

BUILDING
TOMORROW'S
EUROPE

CONFERENCE ON YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH POLICY

Bonn, 7-8 May 2013

IN THE EYE OF

EUROPE 4 YOUTH



LAURA

PIOTREK

BASIA

The Conference

Building Tomorrow's Europe offered presentations, debates and 28 workshops with input from committed practitioners, politicians, researchers and scholars on seven thematic areas drawn from European youth policy and youth work:

- **Active European Citizenship**
- **Equal Opportunities and Diversity**
- **Youth Policy in Europe**
- **Learning Mobility**
- **Non-formal and Informal Learning**
- **Young People's Participation in Politics and Society**
- **Professionalisation of Youth Work**

designed to explore the impacts of Youth in Action and its predecessor programmes against the backdrop of JUGEND für Europe's 25-year history.

In the conference participated experts and multipliers working in youth policy, scholars and researchers from across Europe, national and European policy makers.

Representation of Europe4Youh was also there:



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Opening plenary

Already during the first speeches appeared important words, that are worth to quote in many occasions:

“Europe is not only about economics, or finances. It is about living together and working together. About sharing identity and common future.”

Dr. Hermann Kues

“The mission of European Youth Policy – to fulfill young people’s needs and appreciate their work – is not to be underestimated.”

Chiara Gariazzo

All speakers were emphasizing the importance of youth work in holistic development of democratic societies, mature civil society, as well as education to be responsible, conscious, multi-talented and self-confident human being. The need of continuation of Youth in Action program is unquestionable.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit (member of European Parliament), described this need in a very picturesque way: only through youth projects and constant exchange of young people within Europe can be possible to build truly European civil society with European consciousness and sense of belonging: *“If 1 million of young people in age of 18-30 will go abroad it is highly probable that at least 10% of them will fall in love there. After some years, when everything goes well, some mixed-identity kids will appear and build true European generation.”* Europe have to be treated as a homeland. Therefore, according to him, we must continue to build the European consciousness in order to create the real European civil society.



He also pointed out, that European perspective is needed when it comes to taking decisions on national level. *“Governments care only about the benefits for their countries, avoiding serious commitments which would lead to failure in a next elections. And this is normal in national-states. But in European Integration process, European perspective is needed.”* He suggested, that in current *status quo*, the solution would be to rise more policies on supra-national level, what will prevent rolling-backs of many countries. He meant in the first place: taxes on European level, social policy, external relations and whole sphere of banking, finances, budget planning and implementing. He sees another step in engaging citizens into decision-making process and enhance direct-democratic legitimization of European policies. After all those mutations the meaning of European Union in globalized world will rise and EU (only as a whole) will be able to take part in this world competition. The comparison to United States of Europe was the final point of his speech.

When asked about his vision of Europe in 50 years, he emphasized growing multiculturalism, openness of societies, admitting the facts (e.g. that *“Muslims are more numerous in Europe than Hollanders – with all respect to Hollanders”*) and EU with centralized political system.

Dr. Howard Williamson (Professor of Youth Policy in UK) brought us back to the earth, as he talked about growing euro-skepticism, anti-immigrant moods and radicalization of young people, who are left behind without jobs, or even without the hope for a better tomorrow. He expressed clearly his skepticism toward any speculations about EU future, as focused on here and now he enumerated all dangers that young people face today. Overlapping sets of crises are changing perspectives for young people causing the transition down. Broken generation contract resulted in mistrust between youth and “the rest” and further exclusion and passiveness of youth. Challenges in labour market, in social sphere, slowing GDP, downward pressure on salaries, heavier demands on households, youth unemployment, changes in call demographics, even in cultural participation are hard to be passed without total change of system (he called it “moral capitalism”). Therefore the help provided by Europe youth policy has to be directed right – to the youth with lower opportunities, drug addicts, criminals, disadvantaged, hopeless people, who are even out of dreams.



There are evidence that this desperation of young people can result in unexpected outcomes: radicalism, xenophobia, new alliances amongst youth, massacres, revolts, contra-democratization. Declining economy causes declining democracy. And youth programs are shrinking in the times of crisis. *“Till now youth policy has been successful. But today we see the pressure to define what actually is youth policy and what are the outcomes of it.”* Few minutes later he suggested two function of youth policy: to create a transit zone to adulthood for young people and to give them space for participation. He expressed the need for convergence, stronger harmony and united strategy for European youth policy divided now into several institutions, programs and levels.

