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# Impact of youth work

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## 1 Introduction

Research shows that the vast majority of owners of technical appliances, such as cameras, computers or dishwashers, regularly make use of only around ten percent of their functions. No matter how high-tech add-ons and innovative solutions a producer adds to a camera, these are of no value unless users know how to use them or unless they are aware that they have bought them in the first place.

Youth work is in a similar situation. We can compare it to a camera with numerous functions. Youth work similarly has many and varied forms of impact. However, unless we recognise them, they remain hidden. The work of youth leaders and youth workers does not reach the added value it could, and their product (no matter how consumerist this may sound) is more difficult to “sell” to the state, funders, parents, young people.

### 1.1 Prevention and other stories

Those who do not know youth work, mostly cram it in the context of leisure time. “It’s great,” they say, “that young people do something more or less useful, that they don’t hang in front of the computer or the television, and that it’s not just nonsense going through their heads.” Indeed, prevention, as this is formally called, is one of the most important impacts of youth work. However, it is by far not the only one.

We know of many personal stories from the last ten or twenty years, also in Slovenia, when the life of a person or a group has dramatically changed or even completely turned around because of youth work. In most cases for the better. Many have given up on unhealthy lifestyle and exchanged them for healthier ones, perhaps even more have gained knowledge and skills, on the basis of which they later started their own businesses

or developed an innovation at the workplace. There is a mass of people who have, based on their youth work experience, revived their life mission, or have changed or deepened them. There are also those who have found their life partners through youth work, discovered that they shared a dream with them, and established a family together.

What goes on in youth work to give it such power? Why does formal education, for example, not have such an impact on so many people, to be able to share such stories? Can youth leaders and youth workers properly formulate this power that influences so many different aspects of one’s life?

### 1.2 Formulating the impact

It is useful to formulate the impact of youth work, from many perspectives:

- If the youth leader tries to recognise it together with young people, they begin to understand what they have gained by taking part in an activity. This might be knowledge, self-confidence, new friendships, new ideas. If the youth leader gives this exercise no time, young people may not even be aware of such impact.
- If members or collaborators in a youth organisation or an organisation working with youth, formulate the impact, they will better position their organisation in relation to others, and within the wider social context. They will have a clearer understanding of the organisation’s mission and the impact of their work. They will know with what and how they contribute to a better world.
- Knowing the impact also enables better future planning of activities. Once we recognise it, we better understand the contribution of an activity to the environment in which it takes place. This is how every future activity better corresponds to the needs of the environment.
- Parents often do not recognise the impact of youth work. Many see it as a threate-

ning thief of a young person's time. If the youth leader or the young person her/himself can properly formulate the impact of youth work to the parents, they are more likely they to support or at least to not hinder her/him.

- If the youth leaders and youth workers formulate the impact to supporters, funders, journalists, or public institutions (thus: to external stakeholders), they will strengthen the outward visibility of their work whilst improving the funding or succeeding in ensuring other forms of support.

### 1.3 Translating impact

There is a difference between formulating the impact of youth work for ourselves and formulating it for others. When we discuss the impact of youth work with others, this is always related to how they translate it. This does not mean translation in other languages but mainly in different contexts of the same language. Every target group speaks their own jargon or slang, use different specific expressions and forms of speech. If we wish to explain the impact to them, we must speak their language.



*Youth work is at the crossroads of different fields: pedagogy, sociology, political science, social work and others. Youth leaders must be able to translate the impact into the languages of all these fields.*

Youth work as a field<sup>1</sup> at such crossroads of pedagogy, sociology, political science, non-governmental work, media and others, must be compatible with all of them, if it wishes to successfully cooperate with them or function within them. To paraphrase, it needs to speak at least a bit of all these “foreign” languages. Let us look at some examples:

