

FACTS.

2C/2018

express



Finnish participants have got significant benefits from strategic partnerships of the Erasmus+ Programme

Young people's world is changing – what is the response of youth work?



BACKGROUND

Young people live in an increasingly international world. Regardless of where in Europe they are, they face similar issues, for example, social problems, such as regional inequality, social exclusion, racism and big changes in the labour market.

Conditions for youth work, however, are very different in different European countries: there are big differences, for example, between financial resources available and level of professionalism.

In northern Europe, youth work is closely linked to local public services, supported by a multiprofessional network of non-governmental youth work organisations and operators from other

sectors. Youth workers are trained in upper secondary and higher education; national and regional projects receive public funding to study and develop the sector. In contrast, in southern Europe, youth work is often run by third sector organisations and volunteers, and they may rely on charity for funding.

By developing youth work in international cooperation, people try to respond to the big changes in society and current trends. The European Union's Erasmus+ Programme (2014–2020) also supports this development through strategic partnership projects. Strategic partnerships in the youth sector have developed youth work and sought answers to common

issues within the sector itself or through cross-sectoral cooperation.

What have the strategic partnerships achieved? Finnish National Agency for Education carried out a survey, interviewing Finnish coordinators of projects started between 2014 and 2017 and Finnish partners of projects coordinated abroad.

Results and impact of these projects are summarised in this issue of Facts Express. At the same time, this will illustrate topical issues in European youth work today. Our aim is also to recognise and highlight the great work done in the projects.



FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION





“The world is becoming more and more multicultural, as do the challenges young people are facing. Through European cooperation, we can seek international solutions to international problems.”

PEER SUPPORT HELPS FIND SOLUTIONS TO DIFFICULT WORK PROBLEMS

Those interviewed had found new solutions to challenges they were facing in their work through their Erasmus+ project partners. Though youth workers operate in different environments, they often share similar challenges. Social exclusion can affect young people as much in a suburb in Paris as in a small town in Finland.

Working together with organisations from different countries has been one of the main benefits from partnerships: sharing good practices, developing one's expertise and new working methods, and finding solutions to common challenges.

Key topics in partnerships included social and digital working methods, reaching out to young people at risk of exclusion, inclusion of young people, and profiling of youth work.

PARTNERSHIPS FOCUS IN DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL AND PARTICIPATORY METHODS

The strategic partnerships of the Erasmus+ Programme aim to improve the quality of youth work through innovative methods, tools and materials with a focus in new digital and participatory working methods that are used in all projects and that will help achieve other relevant goals. Development of these methods is often the principal objective of the whole project.

Young people's worlds are becoming more and more digital at a speed that youth workers often find difficult to keep up with. The concept of digital youth work has started to be used in recent years, referring to the use of digital media and technologies in youth work and activities.

The Screenagers project studied the use of digital media in youth work and

“Projects allow you to constantly question your methods you have taken for granted.”

ERASMUS+ STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS TO COMMON CHALLENGES IN YOUTH WORK

Key Action 2 (KA2) of the EU's Erasmus+ Programme funds strategic development projects. In the youth sector – in the Youth in Action part of the programme – these projects are called strategic partnerships, the aim of which is to improve the quality of youth work through innovative methods, tools and materials.

Organisations from large organisations in the youth field to small informal groups get opportunities to develop their activities in projects in cooperation with partners from other countries. Projects can be carried out within the youth sector or in cross-sectoral cooperation, involving, for example, youth organisations, local youth authorities, educational or labour market services.

Between 2014 and 2017, Finnish stakeholders were involved as either coordinators or partners in 11 youth partnerships. These projects have carried out significant cross-sectoral cooperation, often with a strong focus on research. These projects received a total of 1.6 million euros in funding.

At European level, the youth partnerships have been supported by just under 200 million euros.



examples of good practices of digital youth work in the participating countries. The project also drafted recommendations for promoting digital youth work. As a result of the project, information about digital youth work, not easily available before, was collected together.

New digital services are typically first taken up by young people, who start using them and produce content. Adults become interested only later. The Future Labs project wants to improve the digital skills of youth workers, not just as users of services but to help them adopt digital working methods. At the same time, it is looking for solutions to tackle exclusion of young people.

Projects have also developed new practical tools to support youth work. Participating in an international youth exchange is an enormous learning experience for a young person, but it is difficult to measure this learning. The I've Partnership project developed a

“We got research to back our work and a research-based evaluation about the importance of international youth work.”

digital application to identify and recognise competences acquired during international volunteering activities and during youth exchanges.

