



5th EGL CONFERENCE - REPORT -

by
Tomi Kiilakoski
Marko Kovacic

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INTRODUCTION

The 5th event of the Europe Goes Local (EGL) project, held in May 2023 in Stockholm, gathered more than 150 youth workers, municipal workers, researchers, employees of the national agencies in charge of implementing Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects, and decision-makers. The main idea of the event was to explore different local realities within countries that contribute to the implementation of the Europe Goes Local mission. Hence, the objective of the conference was twofold. On the one hand, the idea was to exchange good practices on the different country models of conducting EGL at the local level, and on the other hand, to explore mechanisms for developing quality youth work by utilizing available European mechanisms such as youth programs, namely Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.

After the introductory remarks and speeches, participants were asked to discuss ways to set up meaningful cooperation at the national level to work towards the aims of EGL within their stakeholder groups. The second day of the conference was dedicated to showcasing good practices of different local realities and reflecting on them within national delegations. The last day of the conference focused on enhancing cooperation among stakeholders and motivating them by offering workshops related to the quality of youth work. The conference gathered more than 150 stakeholders representing the community of practice, including municipal and youth workers, the national agency staff, decision-makers, researchers, and project managers in the youth field.

This conference report does not follow a classical chronological structure, nor does it provide the transcript of discussions from the conference. The idea of the report is to grasp the most important and provocative segments of the conference, explore them, and provide context.

In total, seven points are identified and extrapolated from workshop minutes, facilitators' reports, and observations of different segments of the conference. These seven aspects are analyzed, taking into consideration the idea of the project, current trends in local youth work in Europe, and relevant literature in youth studies. Thus, by focusing on the content of the discussions, the aim of this report is to demonstrate the relevance of the Europe Goes Local project for contemporary youth work practice and policy.

Continuing from that point, we present the outcomes of the interaction among the members of the community of practice. Afterward, a synthesis in the form of a conclusion is provided.

THE MATTER OF REACH

It is estimated that young people (aged 15–29 years) make up approximately 16.3% of the EU's total population. The period of youth is characterized by transitional developmental mechanisms, specific societal needs, and the significant influence of various socialization agents. Consequently, it has been receiving increasing attention from policymakers. Youth work, as a specific field of practice, is diverse and rooted in local communities, contextualized based on cultural, political, historical, and societal factors. However, all youth work shares a common trait—to create an enabling environment for young people to foster their development, realize their potentials, and become integral parts of society. As a Council resolution for establishing a European youth work agenda notes, youth work should be offered for "all young people, including those less engaged with society and/or with fewer opportunities and / or whose full political and social participation is at risk due to individual or structural disadvantages or discrimination."¹ Considering this, one of the central points of discussion during the conference was the matter of reach.

The conference addressed two important aspects in this regard. The first aspect concerns the reach of young people. Youth work is diverse because young people themselves are diverse. Their heterogeneity determines the mechanisms, tools, methods, topics, and approaches that youth workers employ to address their needs. However, the question that arises is to what extent youth work successfully reaches all young people. Are young people with fewer opportunities (whether social, territorial, individual, or other) adequately included in youth work? Are young people who are harder to reach represented in different European events, and is their voice sufficiently heard? Inclusion has long been a priority in youth policy; even Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps emphasize inclusion as one of the guiding principles. Nevertheless, participants at the EGL conference were not entirely convinced that the realization of the inclusion principle is adequate. Consequently, a lingering debate on the suitability of conventional mechanics employed by youth and municipal workers for reaching youth with limited opportunities has been raised. Some argue that the focus on numbers in youth work

¹ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda (2020/C 415/01). [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42020Y1201\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42020Y1201(01))

projects diminishes the idea of inclusion, given that resources and capacities are often limited. Can the paradigm be changed so that less becomes more?

Linked to the previous aspect, another aspect of reach was addressed—the role of municipal workers. The starting point of the EGL was to enhance the capacities of municipalities in developing quality youth work by utilizing available European mechanisms. This assumption is a cornerstone of the project; however, participants uncovered a question regarding whether municipal workers are the right stakeholders for this task. Arguments addressing the burden placed on municipal workers with a multitude of tasks and topics they must cover, along with the general lack of capacity and sometimes motivation, reveal the uncomfortable truth that youth work is not always a municipal priority everywhere. Consequently, youth work policy often suffers from a lack of coherence, codification, and funding.

Considering that these aspects are speculative and based on anecdotal findings, the participants felt that in order to offer adequate solutions for both aforementioned problems, one potential step would be to evaluate the reach. Instead of solely focusing on what is happening, it is crucial to understand why it is happening. By answering this question, we can create space for more meaningful, inclusive, and, hopefully, appropriate mechanisms.