He concluded his speech with the statement, that future is not clear and there is possibility that young people will be left behind. Hard times means hard decisions and set of anxiety, uncertainty, exposition to accidents. But youth work needs to be continued, restoring and maintaining the hope, mentoring young people, broadening their horizons by exposing them to different experiences. But it has to be focused on problematic youth in a first place.

After those two speeches time for **workshops** came.

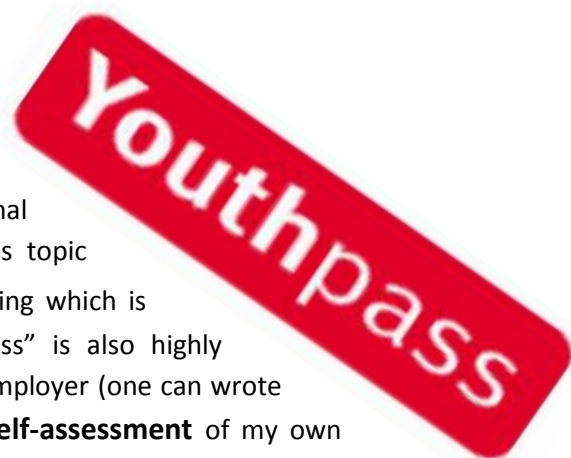
Choice was rich: 7 thematic blocks with set of 4 meetings. I (Basia) have chosen block titled **“Non-formal and Informal learning”**, Piotrek went to **“Professionalization of Youth Work”** and Laura to **“Youth Policy in Europe”**. After first round changes was possible, so we visited also block called **“Participation”**.

Workshops

AREA 1

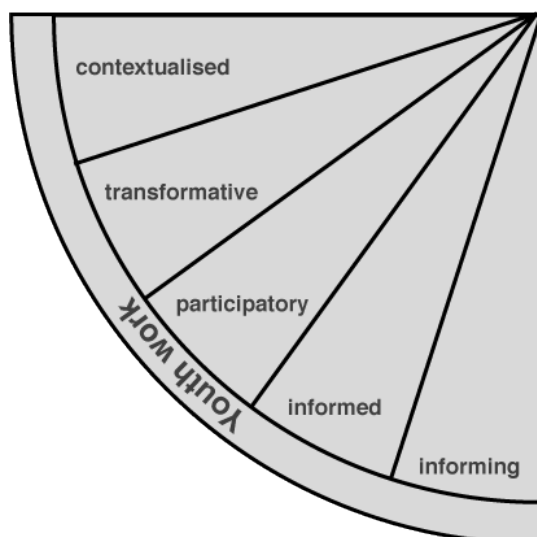
“Non-formal and Informal learning”

First meeting concerned “Youthpass”, as a tool for recognition of youth work realized under non-formal and informal methodology framework. The biggest controversy, which this topic revealed was the question of **standardization** of something which is spontaneous and indefinable from the definition. “Youthpass” is also highly personal and can be over-used in order to impress potential employer (one can write there false conclusions or simply show off). It is moreover **self-assessment** of my own experiences and registration of **feelings** and **attitudes**. Therefore, it cannot be the tool of recognition in terms of **usability in labour market**, as it is not objective. It is a tool for self-reflection and appreciation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Nevertheless, many argue that “Youthpass” should be recognizable among employers. Young people still can choose which approach they will adopt writing their “Youthpasses”. But those two approaches cannot be embraced in the same strategy of looking at youth work and Strasburg process itself...



Another opinion also appeared in the end, that higher **quality of youth work** will result in better “Youthpasses”, which will lead to **recognition** of this tool automatically. So all we need to do is to mentor participants how to reflect on themselves well in the frame of “Youthpass”, despite of the fact that this is not the perfect tool. Some changes in “Youthpass” were nevertheless announced. It will have different form for youth workers, youth leaders and trainers, and will further emphasize reflection, awareness and recognizable competences.

The complex research on usability of “Youthpass” and its application will come out in publication of European Commission Youth Unit publication “**Youthpass impact study**” in July 2013.



