



Some observations on the central role of municipalities in creating sustainable youth work development

European policy documents on youth work have developed significantly since the 2nd Youth Work Convention in 2015. Looking at some recent statements from the EU and the Council of Europe it is clear that “Local and regional authorities and youth organisations are closest to the daily lives of young people and play a crucial role in supporting the development of quality youth work”, that “Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live” and that “Local and regional authorities are primarily responsible for successfully implemented youth work.”

Furthermore, the European Youth Work Agenda aims at “connecting political decisions with their practical implementation”, and, as noted in the *EU resolution on youth work policy in an empowering Europe*, it is through “investing in a robust and long term local youth work policy, based on intense dialogue and participation, local governments create concrete conditions for the optimal development of local youth work.”

The conclusion is obvious: Youth work primarily takes place where young people live, at the local level, and local authorities, that is to say municipalities, are key players in creating the right conditions.

Despite numerous parallel initiatives on the European level debating on youth work, the above statements seem often to be forgotten. Actions and activities are still planned and carried out without taking municipal knowledge and experience into account. However, a ‘youth work community of practice’ of which municipalities are not a distinct and visible part will never be able to develop local youth work in a robust and sustainable way.

Municipalities have a crucial role in the revitalization of democracy and in making young people regain trust in public institutions, not the least through supporting young people’s participation and influence via youth work. We are all aware that municipalities are not a homogenous group and have diverse needs and competencies. Many lack a youth work policy and often even a youth policy. At the same time, there is today a lot of knowledge and experience on the municipal level regarding how to create, implement, monitor and evaluate efficient municipal youth work policy and practice. The European Charter on Local Youth Work, a ‘non-political’ initiative and document, has united the sector and paved the way for municipal cooperation and mutual support in the further development of youth work.

If discussions, initiatives and activities that take place at the European level should have any real and long-lasting, structural impact, they need to start from the actual challenges that youth work is facing at the municipal level. Hence, a “road map” for the further development of youth work must know the place from where the journey departs and where is its destination. In both cases this must be the local level, and municipalities must therefore be part of finding the way forward. If not, there is a high risk of these debates becoming an ongoing loop of non-demanding statements, leading nowhere and only creating frustration among those engaged in everyday local youth work.



Youth work will not be “growing” if this growth is not rooted in municipal soil, and there will only be a robust and long-term local youth work policy if adopted by municipalities. The latest EU resolution states that “The member states and the European Commission are invited to work towards a bottom-up perspective by allowing local knowledge, experience and practice concerning the organisation of local youth work to inform the European level.” This statement must be turned into reality if youth work is to thrive, and it asks for organisations representing municipalities to be present at the table.

We therefore invite the participants of the 4th European Youth Work Convention, in their respective areas of competence, to reflect on and discuss how they aim to cooperate with municipalities in the further development of youth work, e.g.:

- How is municipal knowledge and experience to inform national and European authorities and institutions on the needs and challenges of local youth work?
- How is municipal representation to be involved in the creation, implementation and evaluation of future policies, strategies and activities?
- How are municipalities to be involved in re-designing the European programs in a way that they meet the municipal reality and thus reach new less privileged groups of young people?

We are eagerly looking forward to an ambitious and fruitful Convention, creating optimal conditions for the community of practice to take the next steps together, further strengthening the quality and recognition of youth work.

References

- Making a world of difference, final declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, 2015
- Recommendation CM/Rec (2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States on youth work
- 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)
- Signposts for the future, final declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, 2020
- Report, CG-FORUM(2021)01-02final, 12 February 2021, Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities; Youth work: the role of local and regional authorities
- Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on youth work policy in an empowering Europe (C/2024/3526)