



#EAYW MEETS BRIDGES FOR TRAINERS: PART 2



As you might have read in the [first part of our blog about Bridges for Trainers](#), #EAYW is joining some European events to find out more about inspirational reflections and responses to current developments aiming to support quality and innovation in youth work. In the previous blog post, you can find some interesting and thought-provoking reflections, our impressions of Bridges for Trainers 2020 and some inputs related to trainers' work and the future of learning. And much, much more! Be sure to check it out!

"INNOVATION IS AT THE CORE OF WHAT WE DO!"

Today, however, we would like to hear from the community of practice, in this case, trainers themselves. Why is innovation and quality in youth work important? How is it connected with trainers? And how can we foster it? These were just some of the questions we discussed with Rachel Hurtado, freelance trainer from Spain, and Sabrina Apitz, freelance trainer from Germany.



Bridges for Trainers: a place that offers quality discussions for trainers

Both Sabrina and Rachel work as freelance trainers on EU level and implement training courses on a regular basis. They attended this year's Bridges for Trainers, as they agree there is a need for a space for trainers to meet and reflect, which does not happen that often. "It was interesting meeting trainers who have different opinions. I have a feeling that we as a community have similar visions, but at the same times very different ones, which is nice, as it shows diversity and everyone has a voice," says Sabrina, who also notes that we should recognise the community and use moments like this to motivate ourselves. Rachel also says it was important for her to participate in the event, as discussions revolving around the impact of COVID-19 and the existence of a community of practice were held. "We discussed the community of practice and I feel that we need a community of practice both for moral and professional support. Whether we have or not have a community, we need one and we should define what exactly are our needs," says Rachel.

When talking about key takeaways from the event, both of them highlight that there is a stronger collaboration with institutions such as National Agencies and SALTO Resource Centres. Rachel says she felt they were listened to when asking for changes. "It was interesting to see how the organisers brought back their feedback to us," Rachel concludes. In the same tone, Sabrina adds: "Within the bubble, recognition of trainers' work increases, but outside the bubble we still need to see". As there is stronger collaboration with institutions, as it was outlined in one of the discussions during Bridges for Trainers, there is the opportunity to take advantage of the momentum – with the beginning of the new EU programmes and the European Youth Work Agenda – to bring needed, real and practical changes into youth work.

Quality youth work needs tools and support systems

One of the areas of importance for youth work is connected with the quality of the whole field. As trainers are part of the community of practice, they are also responsible for implementing their activities in a quality way. When talking about quality, both trainers agree that we need to have a system of quality. "We should all aim for quality and there is a big effort invested to develop a system of quality. I think this should also come with a system which says what happens if the quality is not so good," says Rachel, who thinks that investment in quality is quite important. Also, we need more tools, methods or models to support such a system of quality. "In order to enhance and monitor quality, we need tools and practical ways for people to use. It is important to build support, which is handy and practical for youth workers and organisations, to bring into practice and reflect on, so they [organisations or youth workers] can say they enhanced the quality," Sabrina concludes. Some of the main challenges in quality youth work are connected to dependence on grants, but also to measuring the impact. "We are high dependent on grants and programme subventions, which can influence the work," Rachel says. On the other hand, Sabrina talks about the importance of finding the best solution to measure youth work activities. "The whole structure of youth work, non-formal learning and even informal learning does not have the same structure, so you can't measure them, as you can do measurements in formal education," says Sabrina. "We always have to keep in mind what is proper to us."

Innovation and the youth work field

Besides fostering quality, the youth work field is also creating new practices. Sabrina notes that she believes that the whole field is developing in a way which is innovative, that we need to understand more about innovation and follow this way, but also have more opportunities to innovate. "I think we need to put more focus on innovation in youth work. I have the feeling that changes in the environments provide us with a chance to adapt and find something new – this is the way innovation comes in. We make the field a better place for learning and increase the quality as well." Similarly, Rachel also says innovation is essential, especially as the situation is changing. "Youth changes as the world changes – for example, COVID has changed everything from scratch. It has made possible some things (and impossible some others), but it has shown the needs for change. There is the need to adapt, and I think trainers and youth workers need to change and innovate," she concludes. Also, innovation takes time, so we cannot rely on projects, which are limited in time. Sabrina also notes that we don't need pressure to innovate, as some practices and tools can be quite successful and should be kept the way they are.

