



Needs Analysis Report

Country Report Croatia



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1. Youth work in Croatia

The development of youth work has a long history and it is very important to observe its development through a cultural and historical lens because its origins date before the Croatian independence. Although there are no official records and documents that would confirm this development (Bužinkić et al., 2015), there is a lot to be said about the challenges and changes in the field of youth work in Croatia.

But, despite the long history, youth work in Croatia is an area that is not sufficiently formalized nor recognized. There is still no legal strategic approach to its development or professional competencies that are needed for youth workers (National Youth Programme, 2014). The development of youth work in Croatia is usually associated with the development and engagement of the civil sector so research papers and studies on this subject are almost non-existent (Kovačić and Ćulum, 2015).

Considering that the concept of youth work in Croatia is not clearly defined and that there are no official documents defining the framework, those who work with young people assess youth work individually, according to their personal experiences. Further to this, there is no unique definition of youth work but the most comprehensive one is a definition that splits youth work into two terms: youth work in the narrow sense and youth work in broad sense. Youth work in the narrow sense is a planned and organized process of empowering young people for personal growth and development. Also, it includes a process of building human relationships, inclusion and active participation in society which is based on partnership and a friendly approach that allows young people to be equal creators of that process. In short, youth work is an organized process of individual and social development of young people that is happening in cooperation with the young person. Youth work in broad sense is any type of interaction between young people and people working with young people (education, police, centers for social welfare, homes for abandoned children, etc).

1.1 Organisations undertaking youth work

In the past, during and after the war in Croatia, a great many international charities and aid organizations were based throughout the country in an effort to alleviate consequences of destruction and help re-build life in war-devastated communities. Many



of these charities worked with children and young people. They organized free-time activities, encouraged youth organizing and initiated youth work infrastructure in the form of a network of youth clubs. Newly formed civil society organizations took over when international charities left after the war. Since then, in the past 20 years, youth work in Croatia has proliferated, taking on many forms and shapes. However, it has remained largely in the hands of the voluntary sector, unrecognized by the state.

Today, youth workers are working with young people on a daily basis in various civil society organizations, family centres, youth clubs, youth centres and youth organizations. They provide programmes in different areas, offering educational, cultural, social, sport and political activities. Young people, through a variety of programmes, can develop their personality, get more knowledge and most importantly they can gain skills for active participation in society (Morić and Puhovski, 2012).

It must be noted that youth work in Croatia is project and funding oriented. It seems that civil society organizations today produce projects so they could keep their organizations running. There is not enough opportunities for addressing issues that young people face in a particular environment. Instead, we are tackling problems that are defined in EU context.

1.2 Education background of youth workers in the field of inclusion, diversity and equality

Youth workers work as volunteers or professionals in youth organizations and they are people with diverse educational backgrounds (Morić and Puhovski, 2012). Most often youth workers are people with background in social studies and humanities, such as social workers who deal with social and economic barriers, social pedagogues who deal with the prevention of risky behaviour among young people and pedagogues concerned with the education of young people.

The Ministry of Social Policy and Youth initiated a long-term process which aims to establish a common ground for a coordinated strategy towards recognition of youth work. The goal is to develop occupational standards for youth workers, encourage the



creation of targeted educational programmes in the formal education system, thereby raising the overall availability and quality of youth work activities.

So far, there are no specialized educational programmes for youth workers, at least not in the formal education system. In the non-formal system, there are many available training opportunities for youth workers generally, but not that many in field of inclusion, diversity and equality. However, rare are those that are comprehensive and that include holistic approach. One example of non-formal education programme are Youth Studies established by the Croatian Youth Network in 2010. The aim of Youth Studies is to encourage young people to become active members of society, to engage in participatory processes of democracy, to encourage critical thinking methods, techniques and possibilities for action in the community with an impact on youth policy development and positive social change. Also, Youth Studies strives to give specific guidelines for youth workers (Morić and Puhovski, 2012).

National Youth Programme (2014) throughout defined guidelines highlights the concept of inclusion and equality while the concept of diversity is almost non-existent. Inclusion is usually mentioned in the context of involvement of young people in the decision-making processes that directly affect them. Also, inclusion is mentioned in the context of discriminated social groups and there is need for enabling young people to participate in various processes of non-formal and informal learning. In terms of equality, National Youth Programme indicates the guidelines of social interventions that should contribute to ensuring equality of opportunity to all the sub-groups of young people in achieving their life goals and adequate social integration.

