ABC of YOUTHWORK

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KEY CHALLENGES OF YOUTH WORK IN THE CHANGING WORLD

Contents

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socialna makademija

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Preface

This document was created within the project ABC of youth work, which is led by Socialna akademija (Slovenia) and co-created by Uniwersytet Jagiellonski (Poland), Starkmacher (Germany) and Media, Educazione, Comunità (Italy). It is a strategic partnership with an aim to raise the quality of youth work in European Union and inclusion of young people with less opportunities.

Introduction

Most young people in Europe nowadays live in the world of opportunities, which was not available for previous generations. Technological advancement and European integration should enable youth with the life paths that previous generations couldn't even dream of. Success is at their fingertips, they only need to prepare to grab it.

At the same time the future for young people has never been more uncertain. Risk factors are increasing and some changes, like after migrant flows, fluctuations in the financial markets or extreme weather conditions occur more suddenly in recent years than most people expected at the turn of the millennium. There are so many insecurities that even the near future is very difficult to predict. For young people having a dream is hard and making their dreams become realities even harder.

In the process of active participation in society young people are met with diverse institutions– they are met with demands but also actively change those institutions. In education system, educational work with youth, social work and youth work are examples of systems which collaborate to support young people in their growing up and finding their place in the communities and societies. All this systems help with their autonomy, social network, social cohesion, social engagement, self-esteem, self-confidence and professional competences. That's why two of the crucial missions of these activities are preparing and questioning them for the future and helping them adapt their plans to new realities. The more the predictions for the future are changing, the more should this systems modify their activities. And the more the future is uncertain, the more questions about fundamental assumptions are needed from teachers, educators, social workers and youth workers.

Youth work – one of the most adaptable sectors

Youth work has very different forms in different European environments. It has different contexts, political support, aims, goals and traditions. However youth work is one of the most dynamic sectors especially compared to educational system, family policies or labour legislation. Its power of adaptation probably comes from the fact, that youth are actively involved in it. Young people are the actors in its system and its users. Mostly they can feel what they need.

The youth work sector has, as so many times before in the European history, especially in the times of societal changes, acted as a corrector of those systems, which have failed to quickly respond to change. Youth work was strong during mass urbanization and industrialization, in the time between two world wars and in building Europe after the Second World War.

How should youth work look like, so it can address the challenges of the second decade of the 21th century? The purpose of this paper is to identify challenges of our time and subsequently also challenges facing the youth work sector.

Analysis of changes in the environment

The analysis of the current challenges facing young people and youth work was made with the method P.E.S.T., that analyses environment from four perspectives: political, economic, social and technological. The four representatives of four organisations from Slovenia, Poland, Germany and Italy, during the project seminar focused in discussion on those aspects that are most felt by young people and are especially sensitive to youth work.

In each perspective we chose 3 of the most important major trends, that best represent the reality among young people in our countries. Then we tackled the issue by presenting the challenges we are facing especially from the perspective of a young person and from the perspective of a youth worker. We focused on the question, what should be included in youth work, so it would provide a proper answer to the challenges faced and lived through by today's young people.

Political Environment

Major trend 1: Lack of dialogue about political issues in the society	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- non-conventional forms of participation (like new social movements) seem more attractive than conventional ones (voting, membership in the political parties,…), - lower influence of young people through established systems, - lack of education and training of young people to form qualitative arguments.	- focus on acquiring skills for dialogue and discussion through creating opportunities and programs, - present opportunities for socialization – coming out of cocoon, - empower young people for participation.
Major trend 2: Rise of nationalism and extremism	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- young people usually like strong, not foggy statements, - little experience and lack of information limits young people's capacity for critical thinking.	- contribute to intercultural dialogue, - develop critical thinking of young people, - encourage young people to imagine standing in someone's shoes
Major trend 3: Great gap between citizens and decision makers contributes to the lack of trust towards decision makers	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- young people don't feel a need to participate, - young people are withdrawing into smaller social circles (family, friends…).	- develop sense of belonging to communities, - create a bridge between young people and institutions, as well as decision makers.

