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# **Studying the impact of international youth work**

**Towards developing  
an evaluation tool  
for youth centres**



**SUOMEN  
NUORISOKESKUSYHDISTYS**

**FINNISH YOUTH RESEARCH SOCIETY  
FINNISH YOUTH RESEARCH NETWORK**



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FINNISH YOUTH RESEARCH SOCIETY  
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# Summary

This publication presents the expertise and knowledge youth centres have gained by organising international youth work processes. To uncover this knowledge, a research module was included in the Erasmus+ funded project: *Boost Your Possibilities! – Youth Centres for Youth Mobility and Intercultural Learning: Impact of Internationality* (2015–2017). The project was implemented in three countries: Finland, Estonia and Slovenia.

During the research process, various methods of inquiry were used to investigate the scale of impact of international youth work conducted by the youth centres. The young people, youth centre personnel and decision makers' experiences concerning this impact and perceived development needs were gathered using a variety of methods: story-telling, a pilot survey, interviews and interactive evaluation. These methods were tested and fine-tuned during this study and were found to be working well for the youth centres and would continue to do so in the future.

Three forms of impact were found: youth work results, promotion of expertise in youth work and the economic impact of youth centres – the latter impact in the context of national youth centres in Finland. It was also suggested that if three forms of impact emanate from international youth work then all three forms of impact must be included in the evaluation process. As a result, youth centre partners in cooperation from local and international networks could also be asked, among other questions, how successfully youth centres have promoted international youth work expertise. In such an inquiry, the use of a similar survey and interactive evaluation method employed here to reveal the impact of youth work results, is implicated.

Yet, there were two youth service features missing from the research procedure that should be included in the future: accessibility and equality mapping. The process of mapping will generate more knowledge on why some young people, though keen to participate, cannot gain access to youth work services.

# Introduction

This report describes a research process where the main objective was to gain an overview of the impact of international youth work<sup>1</sup> conducted by youth centres. Before detailing the meaning of *youth centre* or, for example, *impact*, it is necessary to describe the wider project to which this research belonged.

The Finnish Youth Centres Association (here SNK, Suomen nuorisokeskusyhdistys ry) has been coordinating a project to develop the quality and impact of international activities implemented by youth centres in three countries: Estonia, Slovenia and Finland. The project is called *Boost your possibilities! – Youth Centres for Youth mobility and Intercultural learning: Impact of Internationality* (2015–2017). The project is funded by Erasmus+.

As described in the Strategic Partnerships application, such international cooperation originated in the benefit that could be gained from the experiences of international youth work of the youth centres involved, in order to improve quality by learning and developing supporting structures for centres aiming to start international youth work. The project brought together youth centre networks from three countries to complete a project cycle lasting more than two years.

Some of the project partners had just started in international youth work. Others already had considerable experience of using internationality in youth work: in long term activity such as supporting small local initiatives by young people, creating clubs, or coordinating multinational youth exchanges, volunteer work exchanges<sup>2</sup> or training courses and job shadowing for youth workers; or in short term activity, such as making informative school visits and organising seminars. These youth centre activities have often been funded by Erasmus+, but for example in Finland, the State Provincial Offices have also provided funding, especially for developing cross-border co-operation.

At the outset of the project, it was important to define international youth work in the context of the youth centres involved. It can be said that all learning related activity in a multicultural youth work environment was counted as international (see for example Villa Elba n. d.<sup>3</sup>). Such activity could have occurred either in the home country or abroad and thus, local international events, weeks and campaigns or international visitors also counted as international activity. In addition, it involved specific content such as music, IT, art, media, cultural programs, sport and nature. The youth centres with long experience of organising such activity, also offered information and guidance on international

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1 According to the *Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention* (2015, 4) youth work includes aspects of cultivating the imagination, initiative, integration, involvement and aspiration by producing processes which are educative, empowering, participative, expressive and inclusive. The Declaration highlights the way youth work engages with young people: on their terms and on their 'turf', in response to their expressed and identified needs, in their own space or in spaces created for youth work practice.

2 EVS (*European Voluntary Service*). [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities-for-individuals/young-people/european-voluntary-service\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities-for-individuals/young-people/european-voluntary-service_en). (Accessed 18.10.2016)

3 [http://www.villaelba.fi/children\\_and\\_youth/internationalyouthwork/en\\_GB/internationalwork/](http://www.villaelba.fi/children_and_youth/internationalyouthwork/en_GB/internationalwork/) (Accessed 21.3.2017)

programs and projects to other organisations in the region or even coordinated nation-wide co-operation between different EVS (*European Voluntary Service*) hosting organisations. The Youth centres in the project also organised youth meetings and study visits in the field of education, meaning that the youth centres participated in and supported international cooperation with schools or organised job shadowing for youth workers.

The main coordinator of the project was the SNK from Finland. However, a similar youth centre umbrella organisation coordinated project actions in each country: In Slovenia, Youth Network MaMa and in Estonia, Eesti Avatud Noortekeskuste Ühendus (AEYC, Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres).

What is understood by 'youth centre' differs in the three countries included in the project. In Estonia, youth centres offer a wide variety of services to fulfil the aim of youth work. This is defined by law as the creation of conditions to promote the manifold development of young people, enabling them to be active outside their families, formal education acquired within the adult education system, and work on a voluntary basis (*Estonian Youth Work Act 2010*<sup>4</sup>). In Estonia, municipalities or NGOs usually own youth centres, where a variety of activities are offered. What is common is the use of open youth work methods. In 2013, there were 237 youth centres in Estonia (Youth Work Structures<sup>5</sup>, n.d.).

In Finland, the youth centres in the project have the status of *national youth centre*, based on the *Youth Act* (72/2006; 1285/2016). In 2016, there were ten youth centres. The centres are specialised in organising and distributing expertise in adventure, nature, environmental and cultural education, camps and social and international youth work. Most national youth centres do not organise daily leisure activities for local young people, thus differentiating them from Finland's municipal youth houses – there are more than one thousand youth houses in Finland in daily leisure time use. An exception to this is the Hyvärilä Youth Centre in Nurmes which also organises municipal youth work for the City of Nurmes including daily activity. Youth centres can also be differentiated from youth houses that are used during the day, by their overnight accommodation facilities. However, as the Youth Act states, youth centres can only offer services on a non-profit basis.

In Slovenia, organisations participating in the project have the status of youth centre or are organisations active in the field of youth work. These organisations operate in local communities in order to support young people, offer them a place to spend quality free time, and opportunities for informal learning and acquiring new experiences. Their activities aim to contribute to the social integration of young people, enable mobility and international cooperation, and establish an autonomous space for young people. The youth organisations are connected and represented nationally by Youth Network MaMa, which has 47 member organisations in 2017 (Mladinska mreža MaMa, n. d.; Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, n. d.<sup>6</sup>).

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4 *Youth Work Act of Estonia*, RT I 2010, 44, 262. <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/520062016006/consolide> (Accessed 21.3.2017).

5 Youth Work Structures in Estonia (n.d). Eesti Noorsootöö Keskus [Estonian Youth Work Centre] <https://www.entk.ee/noorsootoeoe-struktuurid> (Accessed 01.02.2017).

6 Mladinska mreža MaMa (n. d.) Članice. <http://www.mreza-mama.si/> (Accessed 13.2.2017). Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth (n. d) Mladinski sektor. [http://www.ursm.gov.si/si/delovna\\_podrocja/mladinski\\_sektor/](http://www.ursm.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/mladinski_sektor/) (Accessed 13.2.2017).

In addition to co-operation, competence development of youth centre personnel and sharing expertise, the project included a research module. In fact, one of the most important aims of the project was to set up impact research with youth researchers in order to make the processes of international youth work more visible. Furthermore, by offering an overview of the flow of current international activities and their impact, the research could create a fruitful starting point for developing and planning future activities for the youth centres.

The research process was constructed as action research and it included five developmental actions. Part 1 of the report concentrates on the first action: gathering data by using narrative research to build stories revealing what constitutes youth work and international youth work. In this the workshop, the method of the *In Defence of Youth Work* (IDYW) campaign from the United Kingdom and their '*Cornerstones of Youth Work*' were used as a basis.

The second action (Part II) was to pilot and re-modify a youth centre survey instrument to make the impact of international youth work visible to young people. The pilot survey was launched in April–May 2016 in all three countries. This part of the report also answers the question concerning the level of impact that international youth work seems to have on young people.

The third action (Part III) investigated the impact of international youth work beyond individuals: on groups, community and society. Research interviews of youth centre personnel were conducted in Finland and Estonia. The interviewees were experienced youth workers who had participated in, or organised international activities. In Finland, four interviews were conducted, each about two hours in length, in four different youth centres. In each, two youth centre employees were interviewed in pairs. The main aim of the interviews was to establish the possible known wider impact of international youth work in order to propose evaluation instruments that should be available to youth centres for documenting such work in the future. In Estonia, there were three interviews with youth workers from three different youth centres conducted by a student for her thesis *International Youth Work - Youth Workers' Experiences*. (Kalmus 2016) In contrast to the above, these were individual interviews that aimed to investigate the youth workers' personal experiences of international youth work and their thoughts on the importance of international youth activities. The semi-structured interview technique was used and the length of the interviews varied from 45 minutes to one and a half hours. Throughout the publication these interviews are used as background information for the report.

The aim of the fourth action (see Part IV of the report) was to discover the obstacles that can hinder international youth work processes in different cultural and regional realities. It also sought to discover whether development should focus on structural factors. The interviews also covered this theme. In addition, the interactive research method known as *Deliberative Discussion Day* was used during this action and organised in the Oivanki Youth Centre, Finland, in December 2015 (see Part IV).

Young people identified and raised developmental needs based on their own experiences, and discussed them face to face with those organising or financing international activity. The aim of this action was not only to focus development in one individual youth centre but also to stimulate discussion on how to create a stronger strategic community around youth centres and as a result a sustainable supportive environment for growing the quality and amount of international youth work in youth centres.

In short, the main idea of the research process was to study the impact international youth work produces and existing possibilities to make it visible. The report aims to answer the following questions:

- *What is international youth work? (Part one)*
- *How does international youth work differ from other work with young people? (Part one)*
- *What is impact in international youth work? (Parts 1–5)*
- *What opportunities exist to make the impact visible? (Parts 1–5)*

The research was conducted by a transnational team. Senior researcher **Anu Gretschel** Ph.D. from the Finnish Youth Research Network is the author of parts III–V. The piloting of the survey (Part II) was realised and reported commonly with Gretschel, **Tina Cupar**, Sociology Teaching Assistant at the University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts, Slovenia and **Merle Linno**, Lecturer in social work at the University of Tartu, Faculty of Social Sciences/ Institute of Social Studies from Estonia. The survey was designed in co-operation with senior researcher **Tomi Kiilakoski** Ph.D. from the Finnish Youth Research Network. Researcher **Noora Hästbacka** Master of Social Sciences from the Finnish Youth Research Network helped in analysing the Finnish survey data and writing the national report. In Part I Gretschel co-operated with the leader of *The Boost your possibilities!* project, **Antti Korhonen**, International Youth Work Coordinator, in editing and analysing the international youth work stories (Part I of this publication).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> We appreciate the help **Juho Kuokkanen** gave to the research team by composing different language versions of the Webropol survey.

## Part I

# Defining international youth work and why it is important through storytelling

# 1.

## Telling stories and mapping the content with the IDYW<sup>1</sup> 'Cornerstones of Youth Work'

This chapter aims to create a common understanding of what constitutes international youth work. The process is based on analysing stories collected from youth workers and young people.

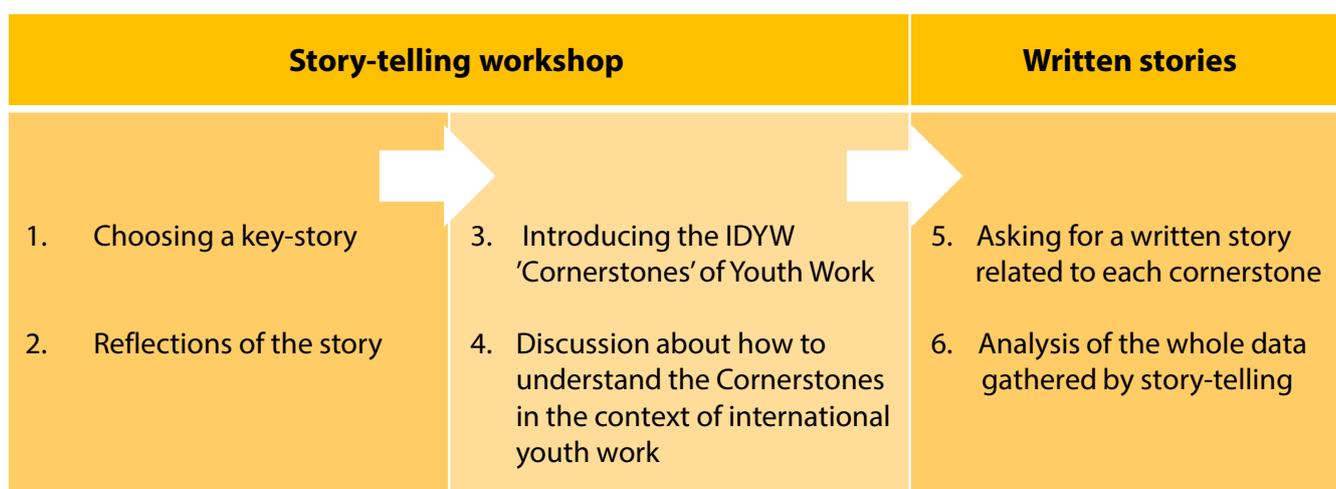


Figure 1. The story-telling process.

As shown in figure 1., the first step was to organise a storytelling workshop during a transnational learning activity of the *Boost your possibilities!* project. The workshop was included in the TLA-program in June 2016, which took place in the **Celjski Mladinski Center** in Celje, Slovenia.

16 people representing youth centres and national youth centre associations from Estonia, Finland and Slovenia participated in the workshop. The workshop process lasted approx. 4 hours. This process was based on the *This is Youth work* workshop method of the *In Defence of Youth Work* campaign from the United Kingdom (see for example IDYW 2014).

<sup>1</sup> IDYW, In the Defence of Youth Work campaign in UK. <https://indefenceofyouthwork.com/> (Accessed 22.3.2017).

The workshop started with discussions in small country-based groups. In their groups, the participants recounted some stories reflecting international youth work conducted by youth centres and chose one story to be presented to all the groups and then analysed. The story told by the Finnish representative was chosen. This story, from now on the *key-story*, and the reflections it inspired in the participants, are described in chapter 1.1. During the collaborative analysis of the story, there was open reflection, after which a systematic feed from the IDWY's *'Cornerstones of Youth Work'* was used to frame how the groups understood the key-story (see table 1).

Youth work...
Takes place in <b>open-access</b> facilities and settings in which young people <b>choose to be involved</b> .
Offers <b>informal educational opportunities</b> starting from <b>young people's concerns and interests</b> .
Works with and through their <b>peer networks and wider shared identities</b> .
Gives value and attention to <b>their here-and-now</b> as well as to their 'transitions'.
Seeks to <b>tip balances of power</b> in young people's favour.
Seeks to develop <b>mutually respectful and trusting personal relationships</b> amongst young people and between young person and adult.
Recognises <b>the significance of the workers themselves</b> , their room for autonomy and their ability to fashion an improvised yet rehearsed practice.

**Table 1.** The IDYW *'Cornerstones of Youth Work'*. (In *Defence of Youth Work* 2011, 6–7; Personal communication Bernard Davies January 2016).<sup>2</sup>

After the analysis stage, the process continued with representatives of each country being chosen to write a short story about international youth work. One cornerstone that the story should reflect was allocated to each writer in advance. The writers were chosen from among the workshop participants based on their experience and writers not attending the workshop were also invited. The stories were written individually in autumn 2016. The writers were informed about the content of the cornerstones, especially the cornerstone to which they were to bind their experience.

<sup>2</sup> The revised version of the 'Cornerstones' from 2016 includes a new cornerstone, located between cornerstones three and four: "Recognises the significance of class, gender, race, sexuality, disability and faith in shaping their choices and opportunities." (Personal communication Bernard Davies 2017).