<sup>1</sup> For fields of youth work, see chapter 4: Youth work

- When talking to educators, it makes sense to speak about learning results, new knowledge, skills, competences.
- When talking to sociologists or anthropologists, we think within the context of social capital, socialisation, integration, inculturation.
- When talking to journalists, we must find special impact, individuals who due to youth work stand out of the average and for whom the impact has already manifested itself in a visible form.
- When evaluating the activities together with young people who are only entering youth work and are not yet aware of most impacts, we need to look at them from the point of view of acceptance in the group, fun, new friendships, interesting implementation of activities, and the fulfilment of personal goals.
- When completing tools for the recognition of non-formal education and/or informal learning, we speak about key competences and non-formally acquired knowledge.
- When talking about our work with local politicians, we will probably present the impact with concrete, measurable and achieved results, visible at the local level.
- • When talking to national- or international-level politicians, we often refer to the implementation of relevant policies, be it on employment, youth delinquency, civic education, education for tolerance, non-violence and social inclusion.
- We will present the impact to parents differently again. We might talk about good company that enables young people to improve their skills to better succeed in life, or perhaps mainly about how young people are in safe hands and do the “right” things.
- Certain segments of youth work cooperate also with other target groups. Actors in religion-based youth work, for example, recognise the impact of youth work mainly in the context of cultural animation for youth, prevention and inclusion in pastoral activity, whilst workers and experts

from non-governmental organisations see this impact mainly in the context of youth participation, strengthening of the civil society and civic dialogue.

Finally, it is worth emphasising that there are no recipes for translation. We must always seek and find common language with our counterpart, no matter which target group s/he belongs to. Listening is key; we must listen which concepts and words our interlocutor is using, what the aims of her/his work are, how s/he understands these aims and concepts, and we must try to recognise our own aims and work in them. This is the only way to successful cooperation and mutual understanding of impact.

## **2 The impact of youth work through history**

As we can read in the chapter History of youth work, different eras and different environments have assigned different social roles to youth work. It understandingly responded to the needs of both (young) individuals and the society, but was put in different contexts. Finally, youth as a social category was also not the same in all periods of history. Of all generations, youth changes fastest and probably in every era most intensely lives the spirit of that time.

It is therefore difficult to assess and evaluate the impact of youth work from the perspective of history. This would require one to familiarise oneself as best as possible with every specific period of time, and to vividly imagine the situation of young people in it, the political goals and the social conditions. The safest way to discover a historic view of the impact of youth work thus probably leads through discovering the statements of youth leaders/workers, thinkers and relevant politicians of the time. The records of these people

about youth work are likely to most clearly present the impact they expected from it.

### **2.1 Impact through the eyes of the big four**

»The saint, the poet, the lord and the cardinal« (Coussee, 2010) is an article vividly describing four important personalities and their motives for youth work. The article refers to the founder of oratories, the Italian priest Don Bosco, the Belgian poet Albrecht Rodenbach, the English Lord Robert Baden Powell who founded the scout movement, and to Jozef Cardijn, who engaged himself with youth workers in Belgium. These men worked in different periods of time and in different environments. Let us take a look at how these contexts affected their views of youth work.

Giovanni Bosco (Don Bosco)<sup>2</sup> who lived in the mid-19th century, wished to react in an untypical way to social injustice of that time, especially to the consequences of the industrial revolution felt in the urban environment. His main impact could be labelled as prevention, which he understood as the protection of children and young people from damaging impacts of the society. He also worked a lot with young delinquents, whose energy he tried to redirect in a positive way. His oratory offered to youth a variety of activities, led by the idea that “everything but sin was allowed”. In the work of Don Bosco we can clearly recognise many other goals, including the efforts to give education to youth, to solve their housing problems, to intervene in deficient family relations (introduction of youth animators). Mainly, however, his work aimed to show to young people that they were appreciated, respected and loved just as they were. Especially prevention (“where would I be today, had I not joined the group back then?”) and the feeling of acceptance

2 He and Robert Baden Powell are already mentioned in chapter 5: History of youth work.

are still today mentioned by young people as two fundamental impacts of youth work.

Albrecht Rodenbach worked in Belgium, a few decades after the Italian priest from the previous paragraph. Worried about the progressive disappearance of the Flemish language, he gathered Flemish students across the country, who opposed urbanisation, industrialisation and capitalism. A romantic movement developed, whose main activity we could today describe as non-formal education through cultural courses. The movement soon gained imitators across Europe, the most known among them being the German Wandervögel. The impact of their work can be identified through the terms social and youth question. They worked to integrate in the society young people from different social strata.