1.3 Background Researches on the main issues affecting young people

The National Youth Programme (2014) usually refers to strategies which aims to implement actions tackling main issues affecting young people. Regarding the specific socio-economic situation in Croatia, the focus is on a few contemporary challenges, such as massive youth unemployment and extended period of dependence on parents. Result of those challenges is a growing number of young people who are at risk of social exclusion in accordance with the categories of education, housing, employment and



health care. According to the "Eurostat"¹, with 32.3% unemployed young people in 2014., Croatia is considered to be third worst country when it comes to youth unemployment in the EU (after Greece and Spain). Also, there was 21.8% of young people that were in NEET status, which puts Croatia in fourth worst spot in EU. The high level of youth unemployment in Croatia leads to the trend of emigration of highly educated young workers in recent years. Croatian Employment Service is trying to solve this problem with "package of measures" for active employment. There are five packages, one of which is exclusively created for young people: "Package of measures for youth – Young and creative".

Special attention in National Youth Programme is paid to the particularly vulnerable young people who are usually facing discrimination based on different origins such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. Those young people are young people with disabilities, young people from the system of alternative care, young people who are members of ethnic minorities (Serbs), young people who are members of the LGBT communities, young asylum seekers and refugees and young Roma people. Also, groups of young people who need additional support are: (ex-)offenders, (ex-)drug addicts, young people who are single parents, young people without adequate family support and young people placed in public institutions.

All those previously named groups of young people are in high risk of facing economic obstacles such as low standard of living, low income, long-term unemployment, precarious living situations and dependence on social welfare system. Furthermore, lot of them have educational problems as well, such as low educational achievement or they leave school early which means that they are in quite serious risk for social exclusion.

In the Croatian context, young people who are living in rural or insular areas are facing geographical obstacles because of lack of infrastructure or transportation connections (Bužinkić et al., 2015).

Disabilities such as mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical or other disabilities are also recognized obstacles for social inclusion. In addition, young people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses or psychiatric conditions often face social

¹http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics



exclusion because they are institutionalized and they need a lot of time and help to resettled back into society.

2. Methodology of the research

Qualitative research was conducted on a sample of 26 participants: 5 key people, 10 youth workers, 10 young people and 1 professor in the field of philosophy. The sample consisted of 15 females and 11 males. The age range of the sample was from 33 to 39 for key persons, from 26 to 33 for youth workers and from 16 to 23 years for young people.

All adult participants have a university degree, wherein one of the participants is enrolled in the post-graduate study and the other completed doctoral studies. As regards young people, some are still in high school and some are in the higher education system.

Key people and youth workers have been working with young people for many years. The person with the least experience has been in youth work practice for 2 years, and most experienced person from sample has 10 years of working experience.

Most of the respondents live in Zagreb, while a smaller proportion of respondents live in Rijeka, Pula, Zaprrešić and Karlovac.

Participants of this survey are working in a variety of associations and organizations. They deal with different populations of young people – from the general population, which includes all young people aged 15-30 years, over young people with behavioural problems and young people from alternative care to the young students from humanistic fields.

The young people are volunteers and/or beneficiaries of various associations and organizations as well - from the association that promotes activism and environmental protection, through the debating society, to associations dealing with the protection of people with disabilities.

For the purpose of this qualitative research, we used a questionnaire created especially for this study. To collect the data from key people and academics, we used a method of structured interview while the youth workers and young people were questioned



through a method of focus group. There was a total of 6 interviews and 4 focus groups conducted.

3. Research results

3.1 Understanding terms of youth work

Participants had problems in defining youth work because youth work in Croatia is not standardized nor formalized. They verbalized unclear distinction between different professions in which some participants are not sure where one profession (for example social work) ends and youth work begins and vice versa. The thing that is missing in field of youth work in Croatia is institutionalization, formal education and standardization of youth work practice.

Regardless of relatively vague field of youth work, participants gave good and important guidelines for youth work practice, which means that there is a certain theoretical and value foundation, and that they need to empower specific skills and working methods in order to work better in practice. Some of the most important guidelines is seeing youth work as a non-formal, voluntary, continuous structured and empowering work with young people which aims to stimulate complete development of young people. Also, they said that youth work has to be participatory, collaborative, emancipatory and that has to be undone in friendly environment in order to create safe atmosphere among young people.

In youth work, it is very important that activities are harmonized with needs of young people, that they follow their interests and that there are clear objectives that wants to be achieved.

Young people see youth work as non-formal approach, without rigid authority and empty phrases; as interdisciplinary work on developing potential of young people; as tool for creating safe environment where young people can freely express their opinion and get recognition for their achievements.