Seven one-page written narratives were gathered as a result: two stories from Finland<sup>3</sup>, two from Slovenia and three from Estonia. Three of the stories were by young people and four were by youth centre personnel, known from now on as 'youth workers'. These stories were analysed by the researcher Anu Gretschel and the project leader Antti Korhonen. The aim of the analysis was to discover any possible new aspects of international youth work present in the stories and how the IDYW 'Cornerstones of Youth Work' could be understood in that context. During the analysis, it became apparent that the stories not only represented one cornerstone, but expressed the presence of several at the same time. The analysis of the stories is introduced in chapter 1.2.

## 1.1 Collaborative analysis of the 'key-story'

The key-story, which was chosen for general analysis in the story-telling workshop, was as follows:

*"The youth centre hired a young person from a little town, a town of minor opportunities. The young person was brought to life on deciding to start in the EVS. The EVS period was interrupted and not finished. There were bad feelings and no employment support from the state. The mentor in the youth centre did imaging work, not by telling the young person what to do, but by presenting opportunities. Now the young person studies at university."*  
(Story-telling I<sup>4</sup>; as told by a youth centre personnel representative from Finland.)

In the analysis of the key-story, the "This is youth work" IDYW-method was followed. This involved discussion that arose when the person who told the story was asked questions. Researcher Anu Gretschel and the project leader Antti Korhonen facilitated the discussion. The content of the discussion was summarised on flip charts in mind maps. At this point the participants were not yet introduced to the list of the IDYW 'Cornerstones of Youth Work', but the discussion was based on their knowledge and experience.

The key-story offered a frame through which a general discussion on "What is youth work" was led. The dialogue clarified the incident and produced further information about the case in question. Then, having transcribed the mind map content into the form of sentences, it was discovered that the youth work process the key-story represented concerned...

*...a young person, who came as a volunteer and whose needs were put first, and who was not assigned goals from the outside. The young person had the autonomy to decide how long to continue the youth work process and whether parents should be contacted.*

*... working through and clarifying feelings, reflecting on matters more neutrally, also helping to make difficult decisions and strengthening one's own opinion.*

*...the role of youth worker being similar to a mentor: asking questions, guiding, not leading, giving information, explaining the options, providing stepping stones and listening to what is happening.*

*... providing a safe environment, a place for helping young people to talk to people close to themselves and to consider the possibilities the environment has to offer.*

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3 Both stories were from the same youth worker, who offered two different stories to choose from, but both were accepted.

4 The key-story is primary data gathered in the story-telling process.

... mutual trust, mutual recognition of young people's potential.

... importance of people to each other.

... following the principles of youth work, following professional boundaries in a technical sense by fulfilling the legal dedication of the EVS sending organisation but also as a role model.

... organisational resources, the process took years and the same youth worker was still there for the same young person.

(Story-telling II; Participants of the Transnational Learning Activity on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2016.)

At this point the workshop participants were introduced to the IDYW 'Cornerstones of Youth Work', see table 1 (page 12). Each cornerstone was discussed and new understanding was again recorded on the flip chart. These notions (Story-telling III in the following) are reported in the following chapter combined with the summaries of the stories (Story-telling IV) gathered later.

## 1.2 Analysing seven stories on what constitutes international youth work

The stories were anonymised and numbered (Stories 1–7) based on the numbers of the cornerstones they were originally written to reflect. During the story analysis process based on themes, an interpretation of the story was composed under each cornerstone regardless of which cornerstone each story was originally intended to enrich.

### Cornerstone 1. "Takes place in open-access facilities and settings in which young people choose to be involved"

In the workshop discussion about what the cornerstone contents meant, the 'facility' or 'settings' was also seen as *"a connection, structure, organisation, not necessary physical or face to face"* and 'open access' was also understood as *"going to facilities where young people already are."*

(Storytelling III; Participants of the Transnational Learning Activity on 28th June 2016.)

In the collected stories, open access youth work was also understood as the opportunity to be available for and "near" to all kinds of young people. Such openness was said to be typical of all the activities organised by the youth centres.

*Youth centres in [names the country] differ according to the target group they tackle. Dedicated to non-organised<sup>5</sup> youth, they offer a variety of activities and possibilities in which young people can be involved.*

(Storytelling IV: Story 1 written by a Youth Worker.)

Some of the stories also indicated that initial involvement in international youth work had been a longer youth centre-supported process than just joining in the activities.

*I first met [says a name of a boy] when he visited the youth centre with his support youth worker. He decided to stay in the youth centre in the social youth work camp and during this period, we prepared his EVS<sup>6</sup> project; he received information about the program and project, he wrote his CV and motivation letter, we cleared his insurance and prepared his travel arrangements for staying two months in [another European country], during EVS.*

(Storytelling IV: Story 4 written by a Youth Worker.)

In this example a young person entered the youth centre as a participant in a social youth work camp and progressed to working as a volunteer in another country. The story also recounted the different forms of support that were given. In youth work, open-access means not only reducing some of the requirements but also helping young people in individual ways to reach and use affordances as they arise.<sup>7</sup>

In this case, open access also promoted and opened up a wider arena of participation, expanding horizons from local level youth work to participation on a European scale. As organisations, youth centres are able to link and overlap activities so that young people can choose to progress and develop in them. Thus, a young person enters the youth centre one way and can continue in another.

## **Cornerstone 2. “Offers informal educational opportunities starting from young people’s concerns and interests”**

*It is five years since I stepped into the world of volunteering. A world where I first realised there are several ways of learning, not only learning data from boring textbooks. Volunteering is where you can learn handy stuff and where my ideas are heard, my creativity is awakened. (Storytelling IV: Story 3 written by a young person.)*

Participation is based on the motivation of the young people themselves, and international youth work taps into that motivation and interest.

*When a young person shows interest in visiting another country or doing something different, the youth worker knows s/he has progressed hugely with this young individual.*

(Storytelling IV: Story 6 written by a youth worker.)

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5 Non-organised is here understood as “not participated in an organised way earlier.”

6 European Voluntary Service

7 See also 8.1.3 on page 50 that recounts how some youth groups need more support in order to participate in youth exchanges.

And vice versa: international processes offer young people the resources to put their own ideas into practice:

*I got a great idea that I immediately presented to a youth centre [names the youth centre] at the end of an [earlier] project, because we were just thinking about signing for our first exchange. My proposal was accepted; we participated in the tender and the project was approved. It was the biggest and best project in my five years of voluntary work with young people.*

(Storytelling IV: Story 5 written by a young person.)

There was strong support for learning outcomes in the stories. For example, the stories also expressed that the young people considered the changes that had occurred in international activity more significant than those that they had experienced in other ways.<sup>8</sup>

### Cornerstone 3. “Works with and through their peer networks and wider shared identities”

As mentioned before, it is apparent based on the stories that “wider shared identities” actually expand through international youth work. International youth work activity is a sort of “eye-opener” for young people as they find themselves part of a bigger collective that breaks down borders between local, regional and national identities.

*“At that time I really discovered how big the world is and how many opportunities we offer – they are endless! This world is not mentioned at home and at school, it was not mentioned on TV. ‘The best week of my life!’ is how I describe my [names the country] experience. I was highly motivated and strongly linked with the organisers, which carry out many exchanges and training annually.”*

(Storytelling IV: Story 3 written by a young person.)

The stories expressed that a sense of belonging to something different (greater) than before had also had an impact on the previously mentioned learning outcomes, making them significant and meaningful.

They also foregrounded a considerable amount of shared emotions and feelings as a part of the processes of international activity. It is possible that the shared identities such feelings and emotions concern, not only affect young people in terms of their collective knowledge and competences, but also in their sense of belonging and value development.

Therefore, the role of youth centres is to offer a platform for such activity and the opportunity to choose to become involved, to grow and develop. Thus, the young people have described their own transitions and growth to becoming part of the wider collective known as “youth”, as they make this jump into wider arenas. In terms of collectivity, there is also a strong sense of international youth work belonging to everyone:

*A world, which is available to everyone, where we can find opportunities for everyone and where the opportunities are created again and again.*

(Storytelling IV: Story 3 written by a young person.)

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<sup>8</sup> The results of the pilot survey reported in Part II support these notions about learning and significance.

#### Cornerstone 4. "Gives value and attention to their here-and-now as well as to their 'transitions'"

To some extent, international youth work also provides young people with the opportunity for a "fresh start" so that they can implement their goals in surroundings without the weight of previous "baggage" or stigma from their everyday life. This helps to create an environment where both the young people and youth workers can see the full potential of individuals, and thus challenge and support individual development.

*He was depressed and had no motivation at all to study or train... when he came back [from EVS] I saw a changed person.*

(Storytelling IV: Story 4 written by a youth worker.)

As the stories are read, a strong sense of empowerment emanates from them. The young people and youth workers express a strong sense of international youth work having a greater impact on their lives than just a single learning outcome. There are even expressions of "life changing experiences" as a result of one activity.<sup>9</sup>

The involvement of young people in international youth work seems to connect with individual transitions: from being young people to becoming adults, from consumers to producers and the claim of power over life decisions. The young people experience "finding themselves" through the positive challenges that international youth work activities pose and lead to transition and growth.

In the stories it is evident that young people have followed alternative paths in society from the experiences gained in international youth work. They expressed that the activities and approaches used for learning (non-formal) had been somewhat contradictory to those with which they had been raised. Also, they had not even known such approaches were available to young people before participating in international youth work activity.

In these cases, youth centres and youth workers act as a catalyst of change, offering opportunities and platforms for young people to have meaningful learning experiences that impact them on a higher level.

*Pedagogical mobility action such as; youth exchanges, camps or EVS periods, are empowering experiences when the young people can test their limits and go safely out of their comfort zone.* (Storytelling IV: Story 6 written by a youth worker.)

The youth worker used the term '*pedagogical mobility*.' Later in the story the same youth worker explained that it is not just about travelling and meeting other people, but the point is that young people "*learn more who they are.*" It is also about how the young people are "*different*" when they return due to knowing: "*s/he can do that and/or is good in this."*

(Storytelling IV: Story 6 written by a youth worker.) What the youth centres offer is a wide selection of entry points to the different 'here-and-now' of young people who also have the possibility to evolve and develop as the 'here-and-now' also develops.

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<sup>9</sup> For more about 'life changing experiences' see chapter 6, on page 41 concerning the open answers young people wrote when answering the pilot survey.

## Cornerstone 5. “Seeks to tip the balance of power in young people’s favour”

Active participation is the basis for setting up any form of international activity in the context of youth centres. Although it offers alternative entry points and challenges to embark upon, international activity can only happen when young people claim ownership for running an activity. Naturally, this is a good learning process for young people in finding their voice, having a say, and making an impact in a democratic way.

*It all started in January 2015 when we [names four persons], students of [names the youth centre], aged 18–26, who are interested in environment and environmental bottlenecks, decided to organise something memorable, something that would change the world around us and the way of thinking of the participants. So we participated in the training [names the training] organised by the national Erasmus+ agency of [names the country], where we discussed the main purposes, activities related to the project and got a lot of motivation to continue working on it by ourselves.*

(Storytelling IV: Story 2 written by a young person.)

In other words, the stories express how international activity encourages young people to take ownership of international processes themselves through their involvement and to increase their role as they continue to participate. This reciprocity between the action and progression of ownership is then supported and enabled by the youth workers in the youth centres and more experienced peers involved in the processes.

*The training period was perfect and after it the phone rang again. An already familiar voice greeted me nicely and even in the same sentence invited me to another training session, this time not as a participant, but as a coach.*

(Storytelling IV: Story 3 written by a young person.)

## Cornerstone 6. “Seeks to develop mutually respectful and trusting personal relationships amongst young people and between young persons and adults”

*You must first build up a rapport with young people before you can successfully work with them... Youth workers must have something that will help young people listen to them and cooperate with them.*

(Storytelling IV: Story 6 written by a youth worker.)

The stories show that for the youth workers and young people who wrote the stories, internationality is the ‘something’ successfully used as a measure for reaching young people within the spheres of youth work. It is a “mentor” like approach and relationship created in the interaction between young people and youth workers, where peers (more experienced young people) can also adopt the role of mentor over time as they encounter newcomers.

*“...I was just there to support them, when they needed help. In the end, the application sadly wasn't approved, but we did learn a lot in the process. That sometimes even though you try hard, you don't always succeed. But this is youth work – a safe space, always open to a variety of young people, where youth workers are always there to support them, even when things don't work out the way we plan them. A lot of them are still active in the youth centre as volunteers and this is what matters in the end: Even unsuccessful experiences are the ones that are reflected upon and they are good lessons for young people. This is, in the end, what is at the heart of youth work.”*

(Storytelling IV: Story 1 written by a youth worker.)

Based on the stories, it also seems typical that enduring relationships are created during international youth work activity. Young people are not only seen as participants in a single activity, but they are viewed from a wider perspective. Thus, youth work aims to attain long term relationships and young people are also encouraged to have a similar attitude.

### **Cornerstone 7. “Recognises the significance of the workers themselves, their room for autonomy and their ability to fashion an improvised yet rehearsed practice”**

In the workshop, this cornerstone inspired the participants to discuss *professionalism and differences between organisations in the way youth work is offered and how youth workers are supported*.

(Storytelling III; Participants of the Transnational Learning Activity on 28th June 2016.)

No other definition of ‘professionalism’, other than the will to fulfil all the requirements of the cornerstones, was mentioned during the workshop and neither during the whole storytelling process.

As for the differences between the organisations, it seems that the youth worker had a need to bring up the same elements in relation to the organisation for which she or he was working, rather than the young people’s needs in relation to the youth worker:

*Our director is very happy to send us on different international projects covering our interests. Also, almost every time we return from our projects and we have ideas as to what we would like to practise here in our own youth centre she is also very open to that. She encourages us and supports even the craziest ideas and tries to find solutions to help make the ideas happen.* (Storytelling IV: Story 7 written by a youth worker.)

Although it is often thought that international youth work generates considerably more work for the youth workers, based on the stories it is also possible to say that some of the challenges that the young people enjoyed would not have existed if the international dimension had not been introduced. In an intercultural setting, the situations that occur are new and challenging for everyone (yet in a safe way) and they also bring more authenticity to the responses and reactions of the people involved. On the other hand, youth workers also gain considerable satisfaction from international work:

*It is a fantastic feeling to motivate young people, follow their mobility and meet them when they return...*

(Storytelling IV: Story 4 written by a youth worker.)

### 1.3 Summary of the storytelling process: youth work in international contexts

This part of the publication was dedicated to identifying what constitutes international youth work. The working process was based on storytelling. The IDYW *'Cornerstones of Youth Work'* and the workshop method connected with them, offered a systematic and participatory approach for an in depth investigation into international youth work.

The story collection process works on two levels. Firstly, it recognises the significance of the storyteller's learning and experience and secondly, it also identifies the nature of the youth worker's role and support in the processes of young people participating in international youth work. It ends by determining what constitutes youth work in the situations recounted in the stories, as well as creating guidelines through which youth workers can identify their own practices. As a result of the knowledge gained from each individual story, one factor became clear: The IDYW *'Cornerstones of Youth Work'* can be used to describe international youth work. International youth work resembles any other form of youth work, it is no better than other forms of youth work, but on the other hand it is equally important.

The cornerstones helped to describe the content of youth work and its distinctiveness<sup>10</sup> compared to other work with young people. By using them in the context of international youth work it was also possible to learn more about this specific form of youth work. Based on the stories collected during the process, it is also possible to claim that international youth work is vitally important because:

- During international activity, young people set goals not only for participating in the here and now, but for life in general – they plan for the future. This naturally happens in all kinds of youth work, but the stories suggest that the international dimension brings a level of “holism” to occurring changes, which can more powerfully affect young people's lives and approaches to life.
- A typical theme found in the collected stories was how young people chose to be involved in more than one of the processes, often leading to a transition from young person to leader and setting up activities for others. The stories told of motivation and the opportunities for “going further” in roles wielding an increasing amount of responsibility.

Based on the process, it can be said that the *'Cornerstones of Youth Work'* do not necessarily appear in all the stories and practices heard, nor are they sufficiently articulated to impress the listener and reader with what is special in international youth work. The same time, the participants of the youth work workshop agreed that the cornerstones provided good guidelines for practice. This poses a clear need in the future to promote (i.e. by running IDYW workshops and training) the implementation of the cornerstones and consequently the increase in the quality of youth work by, for example, discovering good practices that are alike in youth work and international youth work and learning from them. Thus, the cornerstones can guide practice to advance excellence in all forms of youth work.

<sup>10</sup> This term was used in *Youth work story-telling: Facilitators prompt sheet* (IDYW 2016, unpublished).