Robert Baden Powell began to discover his scout method at the end of the 19th century and continued to adapt it into a form of youth work in the first years of the 20th century. His book *Scouting for Boys* is based mainly on what we would today call responsible citizenship. Among many of his interesting quotations, the best known is probably this one: “Try to leave this world a little better than you found it.” He believed in individual responsibility and in one’s honour to uphold this responsibility, this general task entrusted to one as a citizen. On the other hand we could speak of Baden Powell also in the context of holistic integration of young people in the society. Small scout groups quickly turned into a ground to learn about democracy, solidarity, equality, brotherhood, physical aptitude and service to the society. One of the basic principles of scouting is also the holistic development of a person, thus physical, cognitive, social, moral, emotional and spiritual – and this not just for any reason but in order for the person to be able to fully contribute to the common good.

The fourth man, the catholic cardinal Jozef Cardijn was, like Rodenbach, active in Belgi-

um, but a few years later than Baden Powell. He was concerned by the state of moral integrity of youth, particularly those from the working class. Contrary to Baden Powell he did not base his work on the ideal responsible citizen but on the societal and social situation young people were in. More than on the question of integrating young people in the society he focused on their social status. In this sense we could compare him to Don Bosco; however, he did not primarily tackle the challenge through prevention, but rather through a sort of teaching of critical thinking. His method is recognised in three words: see – judge – act. In this sense he wanted to seek the individual truth for the person beyond the consensually agreed social truth, which was in a way pre-supposed by Don Bosco and Baden Powell through their work.

## **2.2 Impact of youth work through the theoretical eyes of Stanko Gogala**

Possibly the first visible theorist of youth work (or, as he calls it, youth movement, thereby thinking mainly of the initiatives coming from young people themselves) in the Slovenian context was Stanko Gogala. He was an extremely productive and influential Slovenian pedagogue from the time between the two World Wars; he lived still after World War II, but for several reasons his later texts are less strong than the ones from before the War.

In 1931 Gogala wrote “On the pedagogic values of youth work” in which he carefully analysed what we call youth work today. The first part of his book is theoretical, whilst the second one describes concrete movements in the field.

Gogala saw the causes for the development and forms of the youth movement in the social situation, which he tackled from several viewpoints. His approach was very progressive for his time. He was probably largely

inspired by the concept of cultural pedagogy of his predecessor Karl Ozvald, whose key premise was the recognition that an individual can be educated by any situation s/he lives in. Reading Ozvald and Gogala seems surprising precisely from the point of view of the meaning they attribute to the experiential, non-formal and specifically informal learning. These concepts are very familiar to youth work. It seems that after World War II this tradition got lost and that youth work has formally rediscovered all these concepts only after 1990.

According to Gogala the main reasons for the development of a youth movement, which at the same time already indicate its impact as well, are:

- School and primarily the attitude of a young person to it. The author claims that the school has lost its direct and vital connection with young people. It represents to them a strange institution, disconnected from their lives. Initially school should have been a genuine experience of a community of a teacher and pupil, where the pupil feels the need to enrich, develop and form her/his soul. This need stems from the fact that the pupil has recognised the teacher as someone who is spiritually and mentally rich. Gogala claims that a good teacher will do more for the pupil than s/he formally ought to, and must know how to attract his pupils. He is also disturbed by how the school has turned from a community to an organisation (from today's perspective we may ask: was it ever a community?). According to him the youth movement developed as a response to such a situation, which we can interpret as a wish to gain knowledge a pupil really needs, genuineness, quality education based on the needs of young people and not on a legally determined minimum. In a way this means non-formal education, then.
- The home is, for Gogala, the second source of the youth movement. He says: "The psychological core of an ideal, i.e.

natural family unit, has its roots not only in the physical-animalistic part of the human soul, but also in the spiritual-love sphere, and this in a way that the normal is transferred from here to the physical-animalistic or sexual-hedonistic aspect of spirituality." Modern families of his time are described by Gogala as broken and disunited, children in them live their own, unseen and uncontrolled life, separated from the parents. They are linked to the family mainly with their physical-biological needs for food and money. The youth movement has thus developed as the search for what the family does not sufficiently provide: understanding and support in spiritual need.