MOBILITIES AND NETWORKS: STRENGTHENING YOUTH WORK

One of the goals of the Europe Goes Local project is to build bridges between the local and European levels and to make the European dimension an integral part of local youth work provision while at the same time supporting local youth work. The project therefore is based on the premise that these two perspectives can be interconnected, i.e. more Europe means better quality local youth work and vice versa, European youth work policy will be better if local context is better taken into account. The participants of the conference offered different perspectives on how these two interconnected goals can be met. As one of working groups put it: *“For us as municipal workers it is important to know the European level. What can we do to make this project really local?”* Different answers were offered to meet this goal.

Firstly, *supporting youth workers and other stakeholders* was seen as a necessary component in the project. Not surprisingly, one aspect of this was organizing mobility projects for youth workers, so that peer learning will be possible. One aspect of European dimension was also

noting that there might be countries where identified youth work challenges are successfully met, and getting to know these solutions might help local stakeholders to better promote youth work . “*Study visits for relevant youth work stakeholder to other countries where cooperation between municipal and national level works in a successful*”. In addition to these, the participants hoped for tools and materials, which would help them to argue for youth work in their local context. Also, strong local networks could be helpful in “*making the municipal voice louder*” in the national level.

Secondly, participants noted that in order to increase the quality of local youth work and to better integrate European dimension *supporting encounters and networks on the national level* would be needed. It was noted that in some cases there are not enough structures which would help in meeting the goals of the project. Statements such as there is “*Strong need for network of municipal officials*”, or that the way forward would be “*organizing specific events for municipality youth officers*” show that there is a need to share practices and strengthen the national context. Besides national level, there were thoughts and reflections on the need to establish European level networks. This way one of the tools would a platform be which could help in spreading information. Ideas such as establishing “*twin EGL cities*” which would go beyond exchanging good practices were proposed.

What is perhaps noteworthy is that a lot of the suggestions about moving beyond mobilities and exchanging information were wishes for the future, instead of building on already existing procedures. It should be noted that this applied to all the levels above. This seems to suggest that there is a need to establish networks which go beyond the existing European programs, and there are lot of expectation for the EGL to help bridging not only European and the local, but also national and local level.

RECEPTION AND THE USE OF THE CHARTER ON LOCAL YOUTH WORK

In his keynote presentation Jonas Agdur highlighted the process of creating The European Charter on Local Youth Work. He emphasized that youth workers need to be flexible, and youth workers need to be able to improvise when they are working with the young. He noted also that youth field needs common guidelines for two reasons. Firstly, not all the youth workers work in manner that corresponds to ideals of youth work. And secondly, they need to be to work as an orchestra instead of group of solo artists. Continuing with the improvisation metaphor he noted

that charter creates a common framework, with which youth workers can improvise together like a jazz band. He noted that charter is tool that needs to be used to improve the local youth work.

The charter was further discussed in working groups. The charter was often mentioned in other discussions during the seminar, and the authors of this report did not hear any occasions there the charter would be criticised for not being suitable to youth work. There was a consensus that the charter describes youth work well and can be potentially used to improve youth work on the local level. The charter was discussed as being “nice”, and “*an inspiring tool to discuss what youth work is about*” and that it can be a resource for promoting youth work. The charter could be used as “*a framework for reflection among youth workers and their organisations*”. The charter was also seen as a tool for arguing for funding of youth work research since the goals of the charter create a need to analyse if and to what extent the requirements of the charter are met.

Even when the charter was not used in the national context it was seen as an impressive document in its own right. This can be seen as being significant, since some of the participants had not been involved in the creation of the charter in the earlier rounds of Europe Goel Local - project and they no 'personal ownership' in drafting the charter.

The reception, however, was more varied when it came to a question on how to implement the charter in the local contexts in different participating countries. In some countries, the charter had been translated to local languages there as in some countries the charter had not been translated, and the action plan for the future could include mentions such as, “*To have a full translation of the documentation*”. At least in one case there was dissatisfaction about the quality of the existing translation. Besides literal translation participants called customizing the charter with the national and regional processes. These discussions show that in some cases the use of the charter is still limited by the fact that it has not been properly adapted in the national context. In some cases, the problem was that the practice architectures of the country, i.e. structures supporting the community of practice of youth workers² were already rich, and there were difficulties in integrating the charter to the already existing policy frameworks. In these cases, plans to integrate charter in the higher-level education of youth workers (Finland) or to offer

² Kiilakoski, Tomi (2020) Diversity of practice architectures: education and career paths for youth workers. In Marti Taru, Ewa Krzakleska & Tanya Basarab (eds.) *Youth Worker Education in Europe: Policies, structures, and practices*. Council of Europe and European Commission, Youth Knowledge #26, pp. 57–89.

workshops how to use the charter (Germany) were seen as a way forward.