## Part II

# **Young people's experiences of the impact of international activity offered by youth centres – results of the pilot survey in Finland, Estonia and Slovenia**

# How international activity has affected young people

Part 2 reports on the process of developing a survey to investigate the opinions of young people on the impact of international youth work activity in which they had participated at least once. For this purpose, the self-report method was used. For example, the survey asked how their *personal, social and intercultural competences* had grown as a result of such participation.

## 2.1 The content of the survey

The main content of the survey was composed to capture the *growth of competences* in young people during international youth work activity. Compared to other pedagogical concepts such as growth, or learning, the term 'competence' is relatively new and was only introduced in the 1970s. It has been the subject of debate and reformulation. The concept of competence can relate to personal characteristics that influence performance. Competence may also refer to performing tasks according to a certain criterion or standard. A widely used definition of competence states that competence is a cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that affects a major part of one's job or an activity (Hsieh & et al. 2012, 28–29; Tripahti & Agraval 2014). The KSA (*knowledge, skills and attitudes*) framework of competence is also used in the European Union 'Youthpass' programme's competence definitions, which have also been influential in the youth field (see European Commission 2017).

The theoretical background of how competences are understood and split into three categories: the personal, social and intercultural in this research, is based on an analysis of competences gained in the international voluntary service, IVS. The original focus of the analysis was a study conducted by Kiilakoski (2015) in co-operation with Karin Stiehr & Katharina Raschdorf (2015) to promote the recognition of such competences. The respondents were young adults from Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Mexico, Russia, Serbia, South Korea, Spain and Turkey. The survey was developed in close co-operation with the youth workers and bodies responsible for organising the international voluntary service. (See Kiilakoski 2015; Stiehr et al. 2015.)

The competence development framework from Kiilakoski (2015) and Stiehr et al. (2015) used in this report shares significant features with the framework used with the key learning competences in the Youthpass. The framework of the Youthpass has been widely used for assessing learning in international youth work.

Youthpass defines seven key competences, which are also included in the list of competences in the survey on which this report is based (European Commission 2011). The main difference between this survey and the framework used in Youthpass is the more nuanced way of defining the social and cultural dimensions of learning in international youth work. Also, the list of competences used in Youthpass could be criticised for laying too heavy emphasis on digital or mathematical competences, by naming them as separate competences while in the framework used in this study, they are included in personal skills.

Table 2 shows how the competences are categorised in this study. The first category refers to individual competences. The second category describes social or socio-psychological dynamics: *working in a group*, finding a role for oneself and being able to engage with peers. A third category widens the reflection to an understanding of *cultural contexts of society*, and the ability to understand otherness and diversity. (see also Kiilakoski 2015; Stiehr et al. 2015.)

Personal competences	Social competences	Intercultural competences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-organisation</li> <li>• self-direction</li> <li>• personal efficiency</li> <li>• learning to learn</li> <li>• taking or carrying out responsibilities</li> <li>• entrepreneurship</li> <li>• innovation and taking initiative</li> <li>• mathematical and digital competences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teamwork</li> <li>• management and organisational skills</li> <li>• communication</li> <li>• supporting others, also in disagreements</li> <li>• participation and civic competences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural awareness</li> <li>• understanding diversity</li> <li>• openness and tolerance</li> <li>• skills in native and foreign languages</li> <li>• using music, art to express oneself</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** Personal, social and intercultural competences. Based on Kiilakoski 2015; Stiehr & Raschdorf 2015.

In this research the framework from the earlier study of Kiilakoski (2015) and Stiehr et al. (2015) was used but some terms from the original survey were simplified so that young people from the age of thirteen years would be able to understand them. The survey was compiled in English and then translated into Estonian, Finnish and Slovenian.

It was not only necessary to translate the questions used in the survey. The content was also adapted to reflect the world of young people from the age of thirteen years and the focus of the survey was transformed to the context of international youth work. There were also some differences between the countries, for example in terms of their education systems.

As the survey was developed, there was also considerable discussion with the youth centres about their needs, and their experiences of the impact of their work. For example the Transnational Learning Activities offered by the project were used as an arena for discussion between the researchers and youth centre personnel. Some structured interviews were also carried out. (See part III).

The final part of the survey contained three thematic parts, as shown in figure 2. The first two parts investigated the opinions of young people on how important international activity was in terms of its perceived impact on different aspects of life, such as wellbeing and competence development. The third part investigated the level of empowerment gained by the young people due to international activity in terms of changes in behaviour, recounting the activity to friends or interest in participating again. The survey was then tested by young people and built into the Webropol online survey environment.

Young people were asked about their opinion of...		What kind actions they have taken or are going to take...
<b>1. How important international activities are for...</b>	<b>2. How much the activity helped to develop...</b>	<b>3. What kind of changes they have noticed...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further studies</li> <li>• Employment</li> </ul>	a) Personal competences like self-organisation or	a) In their thoughts and behaviour?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday life</li> <li>• For wellbeing in this phase of life</li> </ul>	b) Social competences like teamwork or	b) If they have told their experience further?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater independence, autonomy?</li> </ul>	c) Intercultural competences like the ability to understand other cultures?	c) Are they keen to participate again?

Figure 2. The content of the survey.

## 2.2 Project selection criteria in the study

The survey was completed by young people who had participated in at least one international activity organised by several youth centres in three countries. The centres were selected for the study according to proposals from national youth centre associations. The participants were then selected according to one set of criteria in Estonia that differed from the set of selection criteria for the participants in Slovenia and in Finland. In Estonia, the survey was sent to youth centres that were known to be experienced in international activity, while in Finland and Slovenia, it was sent to participants who were chosen in advance and participating or had participated in concrete international projects.

The projects in Finland and Slovenia were selected by national youth centre associations, youth centre personnel, and the researchers. First, the national associations provided information about youth centres active in the field of international youth work. These youth centres were then invited to send some examples of international activity that in their expert opinion could represent good practice in the field of international activity. Second, the national associations and researchers selected the projects that would participate in the survey, based on similar general criteria. One of the most important criterions was the description of the international activity and the reasons the youth centres gave for why certain projects would qualify as an example of good practice in their youth centre.

These reasons mainly focused on the following:

- 1) The very active role of young people in all stages of activity (from ideation to carrying out the activity as peer-leaders and evaluating it);
- 2) Positive evaluation and feed-back from young people, seeing international activity as very educational and productive in terms of their growth;
- 3) The connection of such activity with the local environment and the actual contributions of these activities to the locality;
- 4) Involvement of different countries (in some cases even non-EU countries);
- 5) An overall evaluation of the success of international activity by youth centre experts (for example, some of the youth centres were chosen by the national Erasmus+ agency for having the best examples of good practice in projects nationally).

In order to ensure some variation between the chosen projects and respondents, additional criteria were taken into consideration. Therefore, projects at least to some degree different in content and duration and implemented by different youth centres in each country, were chosen.

In Estonia, 5 youth centres participated in the survey: Rõuge Youth Club, Paide Open Youth Centre, Tähel Youth Club, Kuressaare Youth Centre of Interest and Saku Youth Centre. They were suggested by the Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres to be the most active and experienced in doing international youth work in Estonia. Over the years, they have participated in several international activities, such as youth exchange or EVS. In some cases the youth centres have also organised study visits, study practice or educational programs (Kõiv, 2015). In Estonia the link to the survey was also forwarded to some other youth centres by the national association.

In Finland, 4 youth centres participated in the survey with six different youth exchange projects. The Hyvärilä Youth Centre, located in the town of Nurmes in the north-east of Finland, sent a request to the participants of the 'Boombox Wow Goes International' youth exchange to respond to the survey. The same link was sent to the Metsäkartano Youth Centre, situated near Hyvärilä, in the municipality of Rautavaara, where the participants of the project 'Including Youth' were contacted in the same way. The Oivanki Youth Centre in Kuusamo is further north than Nurmes, and also located near the eastern border. There, the participants of two youth exchanges: 'Searching the Outdoor Potential' and 'From Sea to Sea', were asked to respond to the survey. The latter exchange involved cross-border co-operation with neighbouring countries. In the town of Kokkola on the west coast of Finland, the participants of two exchanges: 'Festivals of the World' and 'Circle of Life', were also asked to respond to the survey.

In Slovenia, 7 youth centres from different parts of Slovenia participated in the survey with 7 different international projects, six of which were youth exchanges and one, a training project. The survey was sent to the participants of the following projects: Youth Banks on the Move (Youth Centre MKC Maribor), Youth 4 Future (Youth Centre Celje), Find your way to local government: "It's up to you" (Youth Centre Dravinjske doline), Healthy 'n' wealthy (Youth Centre Zagorje), Let's act (Youth Centre Trbovlje), Sport will secure your youth (Youth Centre Krško), and LegiLAB (Infopeka Maribor). A short description of all the projects is available in the Slovenian national report (Cupar 2017).

In order to gain an overview and insight of international activity, one international youth work project is also presented as a case example: Youth Banks on the Move, implemented by the Slovenian Mladinski kulturni center Maribor. In the year 2016, the project was also chosen as the best national youth project of the previous year.

## Case: Youth Banks on the Move

The project was implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016 in cooperation with Romania. During the project, 2 youth exchanges were organised: one in Cluj, Romania, and one in Maribor, Slovenia. The exchange in Maribor lasted for 8 days and it had 20 participants: 16 young people and 4 youth workers. Each exchange also included 9 young people with fewer opportunities. The main themes of the project focused on international and developmental cooperation, specific topics related to young people (youth work, participation, youth politics), and awareness of European citizenship and democracy.

As in most projects in youth work, a variety of informal learning methods were used (like presentations, workshops, supervised work in the sports playground, debates, games, cooking, individual work, searching for information on the web, field work, karaoke). According to the description provided by the personnel of the youth centre, such activity enabled young people to gain experience and to strengthen their skills and competences, in this case mainly in the field of project work, planning, sports playground renovation and video preparation. The Slovene participants also learned some good practices from the Romanian young people, who had more experience of implementing such projects, which contributed extensively to the further development and promotion of the *Bank of ideas* in the Maribor programme. Moreover, the project connected the two partner organisations in two countries, in this case MKC Maribor in Slovenia and Assicatia pentru Relatii Comunitare, in Romania.

The active role of young people in the project is visible in the main results of the project:

- 1) the participants prepared an e-booklet *From AHH to OHH: The Path of the Bank of Ideas*, which included a presentation of the project with examples from Maribor and Cluj;
- 2) they renovated a sports playground in Maribor;
- 3) and prepared and tested a game 3, 2, 1, that aimed to promote European citizenship and inform young people about the EU in a fun way.

The other important success factors of the project were its contribution to the local community and its long-term effects. Thus, on the local level, the renovated sports playground now offers young people a new place to spend their free time and participate in sports activity. From the perspective of the youth centre, the project contributed to greater recognition of the Erasmus+ programme and youth exchanges in general. On the national level, the e-booklet might benefit other youth centres in the implementation of similar projects and in becoming members of *Youth Banks International*.

## 2.3 Profiling the young people who responded to the survey

As described in chapter 2.2, the participants of certain international projects implemented by youth centres in three countries were given the opportunity to respond to the survey. It is common in survey studies to suppose that the participants in the survey are more active than the average participant. It is also possible that those who answer are more satisfied with international activity than those who do not. These two factors probably influenced the results of the survey, which showed a high estimation of competence development and are therefore somewhat biased. On the other hand, even if the sample did have such limitations, it actually fulfilled the aim of the study from a developmental action research perspective: The study intended to present impacts which could have been stimulated by international activity. The sample in this research did just that.

The survey was conducted from May to June 2016 and it was based on anonymity. Thus, the answers the young people gave could not be linked with to their names or to the names of the youth centres. 102 young people answered the survey in three countries (see table 3). The respondents were from 15 to 31 years old, their average age being 19.8 years. In Slovenia the respondents were older than in the other two countries, with the average age of the respondents being almost 22 years. About 70 % of the respondents were female. As far as gender is concerned, only 20 % of the sample in Estonia and Finland was male, while in Slovenia there was a gender balance.

	<b>Estonia N=40</b>	<b>Finland N=23</b>	<b>Slovenia N=39</b>	<b>Total N=102</b>
<b>Amount of young people responding (N)</b>	40 <sup>[1]</sup>	23	39	<b>102</b>
<b>Average age (years)</b>	19.6	18.1	21.6	<b>19.8</b>
<b>Amount of females in respondents</b>	80 %	90	50	<b>73</b>

[1] In Estonia, 51 young people opened the survey but 11 did not complete it as they did not have any experience of international activity.

**Table 3:** Amount, age and gender of respondents.

The young people were asked what they mainly do on a daily basis and during the week (see table 4). Most of them, (60–70 % per country) were studying/attending school. 15–30 % of the respondents were working. In Finland and Slovenia, some were unemployed or in labour market training. Some respondents were otherwise occupied as volunteers (EVS) or caring for children at home.

The respondents were asked about their level of education (see table 5). Most of the respondents possessed basic compulsory or upper general secondary education: little difference can be seen between the participating countries; In the Estonian sample, the amount of respondents only with basic education is higher than in the Slovenian and Finnish samples. In Slovenia and Estonia, a number of participants had a Bachelor's degree. In Finland, most of the respondents had vocational and general secondary education. It is worth noticing that in all the countries more respondents had a general upper secondary and university education than vocational upper secondary education and non-university post-secondary education.

Almost all of the respondents in all countries had experienced group activity (Estonia 98 %, Finland 91 %, Slovenia 97 %) and additionally 30–40 % of them had also participated in individual activity (Estonia 35 %, Finland 44 %, Slovenia 33 %). The young people were asked how many times they had participated in international activity (see figure 3). The amount of first timers was approximately the same in all countries: 20 %. In Slovenia the respondents were more experienced: approximately half of them had already participated in international activity at least 4–6 times, in Estonia 35 % and in Finland 25 %. It seems that participating once provides motivation and enables further participation. The results reported in 4.2 (on page 38) also support this with almost all of the respondents wishing to participate again.

Main activity of the respondents	Estonia N=40	Finland N=23	Slovenia N=39	Total N=102
Studying or attending school	27 persons/ 67 %	15/60 %	28/72 %	<b>68/67 %</b>
Working	12/30 %	3/15 %	5/13 %	<b>19/20 %</b>
Being unemployed or in labour market training	0/0 %	4/20 %	5/13 %	<b>9/10 %</b>
Doing something else	1/3 %	1/5 %	1/3 %	<b>3/3 %</b>

Table 4. Main daily activity of the respondents.

The level of education of the respondents	Estonia N=40	Finland N=23	Slovenia N=39	Total N=102
Unfinished basic education	6 persons/15 %	2/9 %	0/0 %	10/10 %
Basic education	13/33 %	4/17 %	9/23 %	24/24 %
Vocational secondary education <sup>[2]</sup>	1/3 %	5/22 %	3/8 %	9/9 %
General secondary education	10/25 %	11/48 %	12/31 %	33/32 %
Non-university post-secondary level (BA) <sup>[3]</sup>	4/10 %	0/0 %	0/0 %	4/4 %
University level of 1 <sup>st</sup> stage (BA)	6/15 %	1/4 %	8/20 %	15/14 %
University level of 2 <sup>nd</sup> stage (MA)	0/0 %	0/0 %	7/18 %	7/7 %
University level of 3 <sup>rd</sup> stage (PhD)	0/0 %	0/0 %	0/0 %	0/0 %
Studied (a profession) in another way	0/0 %	0/0 %	0/0 %	0/0 %

[2] In Slovenia secondary education starts at the age of 15, in Estonia 15 and in Finland 16.

[3] It seems that participating once provides motivation and enables further participation.

Table 5. The level of education of the respondents.

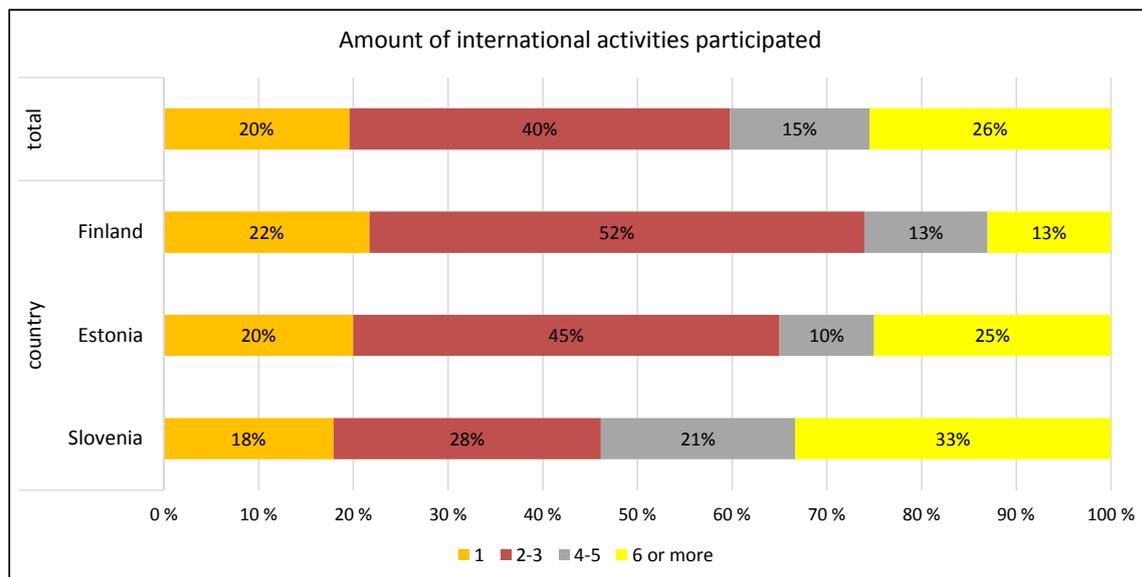


Figure 3. Amount of international activity in which the respondents had already participated.

# 3.

## Evidencing competence growth in international youth work: results of the pilot survey

### 3.1 The importance of international activity in different aspects of life

In general, the majority of respondents see international activity as an important factor contributing to the development of all five aspects studied, with percentages of those seeing them as important or very important ranging from 64 % (further studies) to 93 % (greater independence, autonomy) (see figure 4). In terms of the individual aspects, the main differences occur between two groups of answers. In all three countries, the respondents highly value the contribution of international activity to the development of their independence and autonomy (93 %), as well as to their current well-being (86 %); while on the other hand, their perception of the role of international activity on employment (68 %) and further studies (64 %) is lower.

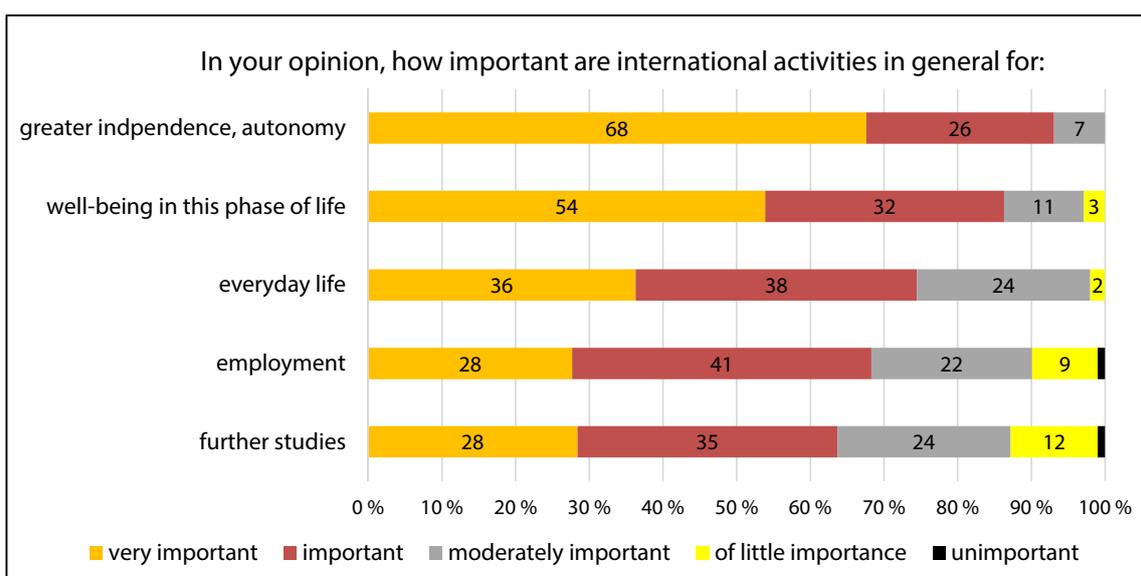
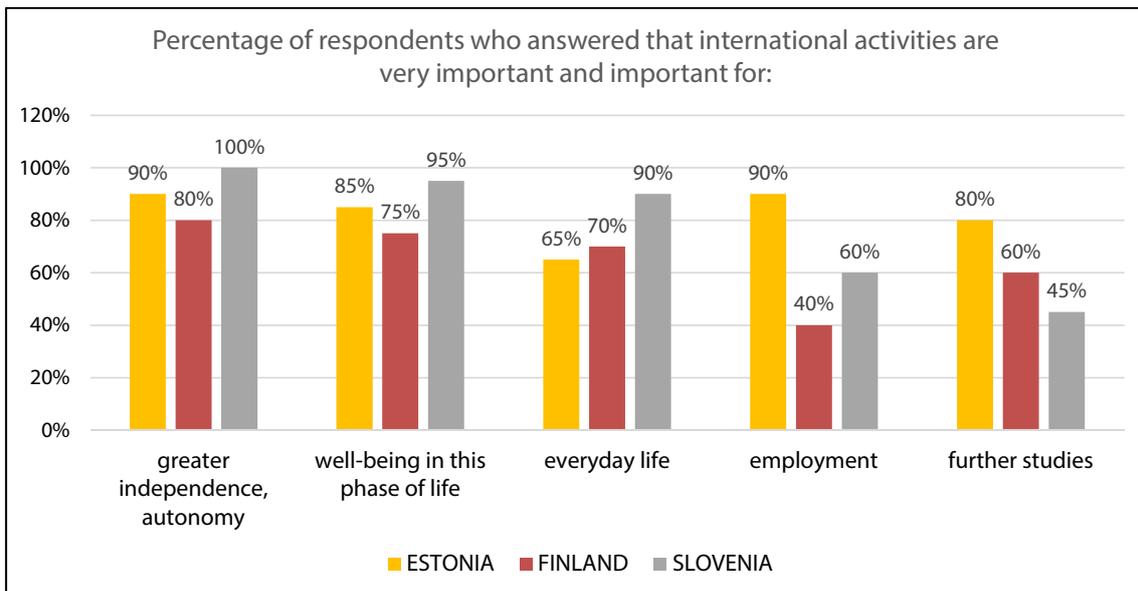


Figure 4. The importance of international activity on different aspects of life, Estonia, Finland, Slovenia.

As depicted in figure 5, the difference between these two groups of answers is most evident in Finland and Slovenia. In these two countries, a high number of respondents recognises the importance of international activity for greater independence, autonomy (Finland: 80 %, Slovenia: 100 %), and their current wellbeing (Finland: 75 %, Slovenia: 95 %), while their perception of the importance of such activity is much lower for employment (Finland: 40 %, Slovenia: 60 %) and further studies (Finland: 60 %, Slovenia: 45 %). On the other hand, there is much less variation between these two groups of answers among Estonians who accorded similar amounts of importance of international activity to all aspects of life (all between 80 % and 90 %). At the same time, Estonia had the lowest amount of respondents who did not assign any importance of such activity to all five aspects studied.



**Figure 5.** Percentage of respondents who see international activity as important for different aspects of life, by country.

There are several possible explanations for why the respondents accorded international activity with more importance as regards the different aspects of life covered in the survey. In Slovenia, for example, the respondents' open answers show that although many young people recognise the impact of international activity on the development of their competences, they rarely directly emphasise the connection between these competences and employment or further studies. This implies that the lower amount of importance accorded to the life aspects may not simply be due to actual poorer applicability of knowledge gained, but is connected to other factors as well. One such factor could be young people's ability to recognise the effects that can be reflected directly in their everyday life (e.g. greater autonomy and other immediate effects, such as new friendships, wider horizons and the opportunity to travel), than those usually perceived more indirectly or are not among the current concerns of the young people in the survey. Also, considering the respondents' age and the fact many are still in upper secondary education, their answers reflect that they may not have had the opportunity to apply the com-

petence gained from international activity at work or study, in practice. Therefore, their evaluation might just be a reflection of their understanding of the current usefulness of the experiences gained. Additionally, some of the aspects of life in the survey question (especially employment and further studies) were described quite generally, allowing broad interpretations of their meaning.

Although the impact of international activity was considered less important to some aspects of life, the results in general show that it nevertheless has a positive impact on employment and further studies. This is in line with previous research, which has shown that involvement in youth work, in both general and international activity, enhances young people's employability (Souto-Otero et al. 2013; Senyuva 2014; CIMO 2014). The research states that participation in youth work activity helped young people to develop the skills and competences desired by employers, gain experience, and develop networks and contacts that could be useful in finding employment opportunities (ibid.). Therefore, future research should focus more on investigating the actual identification of such impacts among young people. This could be done by reformulating the descriptions of the aspects of life in the survey, e.g. by focusing on several specific aspects of employment, more detailed descriptions, and generally making the aspects of life covered in the survey more understandable to young people. (See the suggestions for the development of the survey in appendices 1 and 2).

## 3.2 Impact on competence development

The impact of international activity in youth work on competence development was investigated with three different types of question. The respondents were asked to assess whether participation in international activity had helped them develop personal, social and intercultural competences, develop skills and attitudes and finally, had their thoughts and behaviour changed as a result of engaging in international activity. Those who answered "yes" to this question were able to provide additional information in the form of an open answer and to explain how (See the questions in detail in appendix 1).

The analysis of the combined answers to the survey showed that the respondents recognised **growth in their intercultural competences**. The statements concerning gained intercultural competences with which the respondents from all the countries agreed the most, comprised openness towards other cultures and tolerance, understanding of people with different societal and cultural backgrounds and lack of prejudice. For example 100 % of Finnish youth participating in the survey strongly agreed or agreed that international activity provides such competences. Also, foreign language skills, the ability to use languages other than mother tongue for speaking and writing were highly appreciated by the respondents of all the countries. These findings are supported by responses to questions concerning different skills, attitudes, and knowledge. For example, the answers focusing on skills and attitudes also were in line with improved foreign language skills and tolerant attitudes were also highly appreciated among the respondents of all three countries. These competences (improved foreign language skills and the growth of tolerance) were also mentioned to be the important aspects of international youth work that experienced participants would emphasise to newcomers.<sup>1</sup> The growth in ability to use and

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1 The explanations were given in answer to the open question: "If you were to describe one of the international projects you have participated in to another young person, what you would mention? (Please include at least three different points you consider important to mention)".

practice a foreign language was also valued by the Estonian youth workers interviewed in the qualitative part of the research (see Kalmus 2016).

The respondents agreed less with the notion that mother tongue skills improved as a result of international activity: 65 % of the Estonian, and 74 % of Finnish and Slovenian respondents agreed. Growth of home country and culture awareness was also recognised less by the respondents. This could be because it might be harder to connect mother tongue learning and own culture when focusing on learning about other cultures and languages.

In addition to the experience young people had about the growth of their intercultural competences, the perceived growth of personal and social competences was studied. Overall, the respondents from all three countries recognised to a large degree, improvement in personal and social competences. The respondents of all three countries agreed strongly with the statement, that participating in international activity had helped them to **develop personal competences** such as organisation skills, self-direction and the ability to set and achieve life purposes and goals; taking and carrying out responsibility, a sense of purpose and responsibility, and the ability to act accordingly; entrepreneurship, innovation and initiative, the ability to turn ideas into action, the confidence to take on new challenges and not to give up: 85–95 % of the respondents of all three countries answered they strongly agreed or agreed that international activity had enhanced the above competences.

Learning competence was also seen to be improved through international activity, but there was some difference between the countries. 85 % of the respondents from Estonia, while 72 % of Slovenian and only 65 % of Finnish respondents agreed that this competence is improved by international activity. In Estonia, learning as a mission and characteristic of youth work is strongly emphasized in legislation and policy documents (Youth Work Act). This could explain why the Estonian respondents recognised this competence growth somewhat more: they associate youth work activity with learning. Of course it should be remembered that the sample was too small in this piloting study for making any further generalisations.

Mathematical competences as personal competences, meaning the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations were marked as poorly achieved in international activity in all the countries (see similar results in Stiehr & Raschdorf 2015). If approximately 42 % of Estonian and Slovenian respondents agreed that mathematical competences could be improved, only 18 % of the Finnish respondents did so. The low acknowledgement of growth in mathematical competences could be explained by a lack of awareness of how mathematical thinking and competence is needed and used in non-classroom environments. Maybe the respondents are simply unable to identify growth in such competences. Furthermore, international youth work activity organisers are faced with a challenge for the future: how to make mathematical competences more visible in youth work.

The improvement of digital competences as personal competences was recognised more by the Slovenian respondents (71 %) and less by the Estonian and Finnish respondents (52 %). A later survey conducted in Estonia among youth workers and young people about digital competences in youth work showed that both participant groups wish to improve their digital competences with the aim of using modern digital devices and solutions to improve and simplify how youth work is organised (Käger, Kaldur, Vollmer, Talur, Krenjova, Hänni 2016).

In **social competences**, all the listed sub-competences (table 2 in page 23) were identified as highly improved by the respondents of all three countries. The competences are connected with empowerment and activating young people in youth work and according to their answers, such empowerment and activation was achieved. Those who used open answers to share their experience of changes in their thoughts and behaviour also emphasised growth of tolerance and a broadened world view. Some of the respondents described how they became more open when communicating with other people:

*"I like to talk to people; I'm more frank in communication." (EST/Y)*

*"I have broadened my horizons and as a result, they are still expanding." (SLO/Y)*

The respondents mentioned the need to change one's behaviour and responses as the context changes and also to pass on skills and knowledge:

*"It is enriching your life and sharing your own riches." (EST/Y)*

*"... at the same time I was always in contact with new people, I communicated and started to recognise the limits of my patience, which helped me to improve on a personal level as well." (SLO/Y)*

In these answers, the empowering character of international youth work is visible. Young people who perhaps started as service "consumers" have become active participants and teachers.

## 4.

# Communicating the ongoing and future

## 4.1 Young people were active in sharing their experiences with others

The young people were asked if they had distributed information about international activity to their peers. In all three countries almost everyone had done so. In fact, 90–100 % of the respondents per country answered yes to this question.

The young people were also asked how they had disseminated information about their experiences of international activity. This was an open question, meaning that the respondents were not given any alternative answers from which to choose, but they were expected to describe their method of communication themselves.

The answers to the above questions were content analysed in their original languages. When comparing the answers between the countries, it was noticed that in several cases, the respondents from Estonia and Finland concentrated on describing the content of what they shared or how they felt during and about the activity, for example how proud they were of being involved in the activity. In Finland one person for example used the verb “brag” in the answer: *“I bragged that actually yes I was there.”* (FIN/Y)

The young people established that they communicated actively about international activity while they were involved in it and afterwards. Communication during the activity often seemed to occur online. In their open answers, the young people also used verbs related to the use of social media and ICT tools such as ‘sharing’ and ‘blogging’.

*“When I was in EVS I had a blog about my activity there. I also shared my activity in Facebook.”* (EST/Y)

Facebook was mentioned several times as a powerful tool for presenting ongoing activity to other young people.

*“I kept other young people directly informed through Facebook during international activity, which was most interesting to my acquaintances who then already knew everything about my activities before we even got the chance to see each other, and they were very interested in where to find more information about the activity and where to apply ...”* (SLO/Y)

*“I created a group in Facebook – ‘Youth Exchange Info’, join if you like :), I tell my friends what youth exchange will be next and share general information. I plan to create my own youth exchange organisation :)”* (EST/Y)

The answers to the open question also create a distinction between formal and informal communication. In the Slovenian sample for example, sharing information is described by almost all the respondents as occurring in ways which can be categorised as informal. For example, the young people have had conversations where they have described their positive experience to others. Every third Slovenian respondent also mentions the use of different social media and computer assisted communication technology, such as e-mail.

Young people have also been active in informing others how to find useful information on web sites or in youth centres. In many cases, the intention is not just to distribute information, but the information is passed on so that the recipients may feel that they would also like to participate in the activity.

*"As an active member of different clubs and associations, I've always loved to tell others about my adventures, this was one of the ways to encourage others to participate in this kind of activity. I also realised that a lot of people hesitate to participate in international projects because of different kinds of fears, so I wanted to show and tell them that there's nothing to be afraid of." (SLO/Y)*

*"I shared information about a forthcoming activity." (EST/Y)*

Elements of activeness in the form of *inviting*, *motivating* and *assuring* are to found in many answers.