- The third reason, says Gogala, are organisations. He denotes them as "different high school, academic and culture-work associations, which abound in our society." He mainly criticises their leaders. He claims that such organisations are set up because of a common idea of their members who, consequently, are active and "full of spirit" in the organisation. Nevertheless, the leader's task is to further stimulate this spirit. Otherwise the formality grows, rendering the organisation less and less genuine. Instead of content it is form that begins to matter. Every new generation less feels the common mission and thus the organisation grows old. We can assume that Gogala mainly had in mind the organisations for young people led by adults, otherwise it is difficult to understand the difference between a youth organisation and a youth movement. He thus emphasises active participation of young people in managing their own groups.

Gogala's other reasons for the emergence of the youth movement are:

- the attitude of young people to youth,
- the culture of the body,
- the nature,
- the civilisation,
- the spirit of the time and the culture,

- personality, and
- religious culture.

That Gogala sees youth work mainly from the perspective of youth organising themselves and less from the social (political) perspective, is shown in this quote, taken from the section on youth movements as pedagogical movements: “Let us look at the pedagogical and educational values of this movement and its influence...because the youth movement itself is considered as an educational organisation and because this is precisely why it escaped the educational influence of the older generation. Young people who started joining this movement, have felt that the older generation does not educate at all, or educates in a wrong manner, by showing wrong educational goals and values, or is unable to educate, because its entire pedagogy stems from itself, from its maturity and experience. Its educational activity ... does not take into account the spiritual specificities of youth.”

This paragraph gives us the basis to claim that for Gogala the main impact of youth work lies precisely in the fact that young people set their own educational and pedagogic goals, that they have a space in which to form their own world, and for which they take responsibility themselves.

### 2.3 Edvard Kardelj on youth work

Youth work can be seen from a completely different angle through the eyes of one of the most influential politicians of the post-World War II time, Edvard Kardelj, when he spoke about the role of the socialist youth (Pinosa, 2009). For him, the role of the political system based on self-management was to ensure the inclusion of young generations in the social life as fast and as widely as possible. Therefore he claimed: “The Union of socialist youth and other youth organisations must be given a more important place in the delegate system than they enjoy today. Their main social function must be precisely to subjectively train

and include young people in the system of a self-managed democracy. If the revolutionary organisation of youth wishes to successfully play its role, it must not be self-contained and closed into a narrow circle of so-called youth issues, but must be closely linked to economic, self-management, political and other interests and needs of the person in the work place in a factory, in the city, in the village or in the institutions. The main task of the Union of socialist youth must certainly be to integrate not only the selected parts of youth, but its wide masses into the system of self-managed democracy.”

What do you think was the reason for such different approaches of Gogala and Kardelj to identifying the impact of the youth movement? Did the difference perhaps arise from different political systems reigning in Slovenia before and after World War II? The time difference between these two statements, despite the war in between, is not that big. It is difficult to claim that the reason for such different language contexts lies in political regimes. It likely mostly shows the difference between two narratives: the narrative of the politician Kardelj, and the narrative of the pedagogue Gogala. These two different languages needed translation throughout the entire history of youth work, so that they would understand each other. They are about youth work from the perspective of its impact for young people as individuals (pedagogic view) and about youth work from the perspective of the needs of the society and impact on it (political view).

