



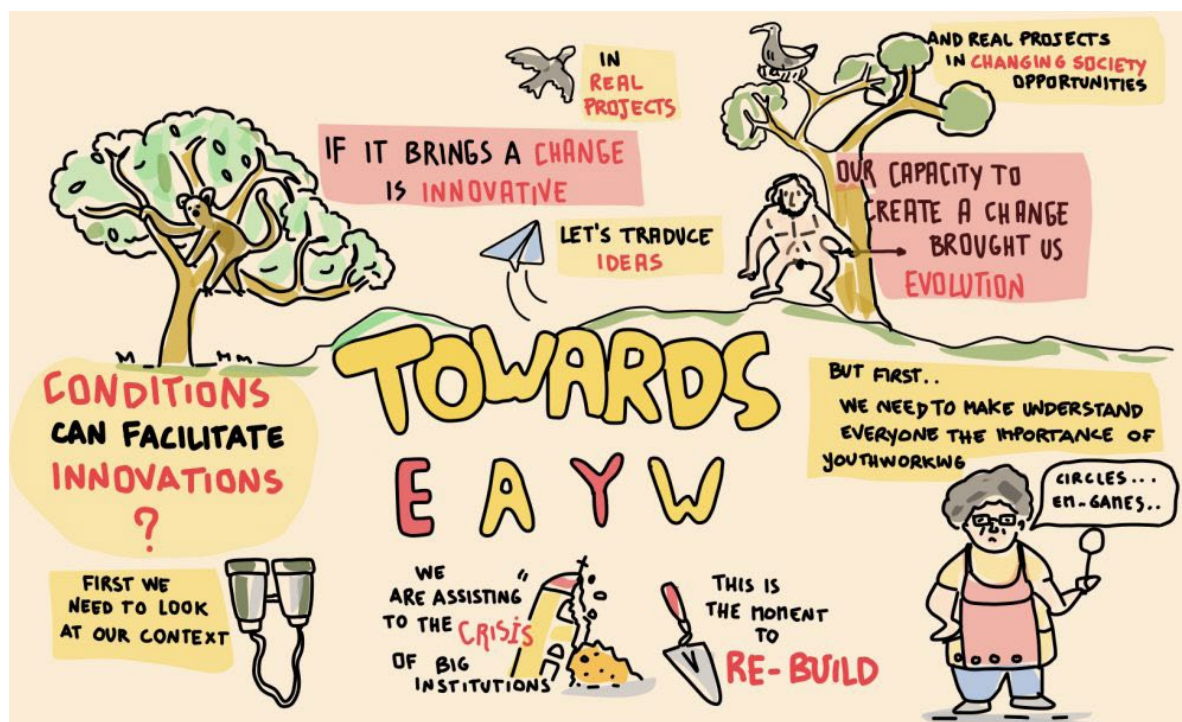
YOUTH WORK AND INNOVATION IN SOUTHERN COUNTRIES: #EAYW Meets “The Outreach of South Youth Workers”



What are the specific elements of youth work in Southern countries of Europe? What are the current issues and challenges youth work is facing and which educational policies and practices are typical for youth work in Southern countries? These were questions discussed at the activity “The Outreach of South Youth Workers: South Youth Workers Forum towards the EAYW”. We were there to listen and share our current state of the play and our future plans.

“The Outreach of South Youth Workers: South Youth Workers Forum towards the EAYW” was held online from 12 – 15 July 2021 and gathered 29 participants from the youth work community of practice (youth workers and researchers) to share and discuss the role of the youth worker and possible common educational policies in the Southern countries of Europe, as well as to converge towards a coordinated effort to bring

the Southern educational approach into pan-European events on youth work. The activity was hosted by the Italian National Agency jointly with the Network of South National Agencies of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes (Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Republic of North Macedonia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, Southern Mediterranean countries).



Coronationalism – a new way of exclusion?