*"I invited other young people to take part in the activity." (EST/Y)*

Some of the young people also use the verb recommend, like "I recommend you apply" (FIN/Y) or "I recommend it to everyone" (FIN/Y; SLO/Y).

Also, some formal arenas were used to distribute information to peers such as 'organising closing events' (SLO/Y) at the end of an activity or workshops in youth centres, schools or in local communities. Young people also used such activity as a theme in their presentations in schools and educational institutions. The respondents also mentioned publishing stories in newspapers. For example, almost every second Slovenian respondent mentioned they had been involved in organising this type of more formal communication process, mostly used after the activity had ended.

## 4.2 Commitment to further participation

Almost all of the young people who responded to the survey in all three countries expressed their motivation to participate in international activity again in the future. Only three of the about 100 respondents said they were unsure about participating again.

The young people were asked using an open question to describe an activity in which they would like to participate in the future. All the answers given by the respondents mentioned activity located abroad. This notion is understandable because not all activity counted as international happens abroad. For example, according to a survey conducted by the AEOYC in autumn 2015, a characteristic of Estonian international youth work involves the tendency of Estonian youth centres to receive more exchange partners they send abroad for the exchange period (Kõiv, 2015).

Some of the respondents hope for similar forms of activity, such as youth exchanges, in which they had already participated and some also wanted a role in organising them. The young people were also keen to participate in training, seminars, courses and different kinds of meeting related to youth projects and policy making in international contexts. As mentioned previously, they were also interested in study or work related activity such as student exchanges and work trips abroad.

In the answers to the open questions, many of the young people also expressed the wish to engage in forms of international youth work with which they were not already familiar. For instance, the desire to do voluntary work through organisations such as the EVS was mentioned often. It is also known that voluntary work is very popular and young people have to queue to obtain such work.

Based on the open answers the young people gave, it seems that although young people appreciate travelling and entertainment as a part of international activity, they would also like international activity to have clear aims and for it to be targeted at specific topics.

*(I want to participate)“... in an activity that has a point and is not just for fun, but has a big impact.” (SLO/Y)*

The young people named many different themes that they hoped would be covered during the next international activity in which they participate. Themes such as entrepreneurship, self-development, understanding different cultures, history and ICT were mentioned. They also listed topics dealing with current issues in society: political activity (e.g. meeting international leaders and politicians, participating in diplomatic and political events, topics related to political culture), social politics, ethical questions/issues, gender equality, intercultural and local community contacts, and topics related to self-sufficiency, sustainable farming and society's attitudes towards nature and the environment. In the field of culture, the suggested themes were mainly related to art, music and theatre. Some were also linked to physical activity (different sports, hiking, camping and survival camp) and to media (photography, journalism). Also, volunteer work related to health care as part of humanitarian operations and among the distressed in general in developing countries was mentioned.

## 5.

# What young people tell their peers: the importance of becoming friends

It is typical that the content planning of surveys is based on the assumptions of adult actors such as the researchers and those working with young people. In this survey, as well as the substantial amount of structured questions, there were many open questions to ensure that the themes and details raised by the young people would be heard. One question, namely Question 11, was planned so that the respondents could actively prioritise what they value in international activity. They were asked what they would tell their peers about the international activity in which they had participated. The question was formulated as follows:

**Question 11.** If you were to describe one of the international projects in which you have participated to another young person, what would you tell him/her? (Please include at least three different points you consider important to mention to her/him).

The answers (N=37 from Estonia, 17 from Finland and 34 from Slovenia) were analysed in their original languages using content analysis. One country was chosen to lead the analysis (Slovenia) and the researcher working with Slovenian data was the first to name the theme categories which arose in the data. The suggested categories were tested with data from the other two countries and it was then agreed whether they were suitable.

During the analysis, it rapidly became clear that young people in all the countries valued aspects of international youth work to a similar degree when asked what they would prefer to tell other young people. Also, most of the themes they raised had already been mentioned in one form or another in the answers to the survey's structural questions.

However first, the analysis also revealed something new: the young people consistently highlighted the importance or 'meaningfulness' of **making friends**. One respondent even summarised thus: "*People are the best part of youth exchanges!*" (EST/Y) The importance of the company of others was also expressed in the following answers:

*"Getting to know brilliant new people."* (FIN/Y)

*"Interpersonal cooperation and the kindness of youth workers."* (SLO/Y)

Among the respondents *making friends* was accompanied with notions of how *easy* it is during international activity, because there was a "spirit of community and a "*feeling of friendship*" – and because "*the encounters were new*":

*"It is easy to get to know people; the situation is new for everyone."* (FIN/Y)

The young people also reported that making friends was not only possible, but really happened to them: they made friends – “*all around the globe*” and it was also mentioned by several respondents that they made *lifelong ones*:

*“You can make new acquaintances to last the rest of your life.” (EST/Y)*

Secondly, “**learning from other countries, cultures and languages**”, as described by one Finnish respondent, was often mentioned as a topic worth discussing with other young people. For example, it was reported how international activity created opportunities “*to gather knowledge from other cultures and countries*” (FIN/Y) or “*to closely experience and see the lifestyle and habits of fantastic young people.*” (FIN/Y)

Many of the answers discussed, from a variety of perspectives, meeting young people from other countries. The young people reported that they would wish to tell their peers about *learning to get along, understanding and being more interested in other cultures* not only in terms of contact with foreign cultures but also in terms of *raising awareness of one’s own culture*. Many of the respondents also refer to an experience of seeing the world *differently* after participating in international activity and to what extent and how a *broadened world view* is typical of such international activity. The following two answers fully express the aspect of intercultural learning, which was considered worth discussing with other young people.

*“Getting to know other cultures, people, experience of working in a team and cooperation, as well as getting to know people from all over the world and creating friendships.” (SLO/Y)*

*“Culture soup. New young people, culture and experiences. Perfect.” (FIN/Y)*

The third most mentioned issues were related to the theme of “**acquiring new knowledge or competences**.” For example, the improved ability to communicate in a foreign language was often mentioned as a theme worth mentioning to other young people. In such answers this competence was also connected with the growth of self-confidence:

*“You can discover that some people speak worse than you, even if in Estonia you have felt that you are not good (at English).” (EST/Y)*

This feeling of growing self-confidence can have a strong influence and is empowering as regards future situations where one might be expected to use a foreign language.

However, acquisition and use of foreign languages were not the only competences thought worthy of mentioning to other young people. Skills in group leadership, organisation, self-expression and the stimulation of new ideas due to participation in international activity, were also reported by the respondents. The value of such learning was expressed through notions that the acquired skills were new, important and had benefitted the respondents.

It was previously discussed how contact with other cultures seemed to broaden world view. According to several answers, such contact had also changed the way young people saw themselves and how they perceived the various opportunities available to them:

*“International work provides many different opportunities, and methods to achieve what we want.” (FIN/Y)*

*“Getting to know yourself, your competences and goals. Personal growth is guaranteed.” (SLO/Y)*

## 6.

# Meaningfulness of international activity as perceived by young people

The quality of the data was the reason for writing this chapter. The open answers written by the respondents obligated the researchers to find ways to highlight the passion that the young people expressed in their answers. They highly valued the experience of international activity and many of them raised assumptions about the sustainable consequences it would have in their life.

*"...it was an unforgettable experience in the international program." (SLO/Y)*

*"I have broadened my horizons and consequently they are still broadening." (SLO/Y)*

*"You can see and experience so much during EVS. It changes you and your future life totally, in a good way!" (EST/Y)*

The young people compared the experience of international activity to all of their other experiences and reported it as being the *"best ever"*, as one Finnish respondent described. Another Finnish respondent also considered the experience sufficiently valuable to be recommended *"to all other young people."*

The young people also described how international activity had best affected them:

*"After international activity I feel like a more active member of society, responsible for myself and others, I'm becoming more and more open-minded." (SLO/Y)*

The experience was described by an Estonian respondent as being *unprecedented in the way it created an opportunity for learning to be more flexible.* A Finnish respondent explained how she or he *"...got through everything"* and will do so in the future. This is because it is unlikely that a more complicated situation than the one experienced during a youth exchange in Slovenia will occur. It was resolved when the young people adopted a plan B and the young people knew who to call for help thanks to the good relations they had built with people in the countries involved. Or like a Slovenian said: *"Realising that the world is not so big and scary."*

According to another Slovenian respondent, getting to know other people created the notion that people have more in common than previously thought. *"Blurred pictures"* and some general information obtained from the media are considered impersonally as *"not my concern"*; whereas meeting other young people *"makes everything become more 'real'"*.

According to an Estonian respondent, young people who go abroad and make friends will later *"reconcile"* the world, because, as described by a Slovenian respondent: *"The same changes in society are wanted and the same obstacles are seen."* The Slovenian answer also states that networking occurs across national borders, especially if people sharing similar concerns cannot be found in one's own country: *"Even if we do not reach concrete goals, such activity is a great opportunity to develop our own ideas, form our views on different current events and shape our values."*

# 7. Summary of the results of the pilot survey

The overall aim of the survey was to gain an overview of the impact of international youth work conducted by youth centres in order to discover what opportunities exist to make that impact visible. In this part we have described the process of using a survey for measuring the form of impact international youth work has on young people.

The survey used mostly focused on the competence development of young people and it was targeted at those who have participated in international activity organised by youth centres in three countries. The study focused on participants of projects organised by the youth centres with long experience in international youth work. It was supposed that the projects produced by these centres would have a strong impact so that it would be possible to test the survey as an instrument for making this impact visible. In short, the idea was to discover the form of impact when international activity is working well.

The piloting of the survey began in spring 2016 with small samples estimated to be sufficient for providing feedback on how the survey could be developed further for regular use in the future. The version of the survey used was a fine-tuned version of an earlier competence focused study (Kiilakoski 2015; Stiehr et al. 2015) with new areas of questions stemming from the information needs based on the context of this research process.

The results of the pilot survey identified considerable growth in the investigated competences recognised by the respondents. There were altogether 102 respondents from three countries. On average 75–95 % of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they recognised growth in intercultural (includes for example openness and tolerance), personal (to set and achieve life goals) and social (co-operation to achieve common goals) competences. The results are high for all the countries and comparable to the results of studies by Kiilakoski (2015) and Stiehr & Raschdorf (2015).

In general, the majority of respondents see international activity as an important factor contributing to all five aspects studied. Those who saw it as important or very important ranged from an average of 64 % (further studies) to 93 % (greater independence, autonomy). The other three aspects investigated were the importance of international activity to current well-being, employment and everyday life.

Although the survey contained many questions where the alternative answers were structured beforehand by the researchers, it also contained many questions where the young people were able to describe their experiences from their point of view. The amount and quality of these answers was surprisingly high when compared to other studies of which the research team members are aware. The young people also brought some themes into the discussion which were not directly referred to in the survey.

That the young people highlighted the importance of 'making friends' in their open answers can be considered the strongest challenge to the pre-established content of the survey. The descriptions of this process varied from how making friends is easier in the international context because the situation is new to everyone, to how these new found relationships can last a whole lifetime. It could be that for young people, the action of making friends was more attractive and important than gaining the social competence needed to make friends later on in life. They also suggested that other young people who chose to participate in international activity would benefit in the same way.

The research team also noticed how the open answers expressed a feeling of passion. This phenomenon was similar regardless of where the respondents were from or the language they used to answer the survey. International activity was not just an activity among others, but it was described as meaningful or even the most meaningful experience the young people had ever had. This notion of high meaningfulness also explains to some degree why the results were so high when the young people estimated their personal growth in terms of gaining competences or changes in attitudes. It can be said that learning did occur on a very personal level and emotions were included in the learning process.

Although the sample was small, the gathered background data also offered interesting information. One fifth of the respondents were newcomers to international activity. There were also many respondents who had already participated in such activity at least four times. Almost all of them hoped to participate again. Such facts indicate seemingly healthy processes: not just the same young people have the opportunity to participate but it is also possible to do so several times. Young people are satisfied with the activity as demonstrated by the desire to participate again.

As for responsible roles offered to young people during international activity, the survey could investigate this further with an additional question. For example, it could ask whether the activity felt youth-driven, did they feel involved enough and owners of the processes of which organising and participating in international activity consist. There could also be a question which asks directly whether the respondent would like to have a more active role in the future.

The average age of the young people from each of the three countries, was approx. 18 to 22 years. It seems that international youth work offers youth work a channel to operate with older young people. The fact that there were very few males (10–20 %) in the samples from Estonia and Finland, whereas in Slovenia the sample represented almost an equal amount of males and females, could be considered worrying. If the amount of males who responded to the survey is reflected in international activity, this should be considered in practice. Another cause for concern is that in all the countries, young people in general secondary education participate more in international activity than those in vocational secondary education.

The pilot study revealed that the survey would need some modification before it can be used regularly by youth centres. These notions are reflected in appendices 1 and 2.

## Part III

**More on the  
impact of youth  
work and what is  
required of youth  
centres and beyond**

## 8. Interviewing youth centre personnel

The results of the pilot survey in the previous chapter provided a frame to present the positive impact of youth work on young people. Thus, the survey as an evaluation tool also seemed to work well in terms of making this impact visible. On the other hand, simply measuring the impact international youth work has on young people fails to capture its wider ramifications.

In this chapter, the interviews conducted with Finnish youth centre personnel are reported. They were asked what kind of impact international youth work has according to their knowledge. The main aim of the interviews was to discover evidence of wider impacts in order to propose evaluation instruments for documenting the impact of international youth work in the future.

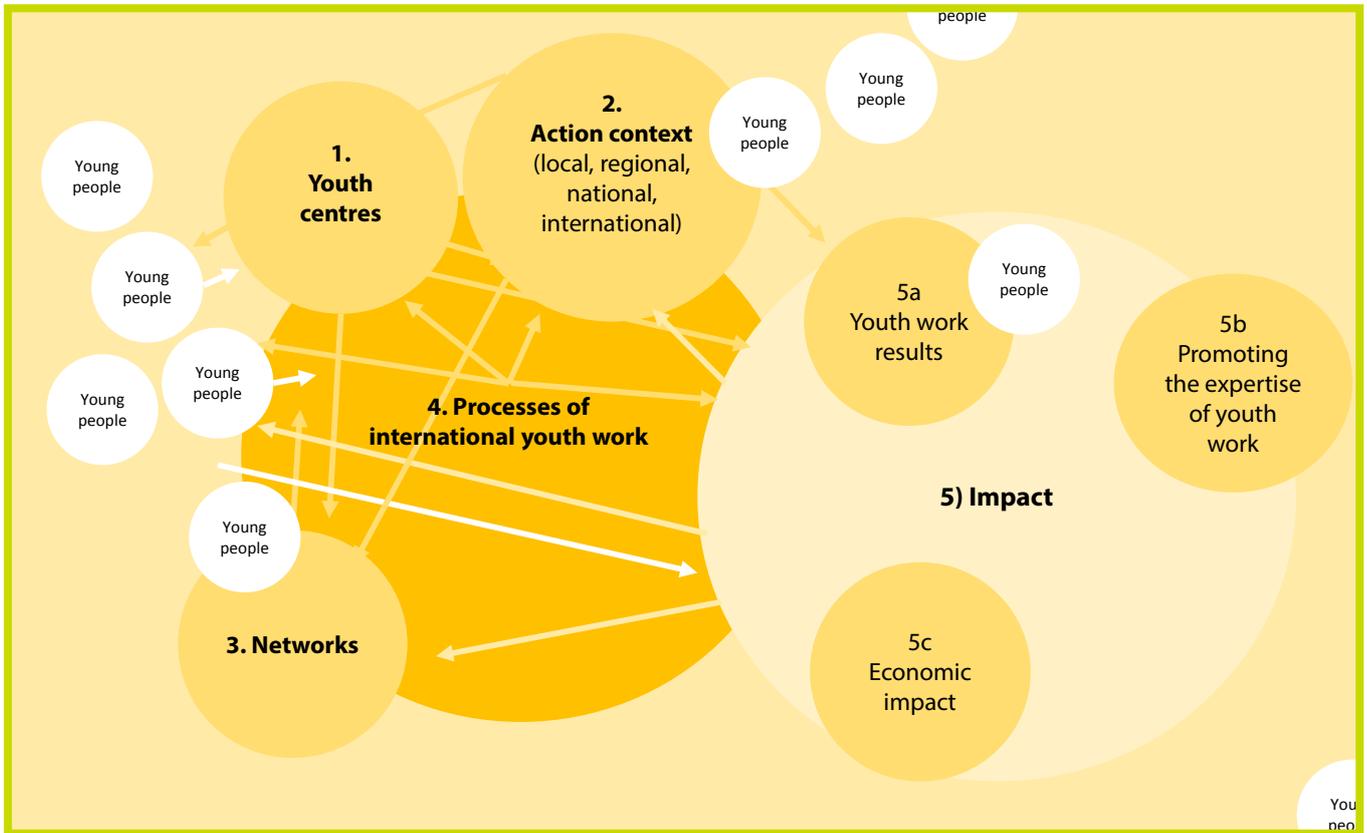
This was accomplished using data gathered in the interviews studying international youth work practices, which were broadened to evidence existing successful practice in order to identify how the quality of such work can be sustained or improved in the future.