The second meeting concerned the question “**SHOULD YOUTH WORK BE FORMALIZED?**” and revealed the biggest discussion on **validation** and **valorization, recognition** and risk of **over-formalization** of youth work. Some opinions on those issues are as follows:



- Improving the quality of youth work will lead to its recognition. When EU strategy leads to visibility and promotion of youth work, its over-formalization is not on the table. But when youth work is to be adopted by formals, employers, it will lose its exceptionality and become another standard procedure of getting certain qualifications.
- EU keens on **evidence-based policy** and the **pressure for quality of youth work**. But non-formal learning quality system framework has to be based on **flexible indicators** and flexible tools of quality measures. It is important to provide evidence for decision-makers, but loosing non-formal character is unacceptable.
- Another speaker had a doubts of what needs to be recognized in youth work. Participation in democratic system and civil society is **valid by itself**. Youth work is the area where is no need for evidences, cause we'd lose humanity seeking for usability of every action. Only formal system can validate qualification gained in on-formal education which are already valorized. Youth work is not validated, and shouldn't be. Youth work shouldn't join the market of validation-capable institutions. This logic isn't for youth work.
- The last speaker opted for **European qualification framework** specific for youth work, which wouldn't be deadly to it.
- The question about the purpose of determining what is going to be achieved has come up. According to this participant, learning is a mutual process so outcomes should remain mystery until they are achieved. The answer to this was indication of the fact, that not every youngster share values of peace, solidarity or tolerance, so positive outcomes in this sphere have to be provided. But part of the outcomes are indeed unknown.
- Another important question was about the difference between **formalizing youth work** and **validating skills** that comes out of it. Famous "what are you talking about?" mentioning those terms 😊 Answers were different, but agreed that recognition of certain skills are to be done on lowest possible level and then rise up to European one.
- Interesting opinion has also appeared at the end, that in times of services (in contrary to industrial era) **labour market needs what is informal**, flexible and uncatchable. Informal is gold in heads of employers.



The third meeting in this area of interest concerned the **Strasbourg process** and its character. It started in year 2000 with the Symposium on NFL/E (non-formal learning and education), being continued in publishing documents like "Pathways paper" and "Pathways paper 2.0" in 2004 and 2011. Therefore it is a **political process leading to better recognition of non-formal learning and youth work**. Another meetings and symposia resulted in formulating "Plan of Action" and "Recommendations", in which appeared several hints for policy-makers on every level (European, national, regional, local), NGOses and youth workers, stakeholders, governments, social actors. For European level the biggest recommendation is to create common, compatible legal text on European youth policy and support for Strasbourg process and monitor its implementation. The biggest conclusion for us was: **read those documents cautiously** and look for potential actions that fit to Strasbourg process and European strategies, having in mind that **recognition is not validation!** But saying I'm a youth worker, it has to be recognized as a real occupation, not a hobby.

There are already several tools for recognition of youth work:

- **European Portfolio for Youth Leaders**
- **Youthpass**
- **Europass**
- **Other self-assessment and assessment tools.**

Austrian experience in area of work on recognition of non-formal and informal learning was presented. NGO in cooperation with municipality of Salzburg implemented something called “Zertifizierte Ausbildung Qualität” – ZAQ, which recognizes and names qualifications gained during youth work, **translating them into language of labour market**. It is valid on national level, being inscribed into national educational framework and accepted by Ministry of Education. Interesting, huh? 😊

The last meeting in this section concerned **“Skills acquired in youth work”**. To name them we need to have different vocabulary in disposal, including business one, or the one from national systems of qualification. Speakers convinced, that all skills gained during workshops are having place in Values and Mission Statements of all biggest companies all over the world:

Strategic thinking, **empathy, creativity**, solidarity, **self-confidence**,
self-awareness, **cultural awareness**, loyalty, commitment, **sense of initiative**,
optimism, respect for environment, **teamwork**, decision-making ability,
research skills, presentation-skills, independency, **open-mindedness**.

Although many of those skills won't be used in many professions (example of coffee shop) they will enrich personalities and improve young people as human beings.

AREA 2

“Professionalization of youth work”

During this workshop we went through the history of the development of youth policy in Europe. We had an opportunity to hear four speakers representing completely different attitudes towards understating on “youth work”. First of them were Jan Vanhee who was the coordinator for the Belgian EU-Presidency on Youth (in 2001 and 2010); and is also attaché on Youth at Permanent Representation of Belgium to the European Union (Flemish Representation). He presented us the Declaration of First European Youth Work Convention (from 10.07.2010). He was talking about the long term process of developing the convention (what took over 10 years!), as well as presenting the document and highlighting the most important, in his opinion chapters it.

