In Brief: the Most Important from Four Analytical Papers

The European Discussion on Youth Work 2015-2020
German Youth Institute, 2020

Cornerstone Challenges for European Youth Work and Youth Work in Europe – Making the Connections and Bridging the Gaps
Howard Williamson, 2020

Ongoing Developments within the Youth Work Community of Practice
Nik Paddison and JUGEND für Europa, 2020

Learning from the Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Youth Work in Europe
Andreas Karsten, 2020

Compilation

Introduction

In preparation for the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (EYWC) and implementing the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA), several analytical papers have been commissioned. Complementary to other resources, their purpose has been to feed, among other things, into the programme of the 3rd EYWC, the final declaration of the Convention, and the national and European processes for implementing the Agenda, defining the content of both the 3rd EYWC and the EYWA.

Aim of this compilation is to provide readers with the most important from the four analytical papers in brief, describing both their complementary features and their differences in focus:

The European Discussion on Youth Work 2015-2020 by the German Youth Institute gives an overview of the debate on youth work as it has been held in documents published and/or funded by the European Union, Council of Europe and associated organisations. The documents analysed were published between 2015 and mid-2020 and all include 'youth work' in their titles. For the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, the analysis shows the need to think about which topics should be raised at the Convention and with whom youth work should co-operate. It also encourages considering how European and national stakeholders can put the European Youth Work Agenda into implementing youth work development at all levels – without youth work losing its identity and the value it has for young people and society.

Challenges for European Youth Work and Youth Work in Europe – Making the Connections and Bridging the Gaps by Howard Williamson seeks to capture and delineate the key challenges that continue to face youth work in the 21st century. In preparation for the development of a European Youth Work Agenda, the paper proposes that attention needs to be given to four key strands of youth work: conceptual challenges, challenges to do with the competence of youth workers, challenges around the credibility of youth work, and challenges of making appropriate connections. Such challenges need to inform the deliberations of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention and contribute to the shaping of an emergent European Youth Work Agenda.

Ongoing Developments within the Youth Work Community of Practice by Nik Paddison and JUGEND für Europa explores what has been taking place in youth work between 2015 and 2020. The paper seeks to highlight what it is that keeps youth work strong, and what keeps it as an evolving practice. It also serves as a guide to the possible content of the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA).

Learning from the Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Youth Work in Europe by Andreas Karsten seeks to illustrate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on youth work in Europe. It is based on the findings of the ongoing thematic research project of the RAY Network and explores what can be learnt from the effects of the pandemic and the responses of youth work to its effects. It also outlines needs and suggests options to support youth work during and after the pandemic.

The paper also shows that the coronavirus pandemic has exposed the systematic fragilities of youth work across Europe. It hopes for the European Youth Work Agenda to clear the path for some, if not all, of the necessary structural changes. The Agenda could do that through generating purposeful, dedicated and generous support as well as a substantive strengthening of the infrastructure and conditions for digitalisation within youth work, so that youth work can focus on creating spaces and building bridges with and for young people.

All complete papers are available at
https://www.eywc2020.eu/en/convention/resources/.

The European Discussion on Youth Work 2015-2020
German Youth Institute, 2020

The paper "The European Discussion on Youth Work 2015–2020" of the Centre for European Youth Policy at the German Youth Institute provides an overview of the discussions on youth work taking place in documents published and/or financed by the Council of Europe, the European Union and associated organisations. The analysed documents were published between 2015 and June 2020 and contain "youth work" in their titles.

General Overview

Following a lexical search of keywords, the general overview identifies trends in the analysed documents. These trends relate both to the conceptual basics of youth work and to the societal challenges that youth work is responding to. Whereas a keyword like "youth worker" is continuously mentioned in all documents over all years, other keywords follow trends, for example "refugee", which increases from 2018 onwards. Comparing political to professional documents show that political documents focus slightly more on conceptual keywords rather than on keywords associated with societal challenges, whereas professional documents focus slightly more on societal challenges.