Four interviews were conducted in four different youth centres where two representatives of youth centre personnel were interviewed in pairs. Those interviewed were the international work coordinator and one other youth centre personnel representative with long experience of international work at the centre.

The centres were the same as those whose participants were asked to respond to the survey (see chapter 2, page 22). Hyvärilä Youth Centre is located in a north-eastern town in Finland, called Nurmes, and Metsäkartano Youth Centre is situated in the municipality of Rautavaara. The Oivanki Youth Centre in the town Kuusamo is located further North in Finland and near the eastern border. One interview was conducted in the Villa Elba Youth Centre located on the west coast of Finland in a town called Kokkola. It can be said that all these youth centres are located within sparsely populated regions.

The length of each interview was two hours. The interviews were conducted and analysed by researcher Anu Gretschel. In the following, the interviews are referred as “Youth Centre 1–4” (in short YC 1–4). The interviews were numbered randomly and they took place between November 2015 and March 2016. They were analysed with the idea of producing a combined impression of the knowledge possessed by the personnel. Also, direct quotations from the interviews are provided to increase the authenticity of the report. Although each youth centre was represented by two interviewees, their voices have been combined in the quotations for the purposes of this report.

Based on the interviews, several factors are included in the processes causing the impacts (Figure 6). Youth Centres (1.) have an operational environment (2.). As regards international youth work, this environment is also international but includes considerable local, regional and national cooperation.



**Figure 6.** Based on the interviews, international youth work organised by youth centres impacts in three ways: the first matches the impact of all youth work affecting individuals, groups, communities and society, but it also develops youth work expertise and to some degree stimulates the regional economy. Dynamic local, regional and international networks are seen as crucial in conducting international youth work successfully. Young people are not seen as passive recipients but they operate as important partners within a dialogical relationship with youth work and in a variety of networks.

Based on the interviews and perhaps rarely mentioned in public discussion, it was also interesting that the impact of international youth work is not a result of the youth centres alone but it is enabled through various networks (3.). Although such networks play a significant role in distributing international youth work, the organisations in them also gain notable benefits from co-operating with youth centres. Not only are these benefits economic in nature, they are all the more noteworthy when considered in relation to the growth of human resources such as expertise.

The interviews also showed that international youth work (4.) as a field of action includes a variety of youth work processes<sup>1</sup>, and activities such as youth work projects, training schemes, theme weeks and duties to provide expertise<sup>2</sup>.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, it was possible to divide the impact (5.) youth centres have through international youth work, into three categories as follows:

- a) *Youth work results,*
- b) *Promoting the expertise of youth work and*
- c) *Economic impact.*

The content of the factors (1–4) and impacts (5a–c) are briefly explained in the following subchapters. The explanations are given so as to support the discovery of evaluation methods needed to make the impact of international youth work visible.

As figure 6 indicates, the young people have manifold roles in international youth work. Not only are they part of the context and should benefit the most from it, but they are also the organisers of activity for other young people and participants within co-operation in different networks.

## 8.1 Youth work results

In the interviews, international youth work was described as “*educational activity, youth work – action and programmes with a purpose, aim and objective*” (YC 2). It was seen to include a point related to learning (YC 1). How the youth centre personnel described their experiences of the impact of international activity on young people, is not reported here in detail because it generally matched the results gathered in the survey pilot (see chapter 2). Instead, the report focuses on what was said in the interviews about the processes of impact and the wider implications of this impact beyond the individual level.

The personnel recounted long-term results and how one project ‘spread’, generating two more related projects. They also reported how important it is to not only organise unrelated short-term trials, but to create ensembles where young people can refine their project ideas from one project to another and at the same time grow into more responsible roles involving planning in advance and project implementation. Such growth can take time as can the discovery of one’s own strengths. Continuity also makes it easier to discern competence gains and is also preferred by project funding systems such as Erasmus+.

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1 For more about the process nature of youth work see part 1 of this publication, p. 10 and for example Ord 2016.

2 The state has provided subsidies in the form of grants to the youth centres and may do so in the future so they can continue to fulfil their role in the field of youth work and activities (see *Youth Act of Finland 1285/2016*; *Youth Act 72/2006*). Furthermore, the Finnish Youth Centres Association has been named as a ‘*youth work service and development centre*’ by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This status has now been changed to ‘*national youth work centre of expertise*’ (ibid.). In order to be given this status in the future, there will be an application process. Researcher Junttila-Vitikka has studied how the impact of national organisations providing expertise, such as the *youth work service and development centre* has been and can be documented (see Junttila-Vitikka 2016).

On the other hand, the significance of short-term development was also mentioned in the interviews. For example, if a young person learns to climb and is then able to scale the climbing wall, what evaluation methods are needed to acknowledge and make visible momentous positive experiences of this kind?

### 8.1.1 Community mind-set breakthroughs

Based on the interviews, it is possible to state that youth centre personnel have noticed how international activity has modified attitudes in local communities. For example, when a young EVS-volunteer, *“worked and engaged in the local community”* (YC 3), either in a school, kindergarten or youth centre, increasingly positive attitudes towards foreigners were noticed.

Furthermore, this was not only true among young people but among persons of all ages who gain new perspectives in intercultural relations due to their personal contact and interaction with, for instance EVS volunteers. Visits in the community, by volunteers and youth exchange groups from abroad, offer everyone concerned the occasion to *“become exposed to internationality or to interact with international people”* (YC 2). The way such contacts occur varies considerably: A volunteer may stay in a community for months or there may be theme workshops or final youth exchange concerts reaching hundreds of young people. It was said that there were more than 5.000 people involved when all the international activity of one youth centre was acknowledged (YC 2) over a period of six months.

Although the main focus of international youth work is to offer experiences of growth to young people, such experiences also rub off on older people (YC 3). It seems that young people are less prejudiced towards internationality than older people (YC 2). International relations are also described as an issue about which older people have a lot to learn from young people (YC 1). Political disagreements between nations have little relevance in the relationships between young people during international youth work; people are people to each other and for many this can also be a fresh start:

*... what I think is great in international youth work is that when they step in here as a camp begins, they are just young people, they don't have politics, a skin colour, religion... they are simply young people, just people, with a first name... if there happen to be young people involved who feel that in their previous lives, they've had a load to bear due to their background or that there are issues lurking in the background, maybe some problems, then in a way they've made it to a place where they can be the same as others, simply a young person among other young people (YC4).*

The question is not only about attitudes towards foreign people, but also how different local ethnicities have mixed as a result of international youth work (YC 3). It is also important to be aware that not all people have negative attitudes based on where they live (YC 1). In order to expand international youth work into new regions, it is important to remember that adults are often in charge of deciding whether or not to embark on international activity. There are even concrete obstacles: some municipalities have forbidden their personnel to travel in order to save money. This has restricted how municipal youth workers can lead youth exchange groups abroad (YC 2).

International youth work activities are also often represented in local media. Consequently, international youth work is seen as a PR-platform for all forms of youth work. Young people also receive positive publicity through international activity: they are, can and do.

### 8.1.2 Involving organisations, geographical areas and young people who are not internationally active

International youth work affects community attitudes just as described. It is a kind of “making the whole world better” (YC 1) and at the same time considering how to use the resources available:

*“...so we can't do everything, so we have to limit ourselves quite strictly. We can do 10 % of what we would like to do... we can't force everyone to be interested and participate in international activity either and on the other hand, it wouldn't resolve anything anyway...” (YC 1)*

If international youth work cannot be offered to all, who are then chosen to be involved? The interviews highlighted the strategical principles used to consider what efforts should be taken to set up international youth work. In the interviews, youth centre personnel described how they have tried, in their own work as leaders of international activities, to maximise efforts to broaden the social circles<sup>3</sup> where international youth work is implemented. They keep an eye on the amount of newcomers and ensure that there are some new young people, youth workers, cities, countries and partners involved in the activity.

The interviews also explained how certain groups have more preliminary meetings to motivate international activity. They also showed how the special needs of some young people are taken into account when the partners for the activity are chosen:

*In EVS projects, we have teamed up with our most trusted partners, because the young people participating in these projects are... from disadvantaged situations, and so strong support is then needed... these are partners who are sure to understand this and prepare things well, as agreed and we have also prepared quality criteria to be followed with them during joint seminars... (YC 2)*

Although the interviews contain examples on how distances, the realities of isolation and various economic and social obstacles have been beaten, there is still room to critically review the prerequisites of participating in international youth work. As one of the interviews states: In the smaller municipalities, there are young people over the age of 18 remaining in the small circles of their localities (YC 4). Also, even if the sample in the pilot survey was small, it also raised questions about the challenges in recruiting men and students in vocational training into international youth work activity (see page 43).

By nature, youth work should be targeted at all young people regardless of their background (education, religious, ethnicity) or place of residence. In addition, the same can be said from the opposite perspective: Youth work should not be selective, picking out those most ready for participation in youth work processes. Individuals and regions are different and there is a need to take this into account in the way international activities are organised and structurally supported.

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3 Youth work as broadening social circles see Nieminen 2016.

## 8.2 Promoting youth work expertise in internationality

### 8.2.1 Role of networking

In the interviews, much was said about networking, with different types of networks often mentioned. The youth centres participate and coordinate different local, regional, national and international<sup>4</sup> networks for example in the areas of youth work, international youth work, adventure and environmental education. Local and regional networks are the densest and young people and groups of young people are seen as an important part of the networks. It was described how the networks are continuously expanding with an increasing number of young people and youth workers wanting to be part of international youth work and when they have participated once, they often continue. The other youth centres and National Youth Cooperation – Allianssi are also mentioned to be important partners.

The interviews also recounted the work that the youth centre personnel had noticed was expected of youth centres. With networks expanding across Europe, to include even some Mediterranean countries as well as co-operation with Russia, some global level contacts could also be expected from youth centres due to their flagship role in international youth work at a national level. On the other hand, the funding channels for geographically expanding partnerships were not yet known.

Youth centres help municipalities, schools and educational institutions, NGOs and parishes to conduct international youth work. They work as an “*extra resource, booster, knowledge bank, catalyst and as a sending force*” – meaning the registered sending organisation for volunteer workers or trainees, for example. They provide any help that is required.

It was also described how local networks need to be constantly motivated. This means generating discussion and action in social media, finding “*passionate souls*” and continuously empowering, motivating and sheltering. The role of youth centres becomes more apparent whenever municipalities make cuts in youth work. For instance, municipalities merge or youth worker vacancies remain unfilled. In some youth centres, the international coordinator is not part of the actual international activity, but leads the project administration and offers support to other organisations.

Youth centres also ascribe to sharing acquired knowledge: in practice, this means producing group leader training open to all, publishing method books and co-operation with the educational institutions offering youth work studies. Also, the contact addresses of trustworthy partners are passed on to those needing help with starting or maintaining international youth work. To ensure that co-operation works, there must be absolute openness so that everything is shared or “*passed on*” (YC 3), so that “*everyone can profit from co-operation, for example the only general secondary education institute in a little locality may remain an interesting opportunity for young people while enriched by international activity*” (YC 4). Likewise, the youth centres have “*succeeded extremely well with this openness*” (YC 3).

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4 From international level *Platform Network for European Youth Activities*: <http://www.platform-network.com/> and ENYC – *European Network of Youth Centres*: <http://eycn.org/> are mentioned.

### 8.2.2 Maintaining expertise

International youth work conducted by youth centres is described as being goal-oriented and planned. It is seen as being one of the strategic key points of youth centres. This trend was also expected to continue in the future. Its weight for youth centres was seen as greater in both a strategic sense but also when measured by volume: amounts of projects, their lengths and how they lead to new projects, participants and people staying over in youth centres, new schools etc. involved and for example, the amount of organisations offering placements for trainees<sup>5</sup>.

International youth work was said to be allocated time and space in yearly planning, working schemes – in talk and action. In many youth centres it was strongly considered to be the specialty of the centre, but much was seen to depend on the interests of each centre's executive.

The interviews recount the challenges of maintaining expertise and following current issues and trends in youth work. The manifold offerings of youth work were also mentioned and the fact that they fulfil all possible needs. The existence of guidelines was cited as an enabling factor and resource of international youth work. When followed, the guidelines constantly strive towards good quality practice. The actual work was described as becoming routine in a good way – *“the tricks of the trade had been learnt”* (YC 4) so *“we no longer have to make ‘fumbling mistakes’ because we know how to do international youth work.”* (YC 1)

Participating in international seminars and training organised for example by SALTO<sup>6</sup> was seen as an important tool for maintaining expertise. For example, European quality label and international youth work funding training are mentioned often in the interviews.

The interviewees described the elements comprising their expertise: pedagogical knowledge, international work knowhow, finding and using funding instruments. Many thematic areas were also acknowledged as areas of expertise: adventure and environment education, humour and the theatre.

The interviews were conducted in four centres. Not all of them see international youth work as being a part of every employee's work. For example, in some centres everyone is encouraged to participate in international seminars and exchanges. Some volunteer work (EVS) has been carried out in almost all of the youth centres bringing *“a breath of fresh international air”* into *“quite an isolated working community in the periphery”* (YC 1). In some of the centres, the service and property departments had their own EVS, engaging not only those directly involved in youth work.

Regional knowledge and knowing local actors were also mentioned as important. One indicator of regional knowledge is that the needs of the region are recognised and that the youth centre's offerings cover the whole region. The youth centres were considered to have an advantage because they offer accommodation facilities, even when located separately. Such facilities were seen as positive because it was easy to organise many forms of activity in their location.

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5 Youth centres offer young people, for example, paths for doing an internship as a part of social youth work programmes or offer in-job training for developing group leadership skills in English. These offerings often also include an international aspect.

6 SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres, <https://www.salto-youth.net/>.

Based on the interviews, the image of centres as experts in international youth work has strengthened. This was supported by several examples: In the past, people had to be persuaded into international youth work. Now the expertise of youth centres is known, they are in turn contacted: more young people and partners are interested than it is possible to take. The shift has changed from finding participants to choosing them. It was also felt that nowadays, youth centres have more say in different levels of policy and are asked for their opinions in decision and programme making. They have been accredited by Youth Cooperation Allianssi and the National Erasmus+ agency, one centre has been awarded a European quality label and youth centres are also mentioned in the speeches of MPs.

Based on the interviews, it seems that there could be more international youth work to match current needs. However, all the interviews also indicated that such growth would also need more personnel resources. Currently resources are limited by what one person can achieve, how often roles change: the international coordinator often has other duties, and the centre is busy during high seasons. Or how many new activities it is possible to start. The interviewees said that as many project applications are written as one person can manage.

### **8.3 Economic impact: distribution of benefits in euros**

In the interviews, the economic impact of international youth work was also raised in the discussion by the youth centre personnel when they were asked about the impact of international youth work activity. At the same time it was emphasised, “how internationality is part of the value base, not about euros” (YC 2). Youth centres are non-profit organisations. On the other hand they employ people and as a result they generate tax income. In recent years, the size of youth centre personnel in general has grown and so has the number of youth centres with an international youth work coordinator.

Project funding for youth exchange projects mainly includes travel costs, maintenance and buying for example, required program services from local suppliers. A part of such funding is returned to the youth centres as accommodation fees, for instance. The amount of money circulated through youth centres has grown over the years despite the fact that youth centre funding is largely acquired elsewhere. In general funding comes in the form of government subsidies from the Ministry and in accommodation fees from paying customers. Only a small part of the project funding is used for the salary of the international coordinator with the amount bound to the project duties of the coordinator. The coordinator also did more than just operate in single projects – rather, this work can involve building co-operation with local and regional networks to create new opportunities, among other tasks.