3.2. The characteristics of a good youth worker

In youth work it is important to establish equal, trusting, friendly, respecting and participatory relationship which will also be a place for learning, not just for young person but for youth worker as well. Good youth worker has to be open minded, accessible, supportive, empathic, resourceful, funny, assertive, a good listener, patient, motivated to work with young people and be aware of the trends among young people. Also, youth worker has to be aware how responsible job it is to work with young people and be prepared to accept young people as they are.

Young people have repeatedly pointed out that youth worker must be patient and has to have a sense of humour because positive mood creates a good and stimulating atmosphere. They said that youth worker has to be enthusiastic and motivated to work with young people, open, accessible, communicative and empathic.

3.3. Understandings and importance of the terms inclusion, diversity and equality

It has been shown that participants understand the most the term of inclusion, but it was difficult for them to make distinction between terms equality and diversity.

Participants usually link term inclusion with people with disabilities and members of minorities; and they understand it as equal opportunities for all and as adjustment of services that exist in the community in order to remove obstacles.

Participants understand diversity as respect between people regardless their differences and they link it with term interculturalism. Young people noted that everyone should be seen as an individual and that diversity means acceptance of others for what they are.

Participants link equality with equalization of starting positions of all people, in other words, equality means ensuring opportunities that every person can reach their full potential. They see it as basic human right and something that everyone should have.

They all offered principal examples from which it was evident that they are missing deeper understanding of these principles. Their perception was subjective and socially



desirable, but the question is how these principles are implemented in practice, in the context of Croatian society that is not sufficiently sensitized and that often does not support the implementation of these principles.

Participants agreed that all three principles are equally important. But in several organizations, inclusion was mentioned as the most important principle. In addition to the three principles mentioned before, one participant point up a new principle – equity. In her opinion, declaratively promoted equal opportunities means nothing to those who cannot reach them.

3.4. Specific issues young people face

Participants critically reflected on Croatian society and identified some of the problems that young people face. Judging by the comments, young people are seen as a vulnerable population that is at high risk of social exclusion.

They named a lot of different obstacles that can prevent young people from reaching their potentials. We can reduce them to personal and social obstacles. Personal can be poor self-image, passivity, lack of information, lack of motivation, while under the social obstacles they indicated lack of financial resources, poverty, risk family situation, demotivating environment, lack of independence, geographical isolation, lack of free activities for young people etc. They also mentioned difficulties in the education process because they see formal education system as a system of regimentation and imposition. Also, they emphasized problem of centralization because most activities for youth are happening in major cities which means that young people from distant cities cannot participate in variety of activities.

Young people mentioned following issues: social expectations, economic crisis, insufficient support of parents/educators/teachers, fear of authority, lack of information, lack of awareness about the possibilities of activating in the community, lack of resources in the community, lack of motivation and financial difficulties.



3.5. Evaluation of interventions

According to the responses of participants, we can conclude that they all have standardized forms of evaluating the work (before/after test, written/oral evaluation), but for some of them, the most important feedback is the one from users of their services which cannot always be measurable.

3.6. Specific resources used and required

It has been shown that participants aren't using very often resources related to the IDE principles. They usually rely on internal documents and knowledge of a core team in organization because there are usually interdisciplinary team in non governmental organization. Only useful resources written in Croatian language are national strategies that provides specific guidelines for working with young people and publications produced by civil society organizations. Also, some of the participants said that they found useful different professional papers on national and European level, as well as various brochures from the civil sector.

3.7. Education/training for Inclusion, Diversity and equality

In Croatia, education on IDE principles are almost non-existent. It has been mentioned that there is no ongoing financial and competent investment in this type of education. Regarding this, it was stated that there is a need for more education where people could discuss methods and techniques in youth work and where they could gain informal practical guidelines for working with young people.

Although not necessarily linked to IDE principles, participants mentioned several training and education opportunities for people from Croatia. Some of them are: international trainings (Erasmus, Salto Youth, Y-Peer, Eryica); national training (Youth Studies-Croatian Youth Network), different conferences and round tables.



3.8. Further developments in training/education

Youth workers and key people said that they are missing practical materials where they can find more specific tools for working in non-formal education, more topical and inovative methods for working with young people and more training of trainers and facilitators for conducting activities for young people. Also, they are missing examples of good practice, guidelines that are needed for working with young refugees and immigrantsand other specific vulnerable groups of young people. Likewise, they are missing materials that would help to standardize practice of youth work (delimitation of professions)in Croatia.