In summary, the general overview provides a specific pattern of topics that have been discussed in the European institutional discourse on youth work during the past five years: the relationship between youth work and overriding societal challenges; youth work and its support to young people in their personal development; and the framework conditions for youth work that support the previous two discourses. Following this pattern, the paper is divided in three more content-related chapters: the importance of youth work for society; supporting personal development as an important strategy for youth work; and the conceptual basics of youth work.

The Importance of Youth Work

Why is youth work necessary? The documents assert that youth work contributes to its surroundings, empowering the individual, building bridges to the community and tackling societal challenges. They sketch a picture of challenges – for example financial and economic crises, the increase of migration – within European society that youth work can contribute to tackling. In doing so, youth work contributes to upholding democratic values and human rights, social cohesion, social diversity, freedom of expression and values, as well as dealing with the consequences of emerging social polarisation and social exclusion. With regard to young people themselves, the need for youth work is emphasised by its role in promoting inclusion, active citizenship and well-being of young people.

The strategy through which youth work contributes to tackling societal challenges is, according to the documents, its ability to empower young people and support their personal development.

Supporting Personal Development as an Important Strategy for Youth Work

One of the main responsibilities of youth work as far as young people are concerned is to confront the various life challenges and emerging threats they encounter. This is done on the individual level by contributing to the knowledge, skills and values of young people.

Besides this focus on encountering challenges and threats, youth work takes a more general approach by providing guidance for young people in the development of their own life projects. According to the analysed documents, on the one hand, youth work has the task to support young people's development in terms of social participation and inclusion (including the promotion of active citizenship and the creation of a positive identity); while on the other hand, it has the task to support individual personal development in terms of skills and personality, contextualised by socialisation processes.

According to the analysed documents, youth work addresses all young people, but at the same time specific groups of young people are considered as being in need of support. In recent years documents have focused on, for example, young refugees as a specific target group for youth work.

Conceptual Basics of Youth Work

The third perspective discussed in the analysed documents is what makes youth work unique in fulfilling its role. In other words, what makes youth work special? The discussions in the analysed documents can be clustered around four topics: The core of youth work; youth work proceedings; professionalisation and the promotion of quality youth work; and youth work qualifications.

Youth work is both a method and a movement, based on the core principles of voluntary participation, youth-centeredness, mutual respect between youth workers and young people, accessibility and openness, flexibility, and the promotion of a rights-based approach, diversity, and inclusion. Youth work is about creating spaces where young people can meet, where divides can be bridged and where social integration of young people is supported.

In order to do so, the recognition of youth work by other actors and sectors plays an important role. One discussion on *what* should be recognised focuses on the recognition of competencies acquired by young people in youth work activities and by youth workers as part of their education and training. Another discussion focuses on recognition of youth work as a professional field in contrast to other policy fields (e.g. social work, education). The discussion on *how* youth work can be recognised by other actors and sectors gained momentum through the debate on the politicisation of youth work, which has been launched in the past few years. A focus on the core principles of youth work helps youth work to gain visibility in contrast to other actors and sectors.

Discussions in the analysed documents on the core proceedings of youth work focus on innovative methods as well as cooperation between actors and sectors. Youth work

continuously has to ask the question of whether its concepts still fit the everyday life of young people, and thus has to review its working methods. Digital and smart youth work are the main methods discussed under the heading of innovative youth work. With regard to cooperation, the analysed documents stipulate that strengthening connections between practice, policy and research within the youth field could be enhanced by the development of a youth work policy. Second, the analysed documents stipulate a need for cross-sectoral cooperation. Not only can youth work provide other sectors with information about the views and needs of young people, but it can also act as a stakeholder for young people.

The discussion on professionalisation and the promotion of quality youth work has been part of youth work development since its early beginnings. In the analysed documents, it is discussed under the heading of the need for a quality assurance framework, the need for better organised education and training of youth workers as well as the need for ethical and employment standards for youth workers. A knowledge-based approach to youth work is one of the mechanisms called for to develop a reflective practice based on systematic evaluation and research.

Finally, the topic of youth worker education and training gained much attention during the last five years. The documents discuss the need for a (European) youth worker education and training system, which, as is argued, would contribute to the recognition of youth work.

Conclusions

The aim of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention is, after discussing the diversity and common ground of youth work in the previous editions, to focus on the further development and implementation of youth work at the European, national, regional and local level. The conclusions drawn from this analysis are the following:

- There exists a core understanding of European youth work. This understanding is however by and large detached from what is discussed in other contexts (for example, employment or health);
- Youth work's strength is its holistic approach: Young people are perceived as a whole and are not reduced to just one (problematic) aspect;
- Fundamental themes of social inclusion and participation play a major role in the European discourse on youth work;
- Some of the major issues that have been discussed in European discourse in general have been neglected in youth work discourse, as far as the analysed documents are concerned. Examples are gender equality, gender inclusion, mental health and well-being, and environmental issues.

For the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, the analysis presented in "The European Discussion on Youth Work 2015–2020" means that there is a need to think about which topics should be raised at the Convention, with whom youth work should cooperate and how European and national actors can transport the vision of a European Youth Work Agenda into actual implementation of youth work development on all levels – without losing the identity of youth work and the great values youth work offers young people and society.

Cornerstone Challenges for European Youth Work and Youth Work in Europe – Making the Connections and Bridging the Gaps
Howard Williamson, 2020

This paper seeks to capture and delineate the key challenges that continue to face youth work in the 21st century.

Youth work in its many forms has always had to adapt to variable and changing **contexts**; the risk of ever attempting a precise formulation of youth work as a practice is that external expectations of its role – from young people on one side and those who support it through funding and advocacy on the other – may rapidly change. Nevertheless, certain principles have guided the diversity of youth work practice over time, even if they themselves remain subject to challenge and debate. The first part of the paper therefore considers not only the contemporary context of youth work policy development in Europe, notably through the 1st and 2nd European Youth Work Conventions and the political outcomes they produced (the EU Resolution on Youth Work in 2010 and the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work in 2017) but also the many lessons that emerged from the History of Youth Work in Europe project that produced seven volumes of youth work knowledge and highlighted what might be called the 'tension triangles' within which youth work has to navigate with some skill. The history project identified twelve such triangles. The final, unexpected, context is clearly the Covid-19 pandemic that has been afflicting Europe throughout 2020, the outcome of which remains unpredictable but the impact of which – on youth work as much as on all other aspects of established life in Europe – has been dramatic and transformative in many different ways.

The second substantive section of the paper focuses on what are considered the nine persisting **challenges** facing youth work in Europe, and European youth work, today. First, despite the apparent consensus across the youth work community of practice that all youth work is simultaneously about providing young people with 'spaces' (for youth autonomy and self-determination) and 'bridges' (to support positive transitions to the next steps of their lives), that common ground remains disputed and contested. It needs to be strengthened further. Secondly there are at least five challenges that have always prevailed within the youth work debate: how to manage the diverse *pressures* and expectations placed upon youth work; where (in what kinds of *spaces*) youth work needs to operate; balancing the different *rationales* for the provision of youth work; establishing the balance in different *styles* of practice; and how to evaluate youth work – agreeing a basis on which to judge its *value*. Third, there are equally traditional disputes about the boundaries of youth work. Where does youth work start and stop in relation to *age* (very different forms of youth work operate across a broad age range of young people), *target groups* (what should youth work be 'targeted' on, if at all) and *issues* to be addressed (can, and should, youth work be engaging with all issues caused or experienced by young people)? Clearly, youth work does not cover everything that affects the lives of young people but, as that is the case, what are its parameters?