### **8.4 About previously used evaluation methods**

The youth centre personnel were asked how the volume and quality of international work were measured. All the centres used *days of use* as an important measure. On the other hand, it was explained that this measure was unsuitable for describing the real nature of international youth work. For example, it was suggested that the amount of young people

reached on a yearly basis in the international youth work context would reveal more: How the networks were expanding or how much time is used in co-operation with partners; or information on new forms and offerings of international work adopted for use. It was added that not everything that occurs in youth centres can be counted as days of use. The basic idea of international youth work conducted by youth centres was considered to be advancing and spreading the word of international youth work. On the other hand, by measuring the days of use involving different nationalities, it has been for example calculated that about 20 % of users are of other nationalities than Finnish.

In addition to days of use, based on the interviews, it could be said that the youth centres need three evaluation methods to make the impact of international youth work visible: for evaluating youth work itself, for evaluating youth work expertise promotion and a method of reporting economic impact. The latter is a good place to start because it is less well-known. Based on the interviews, it appeared that the youth centres do not have a common way of voicing their assessment of how youth centres impact the local and regional economy to policymakers. Therefore, in order to find common reporting instruments, a broad economic impact assessment based on case studies is needed.

Currently, the youth centres in this study collect feedback from stakeholders to discover whether they have found co-operation with the youth centres successful and profitable, and to ensure that offerings have been delivered according to plan or that training has been successful in terms of content, for example. From this perspective, it would be worth developing a common and systematic way of requesting, gathering, and collating feedback. In this case, the youth centres all used their own individual methods. The use of a fragmented feedback system cannot provide an overall picture of how well youth centres have managed nationally in their role of promoters of youth work expertise. It also seems that the youth centres in this study have not yet realised the benefits of digitalisation in the collection of feedback.

As for the current methods of analysing the results of youth work, the interviews indicated that the personnel were aware of the survey pilot reported in chapter 2 and were awaiting the results. Moreover, the survey method was seen as a potentially useful tool for the future. In some youth centres, digital learning badges<sup>7</sup> have been piloted to aid participants in the self-assessment of learning progress and processes during exchanges and training. This assessment method has also been mentioned in the youth centres' Erasmus+ funding applications to indicate how the quality of learning is supported. However, a method of acknowledging the work youth centres do to activate young people, organisations and areas not engaged in international youth work, has not yet been developed.

Also, the yearly reports provided by the youth centres were said to contain little description of the impact on attitudes in general. For example, reports to the Ministry focus on how young people have been impacted. Nevertheless, Erasmus+ project reporting includes regional impact, which is already considered in the application, where information on the assumed impact beyond young people in organisations and localities, is requested<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, no instruments have existed or been used to concretise the actual wider impact of youth work.

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7 About Mozilla open badges see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mozilla\\_Open\\_Badges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mozilla_Open_Badges).

8 The organised activity financed by Erasmus+ are supposed to have an effect on people, practices, organisations and systems (see European Commission 2017, 310).

The importance of collecting stories was also mentioned in the interviews. Youth work processes are often long. There are stories<sup>9</sup> that years of involvement in the life of a young person are needed to prevent social exclusion and alienation. However, when the work with this one individual is reported, it is not considered as valuable as the work conducted with large numbers of young people because the youth centres are funded according to the amount of days of use – the money saved<sup>10</sup> by individual prevention of exclusion does not return to the youth centres directly as revenue.

As a note of the researcher, it could be emphasised here that the personnel did not say that the prevention of alienation of individual young persons captures the whole idea of youth work. Youth work includes for example helping young people to express themselves in creative ways or to have a good life in general. In fact, they actually said that it is crucial to include stories in reporting. As stated in the interviews, one reason for this is that the work motivation of the personnel can be felt and demonstrated in stories lived and known. More broadly, both are needed: something quantifiable to describe the learning and empowerment produced by international youth work but without losing the stories behind the numbers.

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9 See for example the *key-story* in Part I of this publication.

10 In the interviews savings of 1.2 million euros of government money were mentioned by the youth centre personnel.

## Part IV

# **Multivoicing international youth work development needs in the youth centres**

# Including young people and decision makers in discussion: Deliberative Discussion Day

As mentioned in the interviews of the youth centre personnel, the decisions to embark on international youth work are made by adults. It was also mentioned that those with the most power – the decision makers – often fail to participate in international youth work seminars, even if they are organised locally.

This part of the publication reports how an evaluative discussion between the youth workers and decision makers was created. It also reports how the situation was challenged by the participation of young people; they were the most important actors in the process. Based on research prior to the *Boost Your Possibilities!* project, there has been concern on whether there has been sufficient opportunity for young people to voice opinions on youth centre issues and youth work offerings (Moisala 2013; Kokko 2014; see also Nieminen 2013).

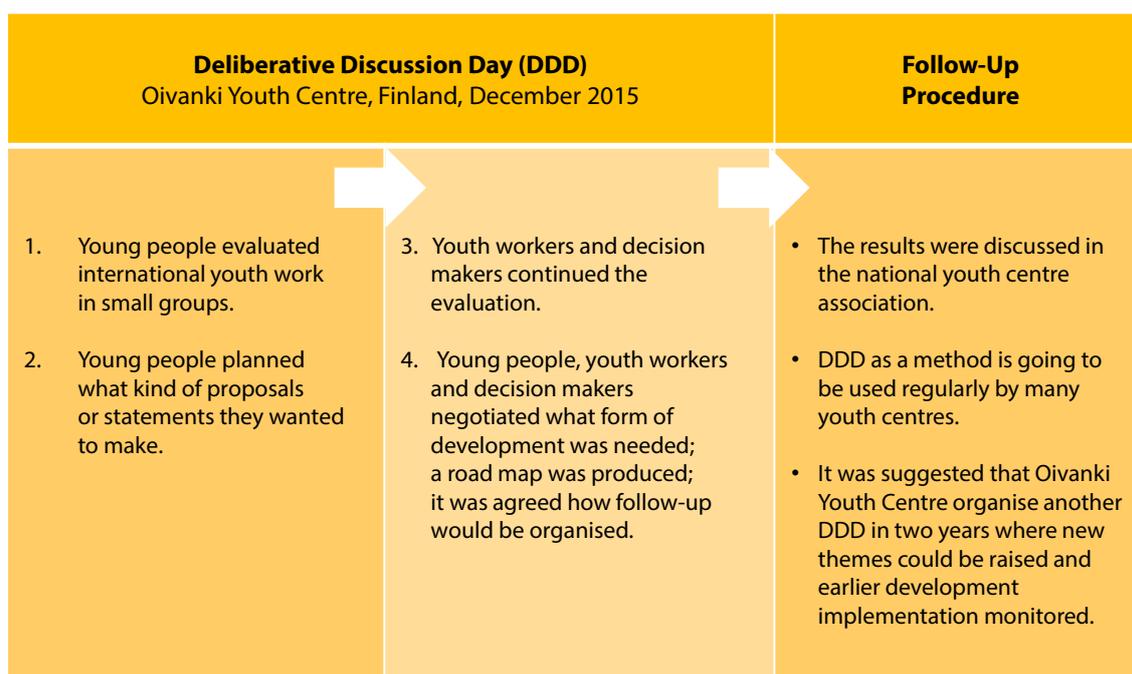
Based on Gretschel, interactive evaluation processes could be used more systematically in Finnish youth work. These enable young people to raise themes for development in more depth: instead of viewing aspects of youth work from a shallow perspective in terms of what has been done correctly, they can also elaborate on whether the youth work offerings match current needs. Such evaluation produces knowledge about how well the services produced are actually responding to the needs of young people. At the same time, young people are able to impact youth work related themes in a direct dialogue with decision makers. (Gretschel 2016.)

Figure 7 (on the next page) presents the process of the Deliberative Discussion Day (DDD)<sup>11</sup> organised in the Oivanki Youth Centre in Kuusamo, Finland. It was included as a one-day program in a transnational learning activity of the *Boost your possibilities!* project in December 2015. DDD is a method which allows not only young people to reflect on youth services, but also the youth workers and decision makers to use their expertise and evaluate the services. The aim of this process is then to proactively negotiate how such services can be developed. The method has been used in over 70 Finnish municipalities and in several non-governmental organisations since 2008 for evaluating a variety of services produced for young people. This was the first time it was used in the youth centre context.

During the day, twelve young people from five municipalities took part; those invited intentionally included some young people who had participated in international youth work organised by the youth centre and some who had not.

<sup>11</sup> Discussion Day method see the article by Sue Cooper and Anu Gretschel in the forthcoming *SAGE Handbook of Youth Work Practice* (edited by Pam Alldred, Fin Cullen, Kathy Edwards and Dana Fusco). The same article also includes information on another participative method called Transformative Evaluation, developed by Cooper.

The DDD also included five youth workers representing different youth centres, one executive manager of a youth centre, a youth centre board member representing the municipal authority, a youth secretary of the municipal authority, a rector of a general secondary education institution and a senior advisor of youth affairs, from the regional state administrative agency. During the day, these ten people evaluated the services and attended to negotiating the young people's proposals for implementation. In addition, the Boost!-project participants from Estonia and Slovenia (five persons from both visiting countries) took part in the discussion. This international discussion was made possible using simultaneous Finnish–English–Finnish translation of the discussion between the young people and decision makers. The whole process took about five hours.



**Figure 7.** The phases and follow-up of an interactive evaluation using the Deliberative Discussion Day method.

The following describes how the evaluation progressed from one stage to the next, during and after the DDD, see the figure 7:

1. The young people first evaluated international youth work using a simple question: "Am I satisfied with international youth work, and why 'yes' or 'no'?" All the arguments were documented in discussion workbooks by secretaries named inside the group. Over time the arguments presented in the discussion formed a deeper view of what needed to be done to develop and improve international youth work.

Several themes arose, but the following were voted by the young people to be jointly discussed with the youth workers and decision makers:

- “How to make encounters with another culture easier”,
- “How to promote international youth work in order to reach young people who are not yet involved” and
- “What needs to be done to ensure a lack of money does not prevent young people from participating?”

The young people formulated some proposals around these themes for the youth workers and decision makers.

2. The youth workers and decision makers used a similar procedure with discussion workbooks when evaluating international youth work. They were asked to concentrate on the above three aspects prioritised earlier by the young people. Training was also given on how to encounter young people and their proposals in a constructive way and it was stressed that the aim was to find different but practical means of implementation.

At the end of the day, the general feedback was very encouraging. The young people were delighted to be heard, learning new perspectives from the other young people and from the adults present. They already felt that they had made an impact even though the issues discussed would not be implemented immediately. The youth workers and decision makers found the themes raised by the young people to be crucial. It was also mentioned that the discussion highlighted the importance of international youth work for young people and that it was no longer simply a passing phase.

The concrete consequences of the DDD in terms of international youth work were: the encouragement of young people to take an active role, for example in sharing information with other young people about the opportunities to take part. The adults also have a great deal of responsibility in terms of implementing themes of development named during the day. Thus, it was suggested that the discussion be repeated in two years to publicly monitor and report back to the young people as regards the implementation of their ideas and to discuss new themes. Repeating the discussion regularly also offers the opportunity to return to the ideas from December 2015 and to relaunch them in case of lack of development and if the theme is still considered important. Nationally, the board of the Finnish Youth Centres Association has also debated the above proposals and has already taken action to support their implementation. The Association also supports the idea of all youth centres using the DDD method as a part of their evaluation in the future.

## Part V

# Completing the jigsaw: what type of evaluation tool do youth centres need?

# All youth centre roles must be covered by the evaluation tool

During this research, much has been learnt about what needs to be evaluated in international youth work provided by youth centres. For example, if youth centres have three differing roles in terms of youth work or regional impact, as suggested by the personnel of Finnish Youth Centres (see chapter 8, page 46), then three forms of evaluation are also needed. However, before considering this notion further, let us review the content of the publication from the beginning.

The aim of this research module in the *Boost your possibilities!* project was to gain an overview of the impact of international youth work conducted by youth centres. In a broad sense, the research context was a development project funded by Erasmus+. In practice, the data was gathered from youth centres and describes their role as the distributors of international youth work.

During the process, the data was to be used to discover suitable evaluation instruments the youth centres could use to make the impact of international youth work visible. Such documentation is needed on the one hand, to justify the existence of youth centres and on the other, to find evidence to guide the further development of activity offered by youth centres.

The report started by investigating whether the IDWY's *'Cornerstones of Youth Work'* could help youth centre personnel to describe how international youth work operates (see Part I). At the same time, storytelling offered the youth workers themselves the opportunity to consciously recognise which elements differentiate youth work from other forms of work with young people. If the intention is to make the impact of youth work more visible, particularly when it is specifically contextualised like international youth work, it is crucial to secure knowledge of what this work includes, so it can be easily shared and understood.

The research process also made it clear that the measures international youth work should use to make its impact visible are mostly the same as those for youth work generally. However, the stories indicated two typical features which seem to be very important in the context of international youth work, namely the active role of young people themselves and the high significance that young people felt international activity has for them. The pilot survey will be validated by checking whether it actually included these features.

The storytelling workshop based on the IDWY's *'Cornerstones of Youth Work'* offered the youth workers a participatory way of describing their work. The stories also included some examples of impacts based on the knowledge of the storytellers. In this publication, the results of the workshop process are situated at the beginning. The idea was to use them to describe what constitutes youth work. The IDWY workshop method is implemented by

naming the principles used in youth work as 'cornerstones'. To some extent, the stories also described the needs to which youth work already responds. It is possible that this way of starting a report (with, for example, workshop results) would function also in other reports with the aim of making the impact of youth work visible.

Part II of the publication reported on the survey pilot conducted in three countries. Despite the small sample, the survey results demonstrate the success of the international youth work processes implemented by youth centres. On average 75–95 % of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they recognised growth in their intercultural (includes for example openness and tolerance), personal (setting and achieving life goals) and social (co-operation with others) competences. International activity was also seen by young people as an important contributory factor in their lives. The results were similarly high in all the countries. All the results indicated the success of international youth work in having the expected impact.

However, the survey failed to ask about the multiple roles offered to participants during international activity and the kind of roles they would like in the future. It also failed to ask how meaningful international activity was for young people. These limitations were rectified by the young people who responded to the many open questions in the survey. In practice, the answers to the pilot survey demonstrated how these two themes should be covered by structured questions in the future when the survey is used, in order to maintain a manageable workload if and when samples grow.

On the other hand, there should always be some open questions to provide young people with the opportunity to discuss themes they find important. In this case, a theme that arose without direct questioning was the activity of 'making friends'. This emphasised the dual benefits of international activity: the idea is not only to gain life skills for the future, such as social competence, which helps in making friends over time, but also to allow the value of the activity to be seen in terms of supporting the wellbeing and satisfaction with this phase of life while making friends at the same time.

In order to model a more comprehensive tool for evaluating the quality and impact of international youth work, several representatives of youth centre personnel were interviewed in Finland (see Part III). In the context of international youth work conducted by youth centres based on the employees' experiences, the personnel were asked: What forms of impact exist? What is working well, what is not, why, and how to develop international youth work organised by the youth centres?

Although the role of youth centres varies in different regions and countries, the three forms of impact found from the interview data offer a useful framework for enlarging the discussion to include all types of youth organisation. The three categories of impact suggest changes which provide indicators of youth work results, growth of youth work expertise and economic effects. As mentioned on page 53 more knowledge in the form of calculative case studies about regional economic impact is needed to formulate a common impact assessment tool for the youth centres, producing easily updated data that can be published regularly.

There is more knowledge available on how the latter two forms of impact could be monitored in the future. In order to gain quantitative data concerning the promotion of co-partners' local and international expertise, surveys of the kind carried out with young people, could be used. It is crucial that all youth centres use the same evaluation instrument. Such an instrument would expand the visibility of expertise development successes

not only locally and regionally but also from the national to the international level. The survey could be designed to function as a partner/customer satisfaction survey at the same time. From time to time, all parties in cooperation should also have the opportunity to express from a grassroots perspective, how to maintain the validity of expertise promotion processes in youth work development as the world changes or whether they think the youth centre's services and networks are sufficiently diverse and reaching enough people. This suggests that the interactive evaluation tool used with the young people in this study could also be used with co-partners.

Evaluation conducted through interaction keeps youth work up to date and relevant to young people. It ensures the services maintain sensitivity and appropriate responses to the changing needs of young people. It also ensures that decisions on how to use available funding and fine tune or redirect services, are based on the most multi-voiced analysis as possible. During this research process the Deliberative Discussion Day method was used to assemble young people, youth workers and decision makers around the same table (see Part IV). The young people's proposals on how to develop international youth work matched three categories: how to make encounters with other cultures easier, how to include new young people in international youth work and how to do things differently to ensure that economic disadvantage does not hinder young people from participating.

