



## How Future-Ready Are You?

by Nik Paddison

On Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024, the second webinar of the Third European Academy on Youth Work took place on the theme of, "How future-ready are you?". It was attended by over 70 professionals in youth work and related fields from across Europe. For the majority, this was their first interaction with an Academy event, with the majority of those saying that they would also be attending the residential event in May. The facilitators, Anita De Silva and Darko Marković, posed a number of challenging questions: How do you relate to the future? Are you in love with it or is it "complicated"? Are you adventurous in the way you imagine it, or are you nostalgic about your "past futures"? Do you feel ready to commit to more future-oriented thinking?

### Exploring our mindset

Right from the outset, the participants were being encouraged to explore their thoughts and feelings, their mindset about futures thinking and youth work. Six statements were posed for the participants to respond to.



The majority of the participants stated clearly that they keep themselves updated about societal trends and regularly rethink their practice. The team's analysis here was that over the last 20 plus

years, as youth work has developed, especially at the European level, contextualising practice and rethinking of practice has become much more the norm. We have access now to hundreds of publications, there has been a huge amount of research, and there is a far greater emphasis on sharing amongst the community of practice.

Regarding the preservation of the core of youth work, while it is necessary and needed - referring to values and principles -, there may be a time in the future when there will be a call for its transformation. We should not ignore this possibility even if it does not feel comfortable. "Letting go of the old ways" provides an easy response from some, but for others there are a lot of questions. Do we have to change because such 'old ways' don't work anymore? Other scenarios can be that a youth worker wants to see change but the organisation, colleagues or even policies prevent that change from happening.

The final two statements link threats and possibilities, or we can say, excitement and anxiety. The analysis of the team focused on how we need to acknowledge and balance these contradictory positions. Also, we need to be aware that for some colleagues or institutions, there may be more anxiety than excitement about creating change.

## Getting future-ready

A question was posed to the group; **"as youth workers/supporters what are your thoughts about how to get future-ready? What can support and what can block this ability?"**. The participants commented; there is a need for cultivating mental wellbeing, the movement for recognition must continue and keep improving, the education and training of youth workers must take future thinking into account, keep listening to young people, maintain awareness of societal realities, and embrace technology.

## Considering possible futures

In the next stage of the webinar, the participants were presented with three future scenarios and asked what they thought the response of youth work should be. The first scenario: **"In 15 years (2039), there are much fewer young people in Europe. Many youth centres have become community centres and serve all generations."**

The main response to this scenario was that youth work would need to adapt to become intergenerational, that it could create different projects and scenarios of sharing, building communication and understanding. It was also pointed out that this is something youth work should be doing already and in some cases is doing. There needs to be ongoing youth work development in both theory and practice, with the aim of reaching more young people and providing better service for young people and youth led activities. The majority of immigrants coming to Europe are young people, youth work needs to be doing more to reach out to these young people to introduce them to youth work and all its benefits.



The second scenario stated: **“In 15 years (2039), the formal education system as we know it, no longer exists. Global online education platforms now certify all kinds of learning experiences, both formal and non-formal, for all ages.”**

While the thought of the current formal education system no longer existing was being celebrated by some, it was acknowledged that there are important aspects to it that should not be ignored or thrown away. The scenario was seen as having exciting possibilities for starting something new, something that promoted learning over control and that would be person centred. Something that would be more flexible in its approach, encompassing many aspects from non-formal education and linking with youth work.

The third scenario: **“In 15 years (2039), due to continuous conflicts and environmental crises, youth workers are focused on building skills of activism, participation and dialogue, for AI-created educational programmes.”**

The first response was that AI needs to be embraced and learnt about, especially by youth workers. Youth work needs to learn how young people can use it and how it can be incorporated into youth work. However, it also comes with dangers attached. It will become increasingly important for youth work to promote and develop critical thinking among young people and raising their consciousness of the possible dangers and so reduce the risks.

## Silent discussion

The final part of the webinar was a silent discussion, the facilitators posed a question and the participants responded just in the chat. This led to a dynamic exchange, not only to the questions being posed but between the participants as well.

The first question asked was, **“what could youth workers be doing to prepare for, prevent or change any of the scenarios?”** Interestingly, the primary response was that as youth workers we should get excited and be curious and creative in order to be the leaders of change. However, this was balanced out with people advising caution, mostly in the sense of expressing fear and hope simultaneously.

The next question asked, **“what skills or knowledge are needed by a youth worker for navigating the future?”**. Answers included compassion, empathy, resilience, critical thinking, computing, communication, teamwork, and flexibility. We need to learn to unlearn, the future is changing so quickly at times that it is necessary for us to unlearn things – even if they were working well.



The third question asked was, **“how we, as the youth work field, can get ready for the future and support one another?”**. As a sector we need to share and communicate; cooperate, talk, discuss, network, listen and collaborate. We need more Academies, more actions and activities that bring the community of practice together and so build a creative and supportive community. Another core response was related to being civically engaged, we need to understand the policies and politics that affect young people and youth work, and we need to be behind upcoming policies.

## Resources

This second webinar closed with the presentation of some core resources for people to further explore futures thinking.



UNESCO: [Future Literacy playbook](#)

Jane McGonagal: [Imaginable](#)

Coursera: [Ready, Set, Future! Introduction to Futures Thinking](#)

SITRA: [Future Frequencies workshop](#)

Institute for the Future: [Global Youth Skills Toolkit](#)