And, what is the best way to innovate? Is it building on what we have already? Sabrina would agree and says that "we need to work with what is developed and build on that." However, this can sometimes be challenging, as there are many resources available and they are not collected in one place. This, in the perspective of our interviewed trainers, is an obstacle, because we need to build upon what already exists. If we cannot find what is already developed and upscale it, innovating new practices, tools and approaches becomes even more of a challenge. We should

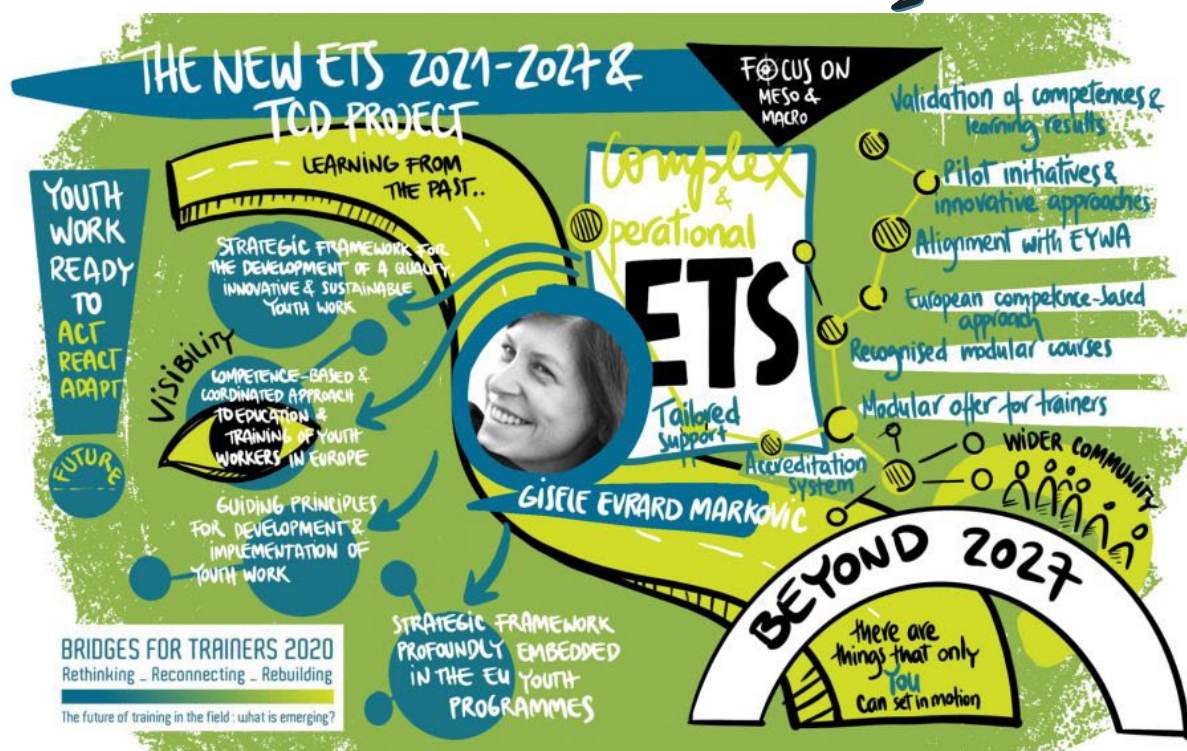


build common places for storing resources in order to develop new tools or approaches. “There is an online overload with so many platforms or repositories of resources, which can be confusing. There are lots of great ideas, but they just get lost in the immensity of resources online,” says Rachel. So, it would definitely be good to think about a central place where all tools, methods and practices will be published, and that they are not dispersed in several databases.

Instead of a conclusion...

Trainers are, in Sabrina’s view, “mediators (interfaces) between local and international level and also between the youth work, training and research fields, which gives them an interesting role and view on things. Furthermore, they are initiators and life-long learners. What COVID-19 has shown us is that the community can adapt to things and deal with ambiguities.” All of this can be seen as innovative, as trainers had to react quickly and think about new methodologies and approaches in order to transfer non-formal learning experiences online and upscale already existing practices.

If you are interested to read more about Bridges for Trainers, check out [our previous blog post](#) or the article about this event in the November issue of the digital magazine **ANews** published by the Romanian National Agency.



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