The conference included four presentations which showed how the charter may be integrated differently in the national realities depending on the strength of existing practice architectures. In Croatia and Slovenia the charter and other tools provided by the EGL were used to create *new practices*. In Croatia, the charter was signed by 98 out of 128 Croatian cities. Connected to youth-friendly cities this created possibilities to promote youth work. In Sweden the charter serves as *a tool for recreating old practices and in providing frameworks*. The ambitious mission statement of MUCF (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society) is to work for implementation of the charter in all local youth centers in Sweden. To achieve this, different tools have been created and policy processes have been initiated. In Finland the charter has been used as *a useful tool in addition to already existing ones*. In Finland the charter was for example presented in the national conference of youth work.

As can be seen from the above observations, there is a consensus that charter reflects what youth work is about, but there are considerable differences between the participating countries on how the charter has been implemented. Also, national youth work practice architectures enable or constricts the use of the charter as a tool for promoting youth work.

PROMOTING THE EGL AND THE CHARTER TO THE LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL

In order to be successful, EGL should be integrated to national, regional and local youth work processes. In some cases, there were criticisms that *“ EGL is not visible on national level, it only appears on European level”*. Lot of discussions dealt with how the project itself could be made better known. One of the challenges, then, is to better promote the European dimension for local youth workers and youth work stakeholder both within and outside the framework of Europe goes local.

Different ways and tools to make EGL better known there though of. According to the participants, awareness raising, and trainings are needed. To better do so, different tools are needed. The tools need to be adapted to the local context. Different governmental structures also

bring about the need to deal with regional or federal level. Translating the charter was mentioned in the countries where there is no translation. Creating direct communication canals between local level and national level was seen a challenge to be dealt with. Suggestions for how to work ranged from visuals, videos, podcasts to training and education (*“Educate different stakeholders at the local level about various EGL- and other European tools”*). The participants also called for more structured issues, such *“monitoring, support, inspiration”* which take into account the local realities, and put trust on the local level and work from bottom up instead of top down.

It is commonplace to note that European practice architectures differ a lot. In some cases, there is legislation, quality assurance systems, youth work education, sustainable career paths and associations for youth workers. In some cases, only few of these elements are there.³ Accordingly, the Charter was approached very differently depending on the strength of the existing structures. In countries where the recognition of youth work is low, participants wanted *“to promote the youth worker charter more, to make sure the youth work values are taken care of”*. For these countries, charter could be used to argue that quality youth work requires economic investments. However, in some other countries it was seen that there are already documents and processes which help unifying youth work in the national level, and therefore it is not easy to find a proper place for a charter: *“charter is super important for the international community, but it does not make sense to duplicate the existing documents”*.

What was being said about the charter perhaps applies to other aspects of Europe goes local. In order to make an impact on the local level European processes need to be connected to the existing structures within the country. In some cases, the difficulty is that there are too few structures. In the EGL, national working groups are responsible for implementing the project on the local level. According to the participants, there are still challenges that need to be met, if the project is to have a real impact outside the European level. In some cases, there is not a national working group. Also, in some cases the role of national working group has diminished, and the *“national group is less and less active”*. In some cases, the national working group lacks connections to different stakeholders. The charter ambassadors felt that they lack the mandate

³ Kiilakoski, Tomi (2020) Diversity of practice architectures: education and career paths for youth workers. In Marti Taru, Ewa Krzakleska & Tanya Basarab (eds.) *Youth Worker Education in Europe: Policies, structures and practices*. Council of Europe and European Commission, Youth Knowledge #26, pp. 57–89.

to work, and would need a common framework so that they could be identified as having a status to talk about youth work. Currently some of them felt that mandate, resources and/or recognition.

In some other countries there is an opposite problem. There might be too many structures, since there is national legislation, official documents, and existing intellectual traditions to talk about youth work. The scholar of youth work, Trudi Cooper, notes that institutional arrangements of youth work are diverse, and the roles of youth workers are varied. Besides these the models of youth work use different language to describe practices and express commitments.⁴ The longer the youth work history, the more detailed the structures and the more nuanced the already existing documents and ways of talking about youth work are, the more complex it is to fit European perspectives into the local tradition.