Although the young people offered genuine solutions to the problems they themselves named in the first place, and even when these solutions improved further when they were discussed with the youth workers and decision makers, this publication does not report on all of them in depth. However, it was observed that in the discussion, the young people raised the challenge of how to extend the offerings of international youth work in order to involve more young people. This is in line with the opinions arising from the interviews with the youth workers: namely that the demand for international youth work is greater than the supply. On the other hand, the pilot survey indicated interestingly that one fifth of the respondents were newcomers to international activity. This was interpreted as an indication of healthy processes: it is not just the same young people who have the opportunity to participate. Here, the notion that it is not just total volume but also the proportion of newcomers that counts, raises questions about how the collection of international youth work statistics should be developed.

Based on the interviews, it is known that the roles of young people have a better chance of developing from basic participator to roles with responsibility, based on the continuity of international youth work processes. More young people in active roles often mean less in volume. The same occurs when attempts are made to empower young people, who are hard to reach, so they participate. There are also more young people wanting to participate than it is possible to include. The youth centres are trying to find a balance between all these needs and their available resources.

However, the current statistical methods used do not present those challenges. International youth work needs new key figures: new ways of documenting the numbers and roles of young people involved and giving a voice to those who are deliberately excluded due to limited resources. Also, as the young people in the interactive evaluation suggested, there are also obstacles, such as a lack of money, which prevent young people from participating. Based on an earlier study on youth work services, there is little knowledge of the geographical, psychological, social and economic obstacles present in the world of young people – so in general youth work service accessibility is not high (see Gretschel 2016).

As regards measuring the results gained by international youth work, the results provided by visitor volume or competence growth, are not enough. It is also important to consider who is accorded the opportunity to participate, learn and to change the world – and his/her own life. In this research process, tools such as accessibility or equality mapping were not used, but the data gathered in other ways suggest that they will be needed in the future. On the other hand, if international youth work is already overflowing, discussion involving decision makers concerning access to further resources to respond to such needs is also required.



Beyond this Erasmus+ funded project, since 2016 some of the youth centres and the Finnish Youth Centres Association have participated in co-operation with other youth work service providers such as municipalities, non-government organisations and parish youth work organisations and other youth work service and development centres named by the Ministry of Education and Culture, in order to start the process of adopting a new evaluation tool for youth work results containing different areas of evaluation (see the content of this evaluation tool in Appendix 3.). The process is led by senior researcher Anu Gretschel from the Finnish Youth Research Network. The content of the evaluation tool is based on the results of this research and importantly on earlier studies (for example Gretschel 2016) and on discussions between the bodies listed previously.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1



Hi,

*In this survey you'll be asked about your experiences of international activity. The survey is part of a research project called "Boost your possibilities" studying the quality and impact of international youth projects. The research is funded through Erasmus+ by the European Union.*

*50 young people in three countries are completing this same questionnaire. These countries are Estonia, Finland and Slovenia. Since the questionnaire will not be sent to many people, it is important that you answer. We hope you answer sincerely so we can develop international activity. The answers will be handled by the researchers only and they will be reported so that individual respondents cannot be identified.*

*If there is anything you want to ask about the research, please contact (in the original: here was the name, email and telephone number of the researcher).*

*The survey is divided into several pages. Please use the buttons "Next" or "Previous" to navigate the questionnaire so that you do not lose your answers when navigating back and forth.*

*NB! Please do not use your web-browser's back button for going back; if you do this, you will lose your answers.*

Have you participated in international activity? \*

(youth exchanges, seminars, training courses, camps, study visits, EVS, internship, job shadowing)

- Yes
- No

## I PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. In how many international activities have you participated?

- 1
- 2-3
- 4-5
- 6 or more

2. Have you participated in the activity as an individual participant or in a group?

You can choose as many alternatives as needed.

- as an individual participant
- in a group

3. How long did each activity you participated in last?

You can choose as many alternatives as needed.

- up to 24 hours
- more than 24 hours but not longer than 7 days
- more than 7 days but less than 1 month
- 1 month or more

## II INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND OTHER ACQUIRED COMPETENCES

4. In your opinion, how important is international activity in general for...<sup>1</sup>

	very important	important	moderately important	of little importance	unimportant
further studies	<input type="radio"/>				
employment	<input type="radio"/>				
everyday life	<input type="radio"/>				
for well-being in this phase of life	<input type="radio"/>				
greater independence, autonomy	<input type="radio"/>				

5. Taking part in international activity helped me to develop the following personal competences:

	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
a) self-organisation skills, self-direction, self-management, and the ability to set and achieve one's life purposes and goals	<input type="radio"/>				

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<sup>1</sup> Reformulation suggestion for Q4, see Appendix 2.

- b) learning to learn in terms of the ability to pursue and organize one's own learning, either individually or in groups
- c) taking and carrying out responsibility, a sense of purpose and responsibility, and the ability to act accordingly
- d) entrepreneurship, innovation and taking initiative, the ability to turn ideas into action, the confidence to take on new challenges and not to give up
- e) mathematical competences<sup>2</sup>, meaning the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations.
- f) digital competence: use of computer/mobile device to search information, plan the activity, report, keep in touch with and communicate with other people.

6. Taking part in international activity helped me to develop the following social competences:

- |   | strongly agree        | agree                 | undecided             | disagree              | strongly disagree     |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a) the ability to form opinions about issues in society and share knowledge of the participation structures and willingness to participate with others          | <input type="radio"/> |
| b) leadership competences, a sense of purpose and responsibility, and the capacity to respect the opinions of others by example                                 | <input type="radio"/> |
| c) organizational skills, participation in deciding how the resources of the project (like money, time) are used and encouraging others to achieve common goals | <input type="radio"/> |
| d) teamwork, ability to work together to accomplish goals and to appreciate and support others, even during disagreement(s)                                     | <input type="radio"/> |

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<sup>2</sup> To make the questionnaire easier to answer, the term 'mathematical competences' can be left out in the future.

e) communication competences in terms of willingness and ability to talk to unfamiliar people and to consider the thoughts and feelings of others

7. Taking part in international activity helped me to develop the following intercultural competences:

	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
a) appreciation of creative expression, using music, performing and visual arts, or literature	<input type="radio"/>				
b) global understanding, understanding diversity, the ability to understand other cultures and interest in international issues	<input type="radio"/>				
c) tolerance and lack of prejudice towards people from different backgrounds and intention to understand them	<input type="radio"/>				
d) the ability to use foreign languages in oral and written form and understanding the meaning of language in understanding cultures	<input type="radio"/>				
e) mother tongue skills in terms of the ability to express yourself and interpret thoughts of other people.	<input type="radio"/>				

### III ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE

8. How has taking part in international activity affected your...<sup>3</sup>

	increased a lot	increased to some extent	remained stable	decreased a little	decreased a lot	cannot say
a) respect for other cultures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<sup>3</sup> Reformulation suggestion for Q8, see the Appendix 2.

- |  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| b) openness towards ways of life different from your own               | <input type="radio"/> |
| c) curiosity about different ways of life                              | <input type="radio"/> |
| d) a critical approach to different cultural norms, including your own | <input type="radio"/> |
| e) awareness of the country and culture of the partners                | <input type="radio"/> |
| f) appreciation of the country and culture of the partners             | <input type="radio"/> |
| g) foreign language appreciation                                       | <input type="radio"/> |
| h) foreign language ability  | <input type="radio"/> |
| i) understanding other cultures  | <input type="radio"/> |
| j) awareness of home country and culture                               | <input type="radio"/> |
| k) appreciation of home country and culture                            | <input type="radio"/> |

#### IV THE OUTCOMES OF TAKING PART IN INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY

9. What do you think? Have your thoughts or behaviour changed because of taking part in international activity?

- Yes

- No
- I don't know

Those who answered "yes" were asked: "Please describe, if possible, how your thoughts and behaviour changed as a result of participating in international activity?"

10. Have you informed other young people about international activity?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Those who answered "yes" were asked: "How did you inform other young people about the international activity?"<sup>4</sup>

11. If you were to describe one of the international projects in which you have participated in to another young person, what would you mention (please include at least three different points you consider important to mention).

12. Are you keen to participate in international activity also in the future?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Please comment; if possible, in what kind of international activity would you be interested in participating in the future?

***Please provide us with your background information.***

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<sup>4</sup> Reformulation suggestion for this alternative: "What channels did you use to inform...?"

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Gender

- female
- male
- other
- I don't want to answer

What is your level of education?

Select the one that describes your situation best.

- unfinished basic education
- basic education
- vocational secondary education
- general secondary education
- non-university post-secondary level (BA)
- 1st cycle university level (BA)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle university level (MA)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle university level (PhD)
- I have studied for (a profession) in another way, please state how

What do you primarily do daily/during the week?

Select the one that describes your situation best.

- I study / attend school
- I work
- I have been unemployed / in labour market training, since...
- other, what?

On what level are you currently studying/which school you go?

- basic education
- vocational secondary education
- general secondary education
- non-university post-secondary level (BA)
- 1st cycle university level (BA)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle university level (MA)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle university level (PhD)
- I'm studying for (a profession) in another way, please state how

***Thank you for your answers, you're almost done with the survey.***

If there is anything more you would like to express about international activity you can write it here.

## Appendix 2

### Re-formulating the survey for future use

The pilot survey indicated some need for modification before it can be used by youth centres or other bodies organising international youth work.

#### Question 4.

Young people were asked how important they considered international activities to be for...

- a) further studies,
- b) employment,
- c) everyday life,
- d) for well-being in this phase of life and
- e) greater independence, autonomy

In future, it is suggested that more descriptive forms of concepts such as 'further studies' or 'employment' be used so that the respondents can better consider their opinions regardless of how old they are and how far in planning their future. By reformulating the start of the question, it would also be possible to focus on also discovering whether the international activity has had an impact on the current situation of the respondent.

Using descriptive forms, instead of the 'further studies', there instead could be a statement, for example: 'I can also use the skills and knowledge gained in international activity at school or other educational institutions.'

Instead of 'employment', there could be a statement, for example: 'The activity helped me to know or convinced me of what I want to do for a living' or 'Due to international activity, I now know what I want to do for a living.'

Instead of 'for wellbeing in this phase of the life', there could be a statement, for example: 'About how happy I feel in general in my current phase of life.'

Instead of 'everyday life', there could be a statement, for example: 'The activity improved my ability and capacity to deal with different situations in everyday life.'

Instead of 'greater independence/autonomy', there could be a statement, for example: 'I am more confident in doing things on my own and making my own solutions.'

More life area alternatives could also be included in Q4 asking young people to assess the importance of international activity for these areas. According to what was stated earlier in chapter 2, the aspect of 'making friends' should also be included in this part of the questionnaire.

The alternatives could also be divided into two categories: contribution to life now and contribution to life in the future. This notion is based on the open answers given by the young people where they not only described the value of international activity in terms of acquiring competences for making friends more easily, but also in terms of already having made friends through such activity and that others could make friends in the same way.

In reference to the importance or contribution to youth work one more alternative 'not relevant in my case' could also be added. On the other hand, the alternative 'This is something I especially expected/desired/respected' could offer considerable information on the impact of the youth work activity.

### **Question 8.**

It is suggested that the number of alternative answers be reduced by combining them in order to avoid repetition.

The following alternatives are suggested for future use with the exception of the alternative that has been crossed out:

- respecting and understanding other cultures<sup>1</sup>
- openness and curiosity towards lifestyles different from your own<sup>2</sup>
- a critical approach towards different cultural norms, including your own
- awareness of the country and culture of the partners
- appreciation of the country, culture and language of the partners<sup>3</sup>
- ~~foreign language ability<sup>4</sup>~~
- awareness of home country and culture
- appreciation of home country and culture

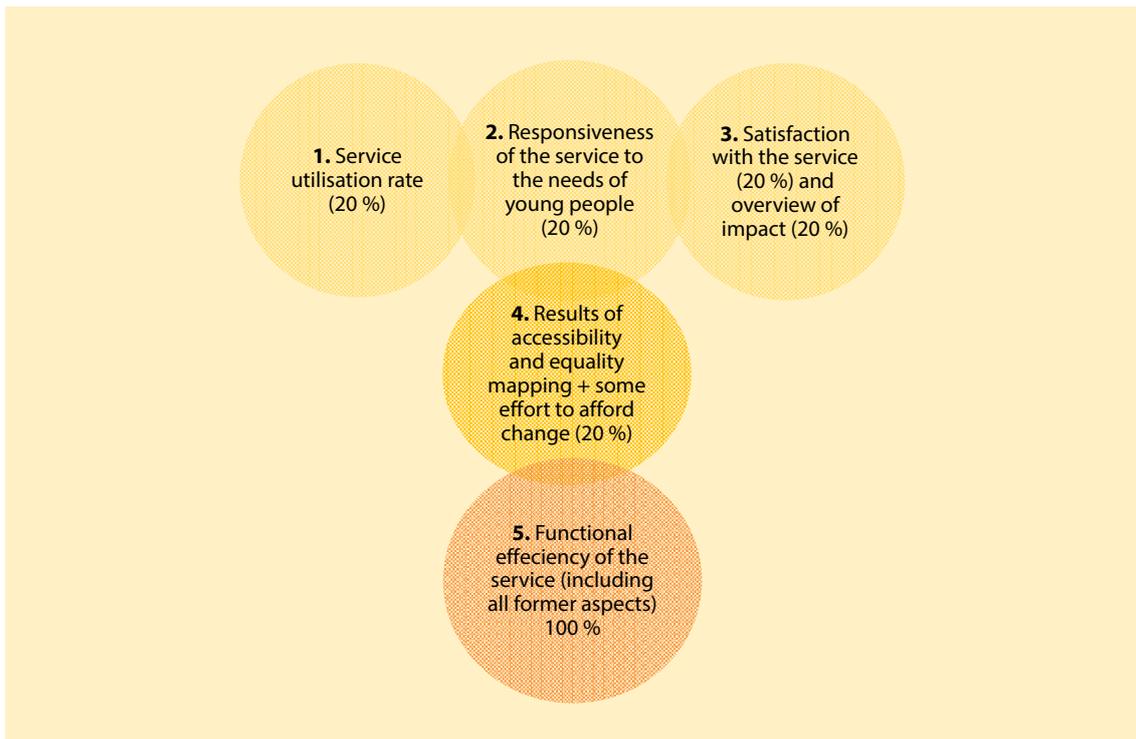
### **Suggestion for a new question concerning the participatory roles offered by international activity**

The survey could investigate the responsible roles offered to young people during international activity with an additional question. In future, there could also be a question or questions to extract more information on the nature of the roles in the international activity, for example: did the activity feel sufficiently youth driven, did the young people feel that they were sufficiently involved and the owners of the process. The young people could also be asked whether they would like to take a more active role in the future.

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1 From the original alternatives (Appendix 1) 8.a and 8.i have been combined.  
2 Alternatives 8.b and 8.c have been combined.  
3 Alternatives 8.f and 8.g have been combined.  
4 Alternative 8.h has been left out because a similar ability is mentioned in 7.d.

## Appendix 3



**Figure 8.** Proposal for a new tool of evaluating the functional efficiency of youth work services as regards youth work results (Gretschel 2017). The model is based on the Boost your possibilities! project related research funded by Erasmus+, but also on for example Gretschel (2016) and collaborative discussions between a considerable number and variety of youth work organisations (municipalities, NGOs, parishes, youth centres and some youth work service and development centres) in Finland and the Finnish Youth Research Network/Gretschel.

Functional efficiency contains the following sub-sectors:

1. Service utilisation rate, where the amount and roles of young people are analysed in relation to the nature of the youth work process in question instead of calculating volumes.
2. Responsiveness of the service to the needs of young people investigated using the interactive evaluation method (such as Deliberative Discussion Day see page 58), which produces knowledge of young people, that youth workers and decision makers should take into account when planning how services will be developed – fine-tuned, or even redirected if needed.
3. Satisfaction of young people with youth work services (20 %) and the value and impact of such services based on their experience (20 %). A survey method such as the one piloted in this study (see part II of this publication, beginning on page 22) is suggested for gaging this kind of information.
4. Accessibility and equality are included in all 1–4 of the sub-sectors, but they are also the focus of mapping (20 %). Suggested improvements based on the mapping should be implemented in yearly planning before this evaluation sub-sector is counted as of having been carried out.
5. Functional efficiency is 100 %, which can be achieved if all the sub-sectors are managed successfully. The evaluation cycle is estimated to take two years in each organisation, after which the organisation starts it again from the beginning.

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