Economic Environment

Major trend 1: Insecure, flexible and precarious labor market	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- transition to adulthood is getting more and more difficult, - pathways to labor market are longer, including the experience of precariousness - ideas are over-glorified, hard work under-estimated (for instance when media promotes successful start-ups established by young people), - no systemic representatives of young people (not represented well in trade unions, for example).	- form new communities (co-working, connecting freelancers, incubators …) to support them, - provide a chance to young people to speak about issues, - creating partnerships with businessmen, mentorship, etc., - provide young people with skills to succeed while facing "new problems".
Major trend 2: Insecurity caused by financial sector, fiscal policies and global business	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- it is very difficult for young people to have their own dreams these days, - young people see some adults not working, but still receiving social transfers.	- encourage young individuals to dare dreaming about their desired future despite the reality they live in, - show that hard work is rewarding and beneficial for long term satisfaction in life.
Major trend 3: Growing gap between poor and rich – growing social inequalities	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- young people feel injustice, - we live in the culture of debts - common feeling that there are no opportunities in life – atmosphere of despair.	- contribute to financial literacy, - educate for broader sense of solidarity, common good, work in civil society, advocacy.

Social Environment

Major trend 1: Migrations and refugees impact on the communities	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- ever more socially and culturally mixed societies (schools etc.), - obtaining new knowledge about the world, - risk of exclusion, prejudices, stereotyping, "ghettos", closed groups, racists messages, - appeal of extremism/realism (risk of manipulation).	- promote diversity, dialogue, critical thinking and empathy, - trying to create projects including (new) diverse target groups promoting inclusion through S.M.A.R.T methodology.

Major trend 2: Overprotection and infantilization of young people (lots of guided time)	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- youth have a right to be bored, - stress and burden lies on the adults.	- promote non-supervised (or less supervised) experiences (autonomy, self-initiative, experiences that take young people out of their comfort zones), - give more responsibility to young people and shape leadership of youngsters.
Major trend 3: Growing individualism and consumerism	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- lack of solidarity and little feeling of being a part of the community, participation, - young people today need more time to concentrate on themselves, on their search for identity - conformism and consumerism, - not caring / or not taking a stand about real life issues.	- promote active engagement within the community to show, that being an active part of a community is beneficial collectively and individually, - promote common decision-making in communities, - promote added value of voluntarism.

Technological Environment

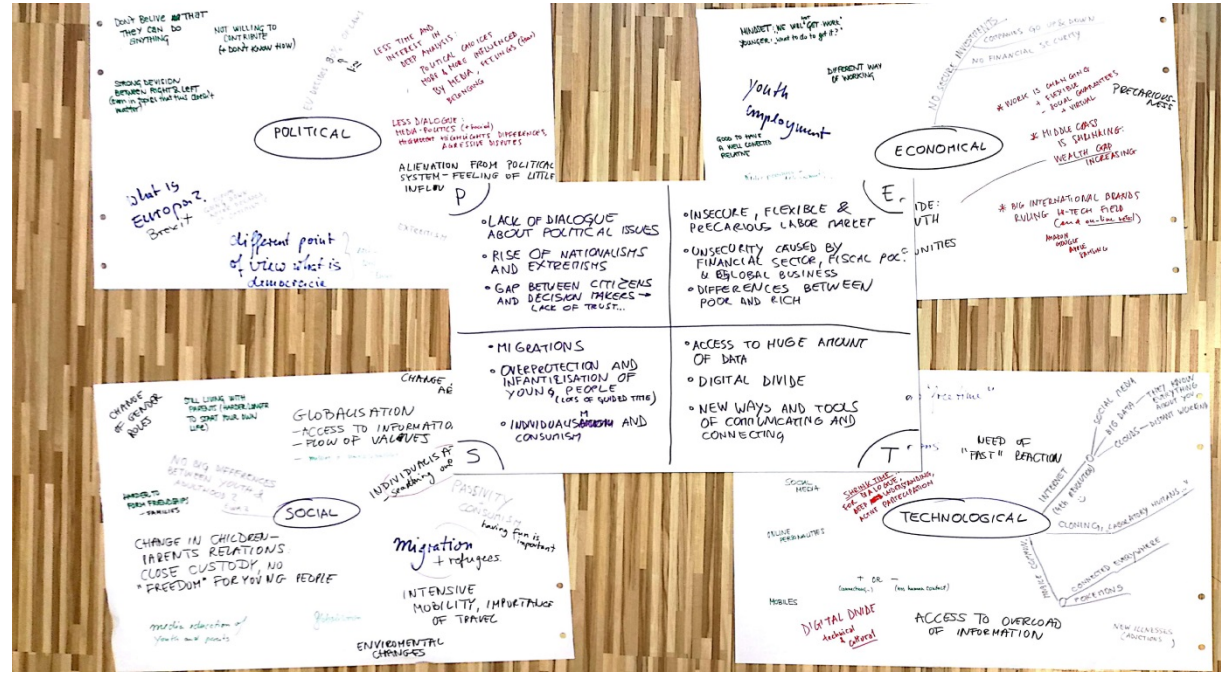| Major trend 1: Access to huge amount of data online	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- information are available from multiple sources and are overwhelming to everybody, - low competences in managing data/information by young people: lack of critical approach, lack of general knowledge, devaluing hard facts, lack of filtering competence, - potential access to more defined information and getting first-hand information (beyond mainstream media), - possibility to verify knowledge with adults.	- help young people with concentration so they do not get easily distracted, - focus on learning competences, linked to using information/filtering/critical thinking, - include methodologies to increase the knowledge of hard facts that everybody should know.
Major trend 2: Digital divide	
Challenges	*Youth work should …*
- the gaps between generations and people with different skills and equipment are getting bigger, - brings new "dangers", which can lead to losing time (huge amounts) online,	- reconsider the use of technology together with young people (young people teaching others e.g. youth workers), - talk with young people about the issue