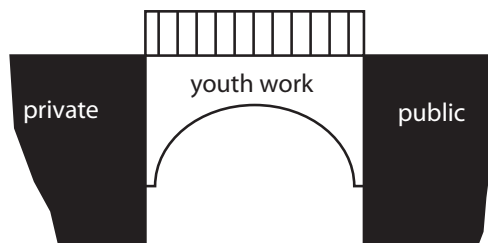


### 3 Impact of youth work on the individual and on the society

#### 3.1 The path of the individual in youth work: from private to public

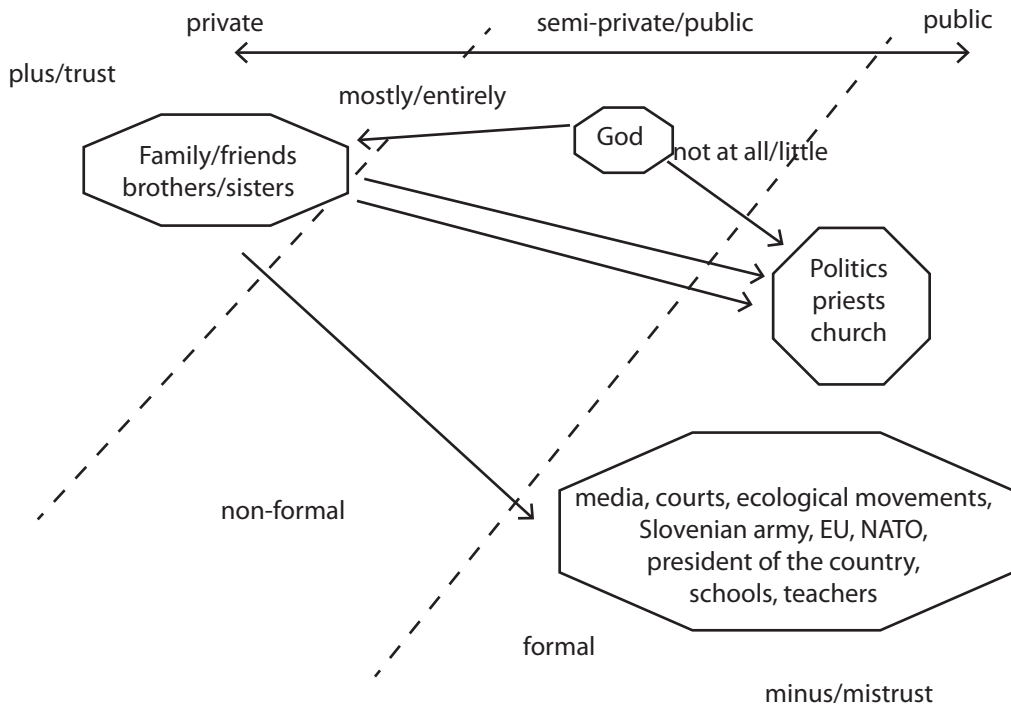
Research measuring the trust young people have in different segments of the society<sup>3</sup> shows that there is a major gap between the trust young interviewees have in their closest ones (parents, friends, brothers and sisters) and in those who appear in their field of the public sphere (or of the public as understood by young people: political parties, political leaders, priests and the church, the president of the country, NATO, teachers, the EU, the Slovenian army).

Young people predominantly put their trust in the private field, whilst public institutions usually record a high level of mistrust. Youth work is one of the possible ways of responding to the so-called gap between young people and institutions, as illustrated by the image below. The trust citizens have in democratic institutions, and their feeling that these institutions serve a common good, are key for the functioning of democracy. We can thus see youth work as a sort of bridge between the private and the public side of this gap.



Youth work can serve as a bridge between institutions

<sup>3</sup> E.g. N. Toš, Potek demokratične institucionalizacije: Zaupanje v institucije sistema. FDV, v okviru raziskave SJM 2006.



Trust and mistrust among young people (Fištravec, 2009)

Youth work leads young people from the private towards the public. It represents a path for a young person, starting in the private sphere, in the circle of friends, where s/he normally begins to satisfy mainly her/his personal needs, such as the need for company, the need to belong to a group, to be in a safe environment, where s/he can express and discover her/his skills and talents. Some young people stay on this path for a longer, some for a shorter time. Some take on new challenges along the way, others prefer to stay more or less in the same place and to repeat the already known activities.

Those who persist on the path for a longer time, and particularly those more prone to taking on new challenges, are gradually led by youth work into the sphere of the civil society. Typical activities than can be attributed to an individual in this phase of development are group, project and organisation leadership, work with the media and cooperation with other stakeholders (e.g. youth and other non-governmental organisations). In the final phase of individual development within youth work, there are, broadly speaking, two options:

- Youth work leads to better employability of youth. The individual gains certain competences through youth work, which s/he can use at the work place, to complete tasks that may at the first sight bear no resemblance to those undertaken in youth work. Even more potential is hidden in so-called soft skills, such as communication and team work. There are also abundant cases of a youth work activity becoming one's periodic or even permanent employment, in the same or another organisation. Youth work thus leads a person towards the market.
- