



Recognising Recognition

Value and recognition of youth work
4-7 December 2023
Zagreb, Croatia

THE DIMENSIONS OF RECOGNITION

SELF-RECOGNITION

Self-recognition starts with us! It is about recognising who we are, what we do, and knowing the value our work has. It is also about recognising who else is part of the community of practice and recognising what it is they do. Self-recognition includes being able to gather evidence of what it is we do. Self-recognition means being able to see the developments that are needed to improve the quality of youth work.

SOCIAL RECOGNITION

Social recognition is when others gain a better understanding of what we are doing. It is about the social players acknowledging and valuing the positive impact of youth work and non-formal learning/education on young people and therefore on their communities as a whole. In practice it means that both the community (the public) and the other sectors (NGOs, private, municipal, media, institutions, education, etc.) not only know what youth work is, but have a positive attitude towards it. In essence it is about gaining visibility for young people, youth work, and the organisations providing this work.

POLITICAL RECOGNITION

Political recognition is when young people and/or youth work are included in policies about young people and/or are the focus of policies. This can be at local, regional, national, and international levels. It is about youth work getting onto the political agenda, entering legislation, and becoming a part of political strategies - and supporting the involvement of young people and youth work in those strategies. It is the political level acknowledging and recognising youth work and the value of youth work.

FORMAL RECOGNITION

Formal recognition has two areas of focus. It refers to the 'validation' of learning outcomes and the 'certification' of learning processes in youth work through recognised and accepted certification. It also refers to the training and education of youth workers, either within the context of youth work itself or through the formal education system. This



includes the recognition of competencies acquired when entering formal education; official accreditation of non-formal education/learning programmes by formal accreditation bodies; licensing of youth workers and youth work trainers; officially recognised occupation of “youth worker” by the state, etc.

Visible Value

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/about-recognition>

BACKGROUND

The conference “Value and Recognition of Youth Work” took place from 4 to 7 December 2023 in Zagreb, Croatia. The conference was part of the strategic partnership of 16 National Agencies (NA) for the implementation of the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps, and four SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres (SALTO RC) which are keen to implement and strengthen the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) through the Bonn Process.

The conference aimed at empowering those stakeholders who are already engaged in the professional debate on recognition. It was a space where they could look for additional cross-border exchange and inspiration, resources, and practical tools as well as strategic alliances within and beyond the youth work community of practice. It also aimed at contributing to the recognition of youth work and providing a platform for further reflection on youth work recognition, which is one of the eight thematic priority areas of the EYWA and Bonn Process.

“The recognition of youth work comes under four dimensions, self, social, political, and formal recognition. This conference highlighted that systematically working on all four dimensions is extremely valuable and necessary. We need to be working on the different kinds of support that are needed and to work on how the recognition of youth work can be supported. To these questions we need answers and approaches.”

Antonia Gladović, Director of the Croatian NA for Mobility and EU programmes

“While it is a role of the bigger institutions, if we really want recognition, it must “start with us”. Once the process of self-recognition gets established, then we will see more recognition at the social dimension, as social recognition develops then the political recognition can come more into play because of society demanding more and therefore more policies will come. With more policies the recognition process automatically influences the formal aspect, and we will see more validation and certification of youth workers.”

Laszlo Milutinovits from the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership

This booklet is N° 1 in a series of five and explores the concept of recognition.

UNDERSTANDING RECOGNITION

Direction for this comes from the Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention:

“Investment in more strategic and co-ordinated efforts and resources is needed to make youth work better understood, visible, and credible as a distinct work arena.”

Recommendations for achieving this include:

- Organising events, such as campaigns or yearly thematic days.
- Developing a communications plan that connects all levels.
- Showcasing the impact of youth work on individuals, on communities, and on societies.
- Developing measures to validate learning in youth work in formal education.
- Enhancing collaboration between formal and non-formal sectors based on a common purpose.
- Conducting research on existing professional standards for youth workers education and training.
- Establishing a European network of youth workers associations.
- Establishing a think tank on the education and training of youth workers.
- Strengthening tools to support recognition of learning processes (e. g. open badges, Youthpass).
- Further developing measures to validate learning in youth work in formal education contexts (e. g. joint curriculum and standard courses at national and European levels).
- Organising peer learning activities with specific education and training related purposes.

No dimension of recognition stands alone, but it is also easy to fall into the trap of trying to do all four dimensions at the same time. We need to take it slowly, focus on small things, and take small steps. We still need to develop a good synergy between EU and national governments concerning youth work, this will be a good support for recognition at all levels.

SELF-RECOGNITION

What is happening?

People have acted as role models in supporting young people to access institutions or organisations, thereby showing what youth work does. Others have been advocating for youth work and the sector, creating understanding amongst those outside. Though it is

still acknowledged by many that explaining youth work to those who don't know is frustratingly difficult.

What do we need to do?

We need a united understanding among youth workers that they are youth workers, and that youth work is a profession. There is a feeling of imposter syndrome amongst some, "who am I to get this recognition, do I deserve it", we need to believe in the value of our profession. Youth work differs widely from country to country and even within one country there can be multiple forms of it. We don't need a unified approach, but we do need to establish a unified understanding of the principles and values of youth work – "anything can be youth work but not everything is".

We need more cooperation with other stakeholders who work with young people, sharing with them what we bring to the table and seeing what they bring to the table. We need to work on mainstreaming youth work terminologies among the rest of civil society and other NGOs.