What to remember is that this is the first political document on international level which contains the concrete definition of “youth work”:

“A broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people. Increasingly, such activities also include sports and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the area of ‘out-of-school’ education as well as specific leisure time activities, managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and is based on non-formal learning processes and on voluntary participation”

The convention is just another, but very big step towards political recognition of youth work and such efforts must be continued. Even The Convention itself states that:

“The Convention requests that, on the basis of this Declaration, the European Union, the Council of Europe and their member states, and the current and next trio Presidencies of the EU should build up an agenda, an action plan and the necessary resources for its realisation. The agenda should culminate in a 2nd European Youth Work Convention.”

A brief introduction to the convention can be seen in the movie:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tU2t0ctC2eo>

The 2nd speaker was Mrs Floor van Houdt (Deputy Head of Unit for Youth within the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture), who presented the contribution of European Commission in the field of youth work on European level. She emphasised the importance of rising the youth work up to the political level by evidence-based evaluation and measuring its impact on young people. In the same time she presented results of the Commission's research on the impact of non-formal education. Very often she used the term “sustainable growth” what was commented by the audience – “*what growth in Europe nowadays? Nothing! We cannot multiply an empty box!*” 😊

Conclusion of her speech could be that nowadays, in the time of crisis and high unemployment, the most important challenge of youth workers is to train youngsters in the context of employability and prepare them to the professional work.

As the last one Dr. Howard Williamson was speaking again. Due to the lack of time he did not have a chance to present all prepared materials, he moved directly to the point (skipping all the political affords, which anyway ended up with cuts in the social budget). In his point the role of youth work is to focus on the person. To develop human beings instead of working machines for job market. One more time he emphasized the importance of helping those who need help the most – youngster with fewer opportunities. At the end he told us a sad story about closing his youth center and a great feedback he is getting after years from people who he worked with.

AREA 3

„Participation of young people”

Participation workshop focused on the role of young people in building up the society. One of it modules titled “a new form of democracy” was a comparison of current social movements in Europe (such as demonstrations in Reykjavik or social movements in Spain) with the Arab Spring. Two speakers presented the key reasons of activeness of young people in those movements. Many common features could be seen. The group discussion focused on the ways of motivation of local societies to more active participation, but no constructive conclusions were found.

On the module concerning the eParticipation four projects were presented. All of them, were high developed internet platforms for citizen participation, which included expensive and complicated tools. While presenting results of the projects I've realized that even such well development platforms did not manage to gather wider attention – voting and discussion finished with the results

of 6-7 opinions. There were two important conclusions to presentation: possibilities of participation should be equal – it means that also the youngsters with educational problems or limited access to the internet should be taken into account while projecting citizens' participation platforms. The second important conclusion was, that eWorld is moving fast into smartphones and all the presented platforms (as well as other portals connected with the 3rd sector) are designed only for big screens. Looks like we need to put more efforts to follow the trends!;-)

Lectures and Final Speeches

During the first day of the conference, we watched two almost contradictory performances of **Dr. Angelica Schwall-Duren**, representative of NRW authority who was talking about political need of having more united Europe, more policies on supra-national level and treaty legitimization of social and youth policy and **dr. Vincenzo Chicchelli** (Italy/France) who presented result of his research on “cosmopolitan mind” talking with all his body and making all room laughing from every gesture he made. Reading about “Erasmus bubble, not Babel” he pointed out, that construction of European identity has a different logic than national identities, rules itself with different rights, has another source of affiliation. More than he said about it we can probably read in his book called “Cosmopolitan Mind” and the newest position called “Cosmopolitan Body”.

During the second day of the conference, after workshops was completed, the biggest fishes took over the rostrum.



Pascal Lejeune, Head of Youth Unit in European Commission, talked about prospects of the new program for youth, the successor of current Youth in Action. On anxiety of the audience about slow tempo of work and so many unknown qualities, he responded that in comparison to 2006, when Youth in Action was introducing, we are six months ahead. He explained with details all procedures that program has to go through before being finally introduced, but haven't reveal any reliable information about its shape, budget, or even name (apart from little joke about possible name “Les Jeunes”, read like Lejeune).



During panel discussion with representatives of every side involved in European youth policy one new proposal of the president of European Youth Forum appeared, that youth organizations need to have **access to administrative funds**, to work independently and without financial obstacles or sacrificing other spheres of life of youth workers. **Youth work is in fact a profession!**

Yes, we liked this postulate very much ☺

More about

- the conference itself: <http://www.buildingeurope.eu/>
- European youth policy: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm
- Strasbourg process recommendations: http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Youth_Work/Policy/STATEMENT_Symposium_participants_160312.pdf



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