departments, governments. So, this process of both creating indicators and setting standards is very, very often run in the sort of collaborative manner. And I mean, I think it's good if, when you are having this small organisation that you take sort of stock of the things that has already been done in terms of European Charter, of course, of all material from the Council of Europe, et cetera, because there's a lot of support and knowledge in these documents that could be used by any kind of organisation, I would say.

[00:17:24] **Dariusz** OK. Thank you. Thank you for this. It's... when we talk about quality and youth work or quality in youth work, like we talk about a lot of different processes, of course. And then we can also talk about quality in all those different processes, because we're not only talking about the quality in youth work practice, we may also talk about quality in youth work training, as Sabine was saying, for example. Right. Because this is also, I mean, this is also another aspect. I mean, we need good youth workers to run, let's say, good youth work and... But there is this always question about the purpose. Why do we need these things? Why do we need these standards? Do we need them at all?

[00:18:09] **Jonas** I would say that we definitely need them not to be used as some kind of prescription in a way, but I think when taking part in reading and studying these different standards. And also, I would say indicators and aims for youth work and discuss it, discussing them amongst youth workers. This creates awareness of what works and what is good youth work and perhaps also what is not. So, I think it's helpful to have all these material as a basis for discussions in any kind of organisations amongst youth workers and also actually together with the young people, which we are doing youth work.

[00:18:53] **Dariusz** So you're saying, for example, that if the exchange of practice or the exchange of let's say the way we do youth work between different amongst, let's say, youth work community and even beyond, let's say the national or international level can very much support this kind of development of quality in youth work.

[00:19:12] **Jonas** Yeah, I'm saying that just discussing these standards, just discussing what does this mean, why do we have them will create a deeper understanding of what is good youth work and how it could support young people in their personal and social development.

[00:19:28] **Dariusz** OK. Thank you. Thank you, Jonas. Sabine, what do you think? We need these standards? Why do we need them?

[00:19:36] **Sabine** Well, I also think they're very useful guidelines. And as Jonas just mentioned. Yeah. As a as a basis or even as a source for inspiration, I would say or also constant progress. So, basically to reflect what do we do, why we do, why do we do it? And how can we constantly improve our youth work? And they are fine, indeed, that all those guidelines, instruments, quality criteria, indicators, standards, you know, you name them, can be a very valid basis and indeed the basis for discussion and further improvement of youth work, of our practice. So that can be a very good basis for exchange of best practice, but also for questioning the process. And also, you know, have a solid basis. So, it's like when you have any youth activity, you could say, oh, well, let's just do, you know, a few fun activities. Let's do my favourite activities or what I feel or the team feels or, you know, the young people I work with feel today, but then. Yeah. I also very often like to bring it back to the experiential learning cycle of Kolb where you really want to go through a concrete experience. Reflect on it. Conclude learning from it. And then again, apply it in practice. So basically, just be aware there is a whole lot of backup and theory and... Yes, solid educational approaches behind and to constantly reflect on those and apply them to practice, question them and develop a new and start a new with the people you work with.

[00:21:14] **Dariusz** So what do you what you are what you are trying to say as well is that they can be quite useful in self-assessment, assessing our practice.

[00:21:23] **Sabine** Indeed. Indeed, they can be super useful in self-assessment, of course, or also when we say also as Jonas has mentioned before, we need it very much to evaluate or also when we try to justify what we do in youth work and in non-formal education. So, self-reflection or self-assessments, self-recognition would be essential there. But then, of course, those things are also there for formal recognition, political recognition, social recognition. So, to really show what we do and have a solid basis for it as well. But then indeed, self-assessment is very important, especially when it comes to all those competence models, etc., where I can really see, OK, where do I stand as a youth worker? What are my qualities and strengths and how can I still further develop?

[00:22:08] **Dariusz** Well, thank you. Thank you.

[00:22:12] **Katya** Thank you. Actually, I had the question, but it almost was answered already. It was about how we can, youth workers can know the quality standards or how they can learn to do the quality youth work. And then one of the answers that you already gave, Sabine, was about evaluating and self-assessing the activities that they run. Then, there are some documents, an official like European Charter that was mentioned here and about this our participants will also find more information in the module, in the module three that is running now. So, any other tips about where or how is the best way to learn the quality youth work, some other advices?

[00:23:05] **Dariusz** So, the words for the wise.

[00:23:07] **Katya** Yes.

[00:23:13] **Dariusz** If there is any.

[00:23:14] **Jonas** I would say, as Sabine says, there as a lot of material, it could be used as some kind of a mirror, so to speak, for it, for self-reflection, which is at the core of youth work, I would say, the

need to reflect on what you're doing and why and so on as Sabine says. And I mean, the Council of Europe is one big source. I would say, Europe Goes Local and their home page is a big source. There will be an online toolkit for Europe goes local that will be I hope will be very helpful for youth workers to develop. So, so there's a lot of material. Google is fantastic. I hope you find it.

[00:24:03] **Katya** Thank you. Sabine, something else to it?

[00:24:10] **Sabine** Well, we've already mentioned quite, yeah, exactly a few of the institutions' materials, as Jonas said there's a lot out there. But I think at the basis it still comes back to, it's a learning by doing process for every youth worker. So, you know, depending where you're at the moment, what the needs of the young people are, with whom you currently work with then, you constantly take it from there. And then it's just an ongoing process of personal development and social development. And I think. Yeah. It just comes down to learning by doing and let yourself inspire from good practices from other organisations, from different materials that are out there. But then, yeah, it's always in the doing in the end that you learn the most, when you apply what you've learnt in a mock training course or with a good training manual or with some quality criteria. In the end, it always comes down to the apply what you've learnt in your youth work context and the biggest development is always in the learning by doing, I think.

[00:25:19] **Katya** Thank you. So, it seems like non-stop process. It's not that one you set the standard and you relax but this is ongoing process that you should be where you should always learn, reflect, assess and look for what suits the best for young people and for their development.

[00:25:39] **Dariusz** Yes, I think we are. We are done for this, for this podcast and because we talk about quality and standards, because sometimes they look like a like a burden for youth workers and for the youth work practice. But they are not that scary. And we encourage you to look at some documents. You will find the links in our course to all the documents that were mentioned by Jonas and Sabine. Thank you, Jonas and thank you Sabine for taking part.

[00:26:07] **Jonas** Thank you.

[00:26:10] **Dariusz** Thank you Katya. We will meet again in another podcast.