CURRENT TOPICS IN YOUTH WORK

Those interviewed were asked to list current issues in youth work that had been raised in projects. These include:

- internationalisation and multiculturalism
- racism
- increasing inequality, structural inequality, regional inequality
- crisis of democracy
- genuine participation of young people and listening to their voices: how to include young people also in the planning and implementation of youth work?
- the political dimension of youth work
- big changes in the labour market and youth unemployment
- opportunities created by entrepreneurship
- raising the level of professionalism in youth work.

IN A NUTSHELL: PARTNERSHIPS INTERVIEWED

(C=coordinator)

DEVELOPMENT PROJECT	PROJECT THEME	FINNISH PARTICIPANTS	OTHER PARTICIPANTS
Future Labs: New Digital and Social Innovative Tools for Youth Work 24 months, 2017–2019	Development of digital youth work methods to strengthen participation of young people and to combat exclusion in Europe.	HUMAK University of Applied Sciences C Hyvarila Youth Centre	Youth organisations: Italy, Portugal x 2, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic
Boost your Possibilities – Youth Centers for Youth Mobility and Intercultural Learning 27 months, 2014–2017	Development of methods, programmes and competences in international youth work in youth centres and a study on impact of international youth work.	Suomen nuorisokeskustyhdistys (association of Finnish Youth Centres) C Villa Elba Youth Centre Anjala Finnish Youth Research Society	Youth work actors: Slovenia x 3, Estonia x 2
Hate Speech Disarmament 24 months, 2017–2019	Development of sustainable solutions to combat hate speech and present the knowledge of minorities in professional youth work.	Finnish Peace Education Institute C	Youth work actors: Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia, UK
Professionalizing European Youth Circuses I & II 24 months, 2014–2016	Development of administrative and youth work competences of European youth circus teachers and instructors.	Finnish Youth Circus Association C	Youth circus umbrella organisations: Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Denmark, UK
TransInnovation Camp for Youth 27 months, 2015–2017	International innovation camps for young people to bring new ideas for development of rural areas and participants' own communities; a model for entrepreneurship training.	Rieska Leader C Keskipiste-Leader	Rural development networks (Leader): Latvia, Romania, Hungary
Come Join Us 24 months, 2015–2017	Use of new working methods and ways to reach out to young people who are difficult to reach and at risk of exclusion.	Keuda Group, Vocational Education and Training	Youth work organisations: France, Sweden C , UK
Raising Understanding through the Narrative Experience 24 months, 2016–2018	Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and improving their competences through role-plays building empathy and social skills.	Etelä-Suomen rooli- ja strategiapeliyhdistys (association for role and strategic plays of southern Finland) C	Youth work organisations and a gaming company: Iceland, Sweden, Germany
Screenagers 24 months, 2014–2016	A European study on the methods and practices of digital youth work.	Verke – Centre of excellence in digital youth work	Youth work actors: Ireland C , Austria, Denmark, UK
Introducing the social circus workshop model to Galway Community Circus 12 months, 2014	Introducing the social circus workshop model to Ireland, and inclusion of young people with special needs in international activities.	Cultural Centre PiiPoo C	Youth circus: Ireland
The I've Partnership 24 months, 2014–2016	Development of a tool to identify and recognise competences acquired during youth exchanges and voluntary camp activities.	Finnish Youth Cooperation – Allianssi Finnish Youth Research Society	Volunteering organisations: Belgium, Spain, Italy C , Korea, Mexico, France, Serbia, Czech Republic, Turkey, Ukraine, Russia
Mapping Professional Open Youth Work 24 months, 2014–2016	Show-casing a professional perspective on youth work and mapping its practices.	HUMAK University of Applied Sciences	Youth work organisations and research institute: Netherlands, Italy, Austria C , Croatia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, UK



“Administrative training encouraged many circus directors to and stick with the work. Before, we were on the brink of burnout.”

PROJECTS STRENGTHEN COMPETENCES IN YOUTH WORK

According to the people interviewed, projects have also developed youth work competences of those who were not involved in youth work as their main job. International cooperation has given them examples of how things are done in other countries and taught new youth work practices. For example, in the TransInnovation Camp for Youth project, young people were taught entrepreneurship skills and encouraged to become active in developing their communities in innovation camps. A youth work unit was established in Rieska Leader association, and partner organisations have also had success in getting young people more involved through the project.

Youth work is also carried out in different clubs whose leaders also need pedagogical skills in addition to being competent in the hobby that the club is for. The Professionalizing European Youth Circuses project trained over 100 youth circus professionals, raising their

awareness of the pedagogical responsibility they carry and improving their competences in working with young people. Exchange of good practices and materials helped to improve the administrative skills of circus directors and staff.

PROJECTS COMBAT ISSUES OF PARTICIPATION AND EXCLUSION

Projects seek tools to encourage active participation of young people in society and its structures. Without understanding their world, values and attitudes, you can't get young people to participate. The life paths of young people are similar across Europe, although each country has their own context and faces their own challenges.

Partners have learned new methods for reaching out to young people from organisations coming from different operating environments. The Come Join Us project mapped young people's values, attitudes and life-long learning skills in different countries. The result of the project was a bank of methods for

inclusion of young people. The Finnish partner Keuda, for example, through using participatory workshop methods that built team spirit or tackled attitudes and prejudices, succeeded in involving young people who normally would not have got involved in international activities.

International partnerships have also helped improve the skills and competences of young people at risk of exclusion. An adventure role play based on Nordic mythology was created in the Raising Understanding Through the Narrative Experience project, which develops problem-solving ability, as well as social and team work skills. The project was cross-sectoral, involving a gaming company in addition to youth field actors.

Hate speech has increased across Europe, affecting young people, too. Hate speech is not tolerated in youth clubs, but how can we prevent those young people who use it from dropping out of reach of youth work? The Hate Speech Disarmament project coordinated by the Finnish Peace Education Institute involves youth workers with minority backgrounds and highlights their competences in dealing with hate speech.

PROJECTS MAKE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION EASIER AND PROVIDE A EUROPEAN FORUM FOR SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Projects enable participants to improve their international skills in their own organisation and within their sector. Some organisations interviewed already had a long history in international cooperation whereas others were only just starting.

Professional mobility – such as job shadowing projects – was seen as an easy entry to international cooperation. The Boost Your Possibilities project studied the impact of international cooperation, improved competences in international youth work in youth

“Projects open the door to the core of the common European values of multiculturalism and tolerance, and provide young people and youth workers opportunities realise these in practice.”

centres in Europe, and brought together actors interested in this topic. As a result of the project, we have research on the significance of international youth work, and youth centres are better equipped to work internationally.

International project work is an excellent tool to raise awareness of one's own work nationally, but also to bring it on the table in European discussions. Highly qualified Finnish youth workers have a lot to give when it comes to professional and pedagogical youth work in Europe. Professional youth work was presented to European institutions in the Mapping Professional Open Youth Work. The Screenagers research project brought the concept of digital youth work in the Finnish context. It also contributed to establishing an expert group for this topic in the European Commission.

Social circuses use circus skills to help people acquire other skills. They promote inclusion, community cooperation and everyday life skills. Culture Centre PiiPoo introduced Finnish knowledge and competences in this field by taking their social circus workshop model to Galway Community Circus in their project to develop circus managers' skills and confidence in leading disabled groups. The project's social circus workshop model got wide publicity in

Britain and Ireland where a number of social circus groups have been started as a result. The project gave PiiPoo more belief in their competences and in the fact that their work had international interest.

PROJECTS CREATE NEW PLATFORMS FOR INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE

International partnerships offer new perspectives and help question one's own methods. Differences and similarities of methods used in different countries create an enormous potential for exchange of practices, knowledge, skills and experiences.

Those interviewed described project partners as acting as a mirror, continuously reflecting their own work. When the same process is ongoing in different countries at the same time, it gives organisations continuous feedback on their practices, helping them develop. On the other hand, international partners also help organisations recognise their own strengths, which often can get forgotten in the daily work.

International projects create new networks. This is particularly important for actors with a narrow operating environment in their own countries. National networks also become tighter when a

project brings people interested in the same topic together at the same table. Project work also creates new platforms for international dialogue, places to discuss work issues in a different way than in the everyday work with colleagues.

Coordinators of finished projects rate their projects as very successful and feel that the objectives were achieved. An important ingredient for success was smooth cooperation, based on mutual trust, dialogue, similar values and aims. Long-term impact can be achieved when solutions and methods developed together can be adapted in the context of one's country. It is also essential for success that projects are supported by management and enough time and resources are allocated to them.

All projects had led to new project initiatives and other types of cooperation between the partners. Project work is described as a continuum of cooperation: cooperation is tested in the first project, upon which long-term partnership is then built. Networks with European actors become stronger. ■

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“We'll continue with a new project with the same gang. Nobody has questioned this.”

The Finnish National Agency for Education is an agency operating in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture. It is responsible for the development of education, early childhood education and care, and lifelong learning as well as for the promotion of internationalisation.