The introduction of a variety of self-evaluation and self-assessment tools will support youth workers in identifying their competences, where they excel and where they need to develop and therefore supporting self-recognition.

SOCIAL RECOGNITION

What is happening?

There has been an increase in institutional knowledge and awareness of youth work in many countries. Several countries now have a national association of youth workers, often these bodies work with different institutions outside of the youth sector. Many youth work bodies are creating targeted campaigns promoting youth work to schools, parents, other sectors, etc. In other areas youth workers are stepping out from just working with the young people, and with their young people are becoming involved in community building and setting themselves up as spokespersons for youth.

What do we need to do?

Social recognition work needs to be a priority of all youth workers. We need to involve more young people in talking about their experiences and what they get from youth work to raise public awareness about youth work.

Where youth work is not understood or is not being taken seriously, we need to be raising the visibility of its positive impact. We need an independent institution to evaluate youth work's learning outcomes for young people. We need more research on the impact and effects of youth work.

In addition, we need to be connecting with families, schools, municipalities, other NGOs, and the wider community, and sharing the positive messages with them. We need to be using the language of the people we are communicating with. We need the means to empower youth workers to be able to advocate for their work.

We need European and national campaigns on the value of youth work, using social media, mainstream media, advertisements, flyers, promotion stands at events or busy public locations and so on... A common strategy and a common message on the values and impact of youth work would be a strong step for social recognition.

POLITICAL RECOGNITION

What is happening?

In some countries they are gathering the political stakeholders and lobbying them with a common message. In other countries there are youth worker professional standards. Social protection and better status for youth workers has been established elsewhere. There is a lot of interest in youth work at the level of European policies.

What do we need to do?

For many politicians, youth work equals social work which equals school and education. We need to build a greater understanding of what youth work is at the political level. The youth sector needs to be in constant dialogue with the decision makers so they will start to understand the effects and importance of youth work. We need to be aiming at having youth workers involved in youth policies, youth work policies and decisions that affect young people.

Youth workers need to be empowered to lobby for youth work at the political level. We need to ensure decision-makers are invited to youth work events, conferences, and major activities – especially those at the European level. We need to be using the media and social media to showcase youth work and its impact for creating pressure for political action. We need to be pushing for the development of policies, guidelines, and frameworks at the national level to ensure the professionalism of youth work.

We need financial commitment at national and municipal level for a youth work budget, sustainable financial resourcing which goes beyond project funding. We need to be developing networking and cooperation between European partners to share youth work policy frameworks.

FORMAL RECOGNITION

What is happening?

Some countries have a national qualification certificate for youth workers, in others there is a vocational certification and recognition of youth work at the formal level. At the European level, there are the ETS trainers and youth workers competence models.

What do we need to do?

There is a need for a common standard educational framework for youth worker education at the European level. This would make youth work more recognisable and reinforce it at the national level.

We need to be working with universities to develop programmes for youth worker education. We also need to ensure that they understand the unique nature of youth work and how to teach it. We need to be pushing for formal education models that are open to the dynamic of the youth sector.

Countries with existing formal education of youth workers need to be sharing and pooling their curricula and approaches to the education process. This would support the further development of youth worker education in countries that already have it and at the same time be an inspiration and push to those countries where there is no formal recognition or education of youth workers.

Educational pathways need to include formal, vocational, non-formal, and experience. We need to establish working groups which will cooperate with their respective governments for developing professional standards where they do not exist or evaluating them where they do exist. The youth work sector needs to be lobbying the formal education sector on the content and approach of the education of youth workers.

ENGAGING WITH RECOGNITION

IT STARTS WITH US

All the dimensions of recognition are interconnected, you can't have one without the others. As was mentioned several times and is a key element to recognition, "it starts with us".

There are no magic wands that make recognition happen and there are no specific tools that make recognition happen. It is youth work practice that makes recognition happen and the promotion of that practice. We need to be showing the wider community what we do, how we do it, and the results that come from it. We need to use events and projects, such as the Youth Capital or the European Year of Youth. These provide great platforms for the promotion and recognition of youth work.

We know what youth work does, so we need to be in the community pushing what we do and showing what we do. The example of Youthpass, there are 1.6 million Youthpass, "the more there are, the broader the reach". (Kristiina Pernits)

CROSS-SECTORAL APPROACH

We need a strong cross-sectoral approach to achieve recognition. There are three approaches to being cross-sectoral:

Formalised cross-sectoral approach:

- Youth work in or with schools, youth workers in prisons, youth workers working alongside social workers.

Non-formalised cross-sectoral approach:

- Youth work is having such an impact locally that other sectors are reaching out to gain support for the young people they are working with.

Natural cross-sectoral approach:

- Youth work in local festivals and celebrations, youth work at job fairs.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In the last 20 years we have seen a succession of crises, economic crisis, employment crisis, COVID, etc. All of these are important for youth work to be involved but are only connected to youth work because they are about young people.

The current crises of wars and attacks on democracy by many governments make this crisis topic the most relevant to youth work - it directly relates to the values and principles of youth work; it hits at the root of youth work. Youth work needs to recognise its political role and be proactive towards civic engagement and democracy.

The more civic engagement youth work connects with, the greater the visibility of youth work and therefore the greater the recognition it will receive.