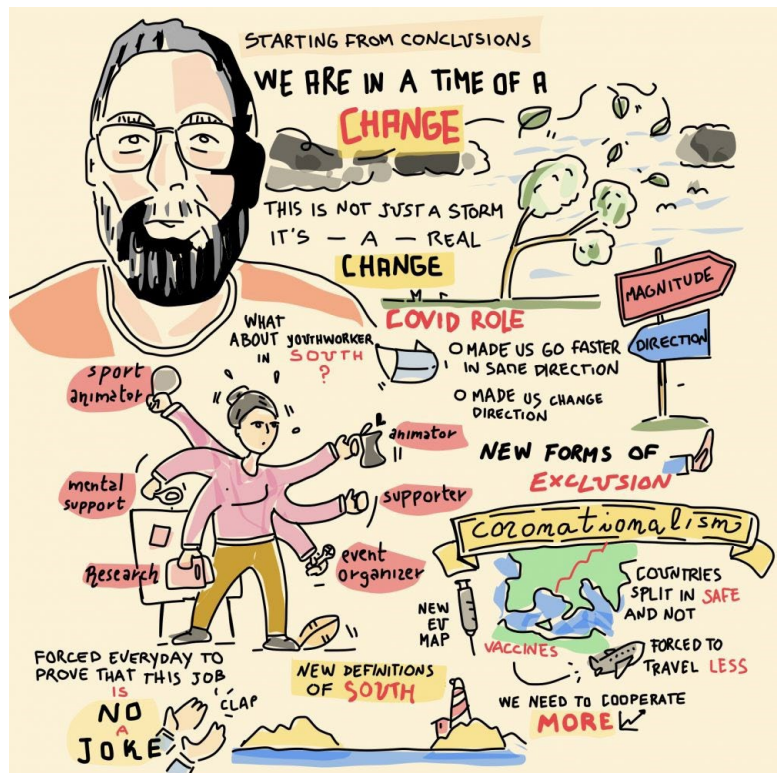
During the four days, the participants had the chance to share their views and discuss their realities, but they were also inspired by keynote speakers, who shared their opinion on trends in Southern youth work, the impact of innovation and cultural factors influencing innovation.

One of the speakers, Özgehan Şenyuva, researcher and EAYW Advisory Board member, talked about current trends in youth work in the South. He started off with the conclusion that we are living in times of change, and that it's important to discuss the direction and magnitude of the change. So, trends that are connected with change are different. From his perspective, there is a need to increase dialogue between research and practice, as practice comes first with interventions and research follows. Also, he noted that youth workers in Southern countries have multiple roles: they are youth workers, social workers, researchers, psychologists... and they always have to justify what their work is all about as well as what is their main role.

From the perspective of the current pandemic, it was highlighted that we have new restrictions and we are creating “Coronationalism”. This means that we have different restrictions for travels, which can influence who we are working with while implementing international projects. For example, we can make a list of participants coming from safe or not safe countries. There can be a change in partnership structure (selecting countries with a higher number of vaccinated people or having inequality because of the vaccine someone got – for example, Chinese vaccines are currently not recognised in the EU). So, this means new forms of exclusion are arising. We can also clearly see how the pandemic is changing youth work as such: there are more activities happening at the local level and there is more cooperation. We are transferring the best practices and learning more from each other. “We may travel less, but talk and co-operate more”, Özgehan concluded.

Innovation in Southern countries

The intention of the event was also to discuss innovation in Southern countries and it started with a thought-provoking speech from Miriam Teuma, Chief Executive of Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, Malta's national youth agency. She kicked off her speech noting



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that the South is characterised by some weaknesses, which include a laid back approach, less discipline and focus as well as looking up to others and not creating something new. Even though these weaknesses are an obstacle to youth work, on the other hand, youth workers are determined, resilient and positive. For her, the laid back approach generates positive things; lack of focus brings resilience. Looking up to others brings new growth.

Furthermore, Miriam talked about the need to have a South Youth Work network. However, she implied that it would be nice to change the perspective and call it “Youth work for people coming from the South”. Specifically in the context of Southern countries, she defined youth work as a place where personal, social and political education happens.