Tackling the problem of having too few and too many structures may require admitting that the same tools and processes may bring about different outcomes. When thinking what impact EGL can make on the local level in different countries, different solutions are created. How these different solutions can be disseminated is a challenge for the future: how it can be ensured that the solutions are openly shared and different stakeholders can learn from the process?

THE LANGUAGE CHALLENGE

The EU is home to 24 official languages, while as many as 200 languages are spoken across the continent. Multilingualism is one of the hallmarks of the European Union and is promoted in various policy documents and cultural practices. As the first language is a significant factor in understanding and interpreting reality, it is important to be respectful and considerate by offering opportunities for individuals to express themselves and consume materials in their mother tongues. However, there is an additional language separation in Europe that is often neglected - the difference between administrative languages used by European institutions and the everyday language used by practitioners, particularly young people. The language challenges discussed at the conference focus on two points of view - the linguistic aspect and the policy aspect.

⁴ Cooper, Sue (2018) Defining Youth Work: Exploring the Boundaries, Continuity and Diversity of Youth Work Practice. In Pam Allfred, Fin Cullen, Kathy Edwards & Dana Fusco (eds.) Sage Handbook of Youth Work Practice. London: Sage, pp. 3-17.

Youth work is diverse, and so are youth and municipal workers. Some have higher education and more training, while others do not. Some are fluent in multiple languages, while others only speak their own language. Some speak multiple languages but do not speak English fluently. Nonetheless, the ability to speak English, although considered one of the biggest advantages in contemporary Europe, cannot be taken for granted, nor does it indicate the quality of youth work or policy offerings. During the discussions, participants often pointed out that professionals from local communities, particularly rural areas, sometimes choose not to participate in international events due to their reluctance to engage in English-speaking environments. Additionally, non-native English speakers may find it difficult to express themselves as their oral production may not be at the level of fluent speakers, making them uncomfortable to join discussions even when attending international events.

Another aspect of this problem is the lack of resources available in local languages being translated into English. Participants claimed that there are sufficient resources in English, but professionals from other countries are often unfamiliar with good practices and quality materials produced in local languages. This is especially true for smaller rural communities that lack resources to translate their materials into English.

From a policy perspective, the issue of using dry administrative language, often referred to as "Brussels language," was raised. Participants argued that policy documents designed for the community of practice are not adequate for all its members. Policy documents are described as being too long, administrative, and containing excessive introduction and contextualization, which requires a substantial effort to understand and later translate them into a language that young people can comprehend. Additionally, there is a discrepancy between the language young people speak and the one policymakers use. If youth voice is to be heard, municipal workers must translate it into bureaucratic language, which diminishes youth authenticity and requires time and energy.

Although challenges were identified, the participants did not offer concrete solutions for the aforementioned problems. Some participants wondered if the development of AI could be a chance to overcome language barriers; however, no specific recommendations were offered.

THE ROLES... OF YOUNG PEOPLE, CSOS & THE NATIONAL AGENCIES

Europe Goes Local (EGL) is a community of practice that includes various stakeholders, such as municipalities, youth workers, employees of national agencies, researchers, decision-makers, and young people. Their collective effort to improve the quality of local youth work through EU programs is pivotal for the project's success. In several instances, including discussions in workshops and stakeholder groups, participants deliberated on the roles of different stakeholders.

First and foremost, the role of young people in EGL was a topic of discussion. Many conversations focused on the need for the role of young people to be more explicit, with suggestions such as increasing their involvement through youth exchanges and informing them about the possibilities and rights offered by the Charter.

Furthermore, participants expressed that the role and significance of civil society organizations (CSOs) should be more clearly defined and reflected in the project outputs and bodies, particularly in national working groups. It was emphasized that youth work is typically associated with civil society and CSOs, and therefore, national working groups should collaborate with all relevant organizations. However, there was no clear consensus on how to effectively address this concern.

Lastly, throughout the conference, there was ongoing discussion about the role of national agencies in national and local youth policy. Due to differences in roles, legal positions, and mandates, some national agencies are more active in the policy environment and thus have a greater chance to influence the development of local youth work. On the other hand, certain national agencies are exclusively focused on the administration, promotion, and coordination of programs like Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. Consequently, these varied roles are reflected in the diverse activities within the EGL project.

THE EGL GOES EYWA?