Fourth, there are important questions about the structural arrangements for the delivery of youth work, from the European level (and the concept of 'European youth work') to national and local provision. Fifth, there is the challenge of *building rapport* with other agencies, professionals and groups that work, in many different ways, with young people.

The sixth challenge relates to *education and training* for youth work, particularly as most youth work continues to be provided largely by volunteers, raising questions about *professionalism* if not professionalisation. Relatively little is known in detail about the diversity and delivery of youth work across Europe, even at the local level, which has inevitably invited questions, and criticisms, as to what exactly does youth work *do*? What kinds of outcomes and impact does youth work produce? This raises a seventh challenge concerned with the *quality assurance* dimensions of youth work.

Proponents of youth work often talk about it as if it is a pervasive practice imbued with shared understanding and relatively uniform provision throughout Europe. A small scratch below the surface reveals this to be a patent myth. There are, as an eighth point, at least three striking *missing links*. The *urban-rural* divide is a huge fault line for youth work. The transnational divide conveys starkly that there is not yet any kind of *level playing field* throughout Europe. And there are still huge debates about the distinctions and (lack of) connections between *European, national and local youth work*. Understanding, traversing and bringing closer together these three, and other, missing links remains a significant challenge for youth work.

Finally, there is the perennial cry and challenge to do with winning *recognition for youth work*. If youth work was everything that those within its community of practice proclaimed it to be, it would not have to struggle to secure its place within political advocacy and youth policy development. But rarely, if ever, has this yet been the case. Winning hearts and minds beyond those already converted to the value of youth work remains the ultimate 'political' challenge for youth work.

The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly affected all aspects of societies. The third section of this paper considers the impact of the Covid-19 **crisis** on young people, on youth workers and youth organisations, and on youth work practice. Many negative consequences have been well documented but innovation and responsiveness, particularly through digital practice, has provided youth work with an opportunity to claim its stake in the process of rebuilding and refocusing Europe in a post-Covid world.

The paper, in **conclusion**, and in preparation for the development of a European Youth Work Agenda, proposes that attention needs to be given to four key strands of youth work. The **conceptual** challenges are, at one level, self-evident, yet their resolution remains elusive; as soon as some definitional consensus is reached by some, others are eager to dismantle it. There are challenges to do with the **competence** of youth workers: what kinds of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and critical understanding are needed for the practice of effective youth work and how should these be engendered? Then there are the challenges around the **credibility** of youth work, in terms of its social and political recognition and the security of funding and occupational

pathways that may flow from that. And finally there are the challenges of making appropriate **connections**, both vertically within youth work (from the 'European' to the local) and horizontally between youth work and other sectors.

Such challenges need to inform the deliberations of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention and contribute to the shaping of an emergent European Youth Work Agenda.

Ongoing Developments within the Youth Work Community of Practice
Nik Paddison and JUGEND für Europa, 2020

The strength of youth work lies in its vivid practice and in the way it engages young people, builds relationships with them and supports their personal and social development. Its strength also lies with the community of practice: its committed youth work practitioners, volunteers, policymakers, activists, managers and researchers, to name just a few of the roles that make youth work what it is. Youth work is beneficial for young people as well as for society at large.

This paper explores the ongoing developments that have been taking place in youth work between 2015 and 2020. It seeks to highlight what it is that keeps youth work strong and what keeps it as an evolving practice of development. It also serves as a guide to the possible content of the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA).

It is important to note that it also considers the 2020 Covid-19 crisis and its possible impact on youth work. Even just after the emergence of this worldwide pandemic, it was already evident that the lives of young people as well as the practice of youth work was and would continue to be heavily affected by the restrictions on public life.

Contents of the Paper

The paper consists of five chapters. It begins with a more in-depth explanation of the reasoning and approach for this paper (Chapter 1), then looks at the concept of development by defining the context and exploring it using a theoretical model (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 outlines what have been identified as significant "ongoing developments" in youth work at European level since the 2nd European Youth Work Convention in 2015, presented here in the form of "cluster topics". Having highlighted what has been achieved through these numerous cluster topics, the paper explores a number of identified challenges and success factors that affect ongoing developments (Chapter 4). The paper concludes by exploring the links between the cluster topics and the aforementioned challenges and success factors, highlighting the insights gained that may provide input for the prospective European Youth Work Agenda (Chapter 5).