addictions… - deepening the gap between youth workers and young people.	and educate them about pluses and minuses of technologies and modern styles of living, - strengthen other types of communication.

Major trend 3: New ways and tools of communication and connecting virtually

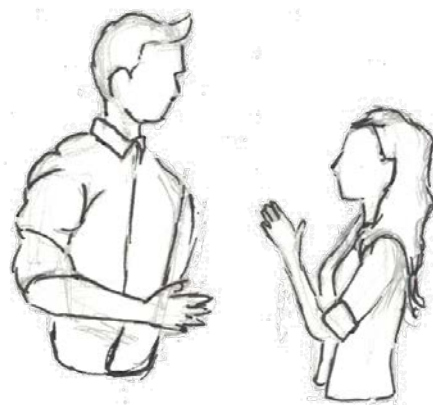| *Challenges*	*Youth work should …*
- enables information to spread quickly and creates fast contact possibilities, - international exchanges (couch surfing,…) and travel, - offer a way to always keep in contact, - losing track (feeling out of track), - increasing consumerism, - shallower communication and relations, - we are used to sense action all the time, - shortening of our attention/concentration span, - young people are absent minded.	- promote positive creative use of communication and connecting tools, - start complementing traditional ways of communication with new methods/tools online, - find new ways of promoting and attracting young people.

Conclusion

PEST analysis showed us, that big changes occur in all four discussed areas of young people's environment. These cannot be by-passed by youth or by youth workers. They bring the demand to changes in youth work, at least to include new target groups (such as migrants) and new topics (such as ICT skills, financial literacy, etc.).

However, only changes in target groups and topics should not be the end of transformation of youth work and its adaptation to new circumstances. Youth work is about creative socializing of young people. Above mentioned trends do not only influence who is a young person today and what he/she is speaking about. Many of mentioned trends influence how young people socialize with each other, inform themselves, and perceive their autonomous space and the way grow up.

To conclude: changes in the youth work should not mainly focus on new target groups or new content of the youth work curricula. Changes should focus primarily on the methodology of youth work. New ways of canalizing attention of young people should be discovered. New actions of helping them find common interests, new approaches of overcoming individualism, new forms of accepting joint decisions, new styles of solving conflicts, new ways of promoting creativity in groups and practicing dialogue.

These efforts probably take more time than just changing the content of youth work. They also demand a shift in main questions of a youth worker. We, the youth workers, should be less concentrated on offering activities to young people and more focused on observing and facilitating their socializing, dialogue, searching for common interests, their motivation, their empathy for others and their sense for community building.

Participating organisations:

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