When talking about innovation, she highlighted that it is connected with the usage of technology, having creativity, having a clear strategy (how to be more efficient) and vision, as well as having inspiration (from all over the world). She concluded that we need better lobbying in youth work, as it will make things happen: “A lot of governments and authorities in the South, especially in the Mediterranean, have limitations. They do not have structures and competences – this is the right time for lobbying”.

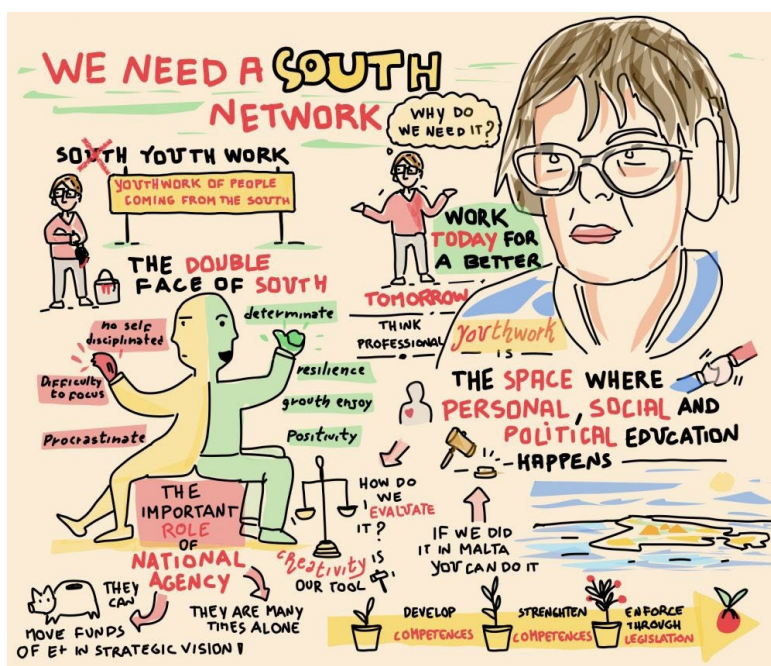


In her presentation, Miriam provoked a discussion around the Erasmus+ programme. From her perspective, funds should be allocated to lobbying efforts and giving the opportunity to youth workers to influence policies. Another important area would be implementing more meetings between organisations and starting strategic cooperation in order to make a change.

Last but not least, Dragan Atanasov, Secretary General of the Union for Youth Work of North Macedonia, trainer and consultant and researcher for the EAYW, talked more about the factors that influence innovation. Drawing from research done by Barbara A. Kerr, he noted that there are a variety of factors that influence innovation, including economics, social surroundings, the education system and the individual environment. For him, culture is part of the conditions in the ecosystem of youth work innovation. Unlike countries that foster a more individualistic approach, Southern countries are characterised by a culture based on relationships. This means that people are spending time with each other, network and like to be connected. This certainly plays a crucial role in innovation. If we look at history, the concept of Agora in Greece can reinforce this notion, as different innovations happened there.

Also, Dragan noted that for innovation it is important to have support structures. According to the study about innovation implemented by Barbara A. Kerr, a very strong support structure exists on the national level, which supports creativity, innovation, and the development of new ideas. Institutions in Southern countries should thus provide more support structures to make innovation happen.

From the participants' point of view, innovation was seen as the ability to adapt and change throughout time, especially having the capacity to find solutions to emerging challenges. They highlighted the importance of transferability of youth work activities as something crucial.



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The impact of innovation, from their perspective, is visible years after activities have been implemented and it can be on individual level or professional level.

Instead of a conclusion...

Four days of the "Outreach of South Youth Workers" were full of findings, keynote lectures and discussions among participants. The activity created a space for the participants to reflect, but what is more important, it gave them the opportunity to discuss important topics issues that are of specific importance for the situation and the professional and social recognition of youth workers in South European countries.

Within the programme, the EAYW was presented, including the 2nd EAYW event to be held in November. Youth work and innovation are context-related and we are looking forward to further discussing there what is needed to find and implement solutions to existing and emerging challenges, specific to the countries in the South of Europe and to other parts of the wider Europe. Participants of this activity who want to attend and will be invited to the next edition of the EAYW will certainly have relevant thoughts to share in these discussions!