The writing of this paper was supported by the European Steering Group (ESG), the advisory board of Germany's Federal Youth Ministry for the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, which consists of experts from the youth work community of practice. The members of the ESG have supported the writing process by exploring and identifying developments that have or will have a major impact on youth work practice across Europe.

Development

There are many aspects and perspectives to development in the youth work context. Several are explored here in order to provide an all-encompassing understanding of what it is the paper wants to focus on when identifying the nature of "development". It

is important to understand the work that is being done at all levels within the youth work sector: face-to-face work with young people within the youth work spaces provided, the dialogue in those spaces, information-sharing between every aspect of youth work, analyses of what is happening in society and among young people, the strategies being developed to respond to existing and/or future issues, cooperation between the many sub-sectors of youth work, political affirmation of the work being done through the adoption of policies and papers, the influence of face-to-face youth work and the response and guidance at European level.

Abstracts of Cluster Topics

Based on the papers of Howard Williamson *Cornerstone Challenges for European Youth Work and Youth Work in Europe – Making the Connections and Bridging the Gaps* and the German Youth Institute *The European Discussion on Youth Work 2015-2020* as well as on ongoing practice and research activities, JUGEND für Europa identified a number of cluster topics to be explored in this paper. They were selected because they highlight the specific developments that have been taking place in youth work between 2015 and the present. It is important to note that the list is neither exclusive nor complete. The cluster topics are Youth Work as a Working Field; Knowledge Base, Research and a Better Understanding of Youth Work; Youth Work at the Local Level and Youth Work in Remote Areas; Recognition and Validation of Learning in Youth Work; Quality Development; Education and Training of Youth Workers and Youth Work Trainers; Volunteer Youth Workers; Participation; Citizenship; Inclusion and Diversity; Transition from Education to Employment; Migration and Refugees; Extremism and Violent Radicalisation; Innovation; Digitalisation; Environmental Sustainability; Youth Information; the Place of Youth Work within Youth Policy; and Funding Programmes and Mobility.

Challenges to and Success Factors for Development

There are numerous challenges to development in youth work. Some are clear and easy to identify, sometimes easy to tackle; however, many are less obvious and not easy to tackle. The following challenges have been identified in a series of meetings and workshops: Delayed Responses; Focus on Current Issues; Shrinking Spaces; Resources; Intra-Sectoral and Cross-Sectoral Communication; the Community of Practice; Cross-Sectoral Connections; and Legal Provisions.

In the same series of meetings and workshops, the following have been identified as key success factors for development: Intra Sectoral Dialogue; The Whole Community of Practice; Strategy; Political Level; Transfer of Knowledge and Sharing of Information; Understanding the Diversity of Practice; European Dimension; Analysis and Building of Knowledge; Monitoring.

Outlook

The youth work sector's slowness to respond to digitalisation, its reticence to respond to young people calling for climate change and the speed with which it has adapted to the pandemic show its many different faces, reveal some of its fragility, and highlight a number of its strengths. In all scenarios, there are good and poor practices to be learnt from.

Connection to the EYWA

The EYWA is a potential strategic framework within which to support youth work to react to emerging challenges and to adopt innovative practices. The ongoing developments connect to the EYWA through supporting integrated policy development, expanding youth work provision, strengthening common ground, supporting quality youth work, and enhancing the promotion and recognition of youth work. Thanks to the analysis this paper provides, it is easier to recognise and understand ongoing and upcoming developments, structural challenges, and success factors. On the one hand, the EYWA is intended to serve as a framework for the general development of youth work in Europe by supporting and developing the success factors. On the other, it can act as a catalyst for the development of the specific topics of youth work practice across Europe.