Europe Goes Local (EGL) is one of the five strategic partnerships among national agencies that focus on youth work. What sets EGL apart from the other strategic partnerships is its specific

focus on local youth work, with municipalities as its primary stakeholders. Nonetheless, other initiatives such as Democracy Reloading, Lobbying for Youth Work, Youth Work Academy, and the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) also have an influence on EGL, just as EGL has an influence on them. At the European level, the most prominent youth work scheme is the European Youth Work Agenda. This policy framework aims to support the development of youth work across Europe by consolidating various initiatives and increasing their visibility to the target groups. Given that the EYWA is supported not only by a strategic partnership among national agencies but also by a Council's resolution⁵ and the Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, it holds both policy and practical value within the community of practice. Moreover, the EYWA is guided by national working groups in the majority of countries, which collaborate with local and national stakeholders in the field of youth work.

During the conference, these aspects were discussed within the context of EGL, and the commonalities between the two initiatives were explored. Some countries have decided to merge their EGL national working group with the one focused on the EYWA, and other participants are considering a similar approach. This generated discussions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of such a merger, but a consensus was not reached. Nevertheless, it was agreed that this is an important point that should be addressed at the EGL management meeting.

CONCLUSIONS

In analysing the Stockholm conference, we have highlighted seven different themes. These themes dealt with the questions of how Europe goes local is able to contribute to development of the local youth work and how it is able to reach young people (the matter of reach; networks and mobilities); how the tools created in the project are currently used and how they could be used (the use and reception of the charter; promoting the charter and other tools); what are the possibilities and limitations of the current approach of the project (language challenge, the matter of reach and the roles of young people, CSOs and national agencies) and how the EGL is connected to other European developments sharing similar goals (the EGL goes EYWA). These

⁵ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda 2020/C 415/01

questions show that while the general idea of Europe going local is supported, there are still some issues which need to be addressed.

In conclusion, we will borrow a framework of expansive learning. The basic idea of the framework is that in a complex context people and organisations are learning something that is not stable, or in some cases not even there. This type of learning is a collective endeavor and requires 'an entire activity system in which the learners are engaged'.⁶ We argue that in the post-pandemic Europe where the roles of young people are changing, new policy processes are being created and new challenges are met, projects like Europe goes local by necessity have to deal with new forms of activities and new ways of working. These new ways are of course based on existing practice architectures. In any case, learning new practices instead of seminating the old ones are needed. To point out the complexities involved we will use five perspectives provided by the theory of expansive learning, which can be used to identify some of the challenges raised in the seminar.

Tools. Europe goes local has created different tools, such as the European Charter on local youth work and the changemakers kit. The participants of the project gave their consent that these tools reflect what youth work is or should be about. However, since tools only work in the context of the local youth work community of practice, different national and local conditions mean that these tools require adapting them to national context. Clearly this process has been more successful in some countries, whereas some other countries are still at the beginning of the national road. The question remains how these learning processes can be supported by Europe goes local, either by identifying common challenges or by providing peer learning networks. Connected to the question about the usability of the tools is the language challenge described earlier in the report.

Rules. In order to support learning, communities need a shared set of rules which do not restrict but enable learning. There were wonderful examples where EGL had provided opportunities to set up new rules in the national context, whereas in some other cases the mandate and the role of the program was a bit vague. In the European context as well, there were some cases with unclear rules, such as the mandate and the status of charter ambassadors or the connection of the EGL to European youth work agenda.

⁶ Engeström, Yrjö (2009) Expansive learning. Toward an activity-theoretical reconceptualization. in Knud Illeris (ed.) Contemporary Theories of Learning. New York: Routledge, pp. 53-73.

Division of labour. Sweden provided an example with a clear division of labour. The national authorities had taken the lead in the project and included other stakeholders in the process. In some other cases the division of labour was unclear, and the processes moved slowly. Also, there were questions raised if too much is expected from youth workers, since their professional role may not enable them to meet the expectations of the project. Division of labour, therefore, is a question that could be tackled further.

Boundary crossings and network building. Any European youth work program needs to find a balance between respecting and understand the variety in the local youth work contexts, and in finding common ground. The European youth work community is complex, consisting on paid and voluntary workers, different stakeholders and varying supporting structures. Different communities of practices of youth work have their local specialties. However, some of the challenges are interconnected and therefore there might be room for boundary crossings within the project. The pandemic clearly affected these European exchanges, and there is a need to create new ones. Of course, there are already some well-established networks on the national level which may be used to better find solutions to new learning challenges.

Agency – participants' ability and will to shape their communities of practice. The goal of the EGL is to create a new practice which would connect European dimension to the local youth work. This is a learning process. In order to succeed, local youth workers and other youth work stakeholders need to be involved and give their consent to the goals of the project. The participants of the seminar described different tools such as visuals, podcasts, trainings, and networks which could be used to reach the local youth workers. In the future, the authors of this report suggest paying attention to the different success stories in reaching local youth work communities and identifying common challenges in doing so.