The EYWA and the EYWC are ideal opportunities to focus on the following two areas:
- Strengthening the framework conditions for youth work and thus improving the external factors;
- Raising awareness of and strengthening the factors that can boost developments in specific areas: an enhanced understanding of the community of practice as a whole, more shared strategic approaches and political support, more intra-sectoral dialogue, better knowledge transfer and information sharing, a better understanding of the diversity of practice, more analysis and monitoring, and the added value of a strengthened European dimension.

This is a great window of opportunity, which should be made use of by the community of practice in a joined spirit.

Learning from the Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Youth Work in Europe
Andreas Karsten, 2020

The world is going through unprecedented times: the coronavirus pandemic has taken people, governments, and societies initially by surprise – and youth work was no exception. The resource paper on this topic illustrates the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on youth work in Europe, explores what can be learnt from the effects of the pandemic and the responses of youth work to its effects, and outlines needs and suggest options to support youth work during and after the pandemic.

The research of the RAY Network shows, very much in alignment with other research being conducted across Europe, that youth work has been shaken to its core by the coronavirus pandemic: the very tangible effects on staff and volunteers as well as funding and structures severely limit youth work practice during these turbulent times.

The profound effects of the pandemic have touched every aspect of youth work: activity and event formats, methods and tools, places and spaces, times and timings – and, to a lesser extent, values and principles. Across Europe, many youth work activities and projects were delayed and/or interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. More than half of all youth work activities remain in limbo – and the risk assessment for full activity and project cancellations remains high.

Work time of paid staff members has frequently decreased and less commonly also their number. Volunteering time, and the total number of active volunteers, have shrunk more considerably, a development that is particularly worrying. The coronavirus pandemic has also triggered stark effects on the budgets of many youth work organisations in a very short amount of time. At the same time, the eligibility of youth work organisations to pandemic relief packages remains very low across Europe.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic is more severe for international youth work, where structural funding is much less common and project-based funding prevails. International youth work has been delayed or interrupted significantly more often, budget reductions have been significantly more prevalent, and reductions of work time and numbers of staff as well as engagement time and numbers of volunteers have so far been significantly higher in international youth work.

The impact outlined in the resource paper is nothing other than a shockwave for youth work, laying bare the fragility of youth work in general, and the amplified frailty of international youth work in particular. All this should be reason for stark concern, especially when considered together with the sustained risk of further project and

funding cancellations, as lockdowns are being renewed and/or intensified across Europe.

In addition, youth work is struggling with having to take as many of its activities, programmes and projects online as fast as it can. Yet, at times seemingly against all odds, youth work manages to help young people through this pandemic – and young people help youth work through this pandemic, too. From battling misinformation to addressing mental health, from building online spaces to organising device-sharing, there are countless examples from youth work within and beyond Europe that demonstrate how crisis-savvy and resilient youth work can be, even when budgets need to be cut, staff time has to be reduced, and volunteers must slow down.

The RAY data demonstrates, however, that despite all that resilience youth work is trying to find its bearings in largely uncharted waters at maximum speed. If youth work's function is to build bridges that support positive transitions, what does youth work do when these transitions grind to a screeching halt amidst a global pandemic? If youth work's role is to build bridges that support the integration in particular of young people at risk of social exclusion, what does youth work do when exactly these young people fall out of reach?

The resource paper illustrates that the coronavirus pandemic has not only led to a substantive crisis of youth work in its own right, but that it has also exposed the systemic fragilities of youth work across Europe. With very few exceptions, youth work will not be able to recover from this dual crisis without purposeful, dedicated and generous support, and a substantive strengthening of the infrastructure and conditions for digitalisation within youth work.

It is to be hoped that the European Youth Work Agenda clears the path for some, if not all, of the necessary structural changes, so that youth work can focus on what it does best: create spaces and build bridges with and for young people – with confidence in their political backing, and without fear of the survival of their organisation.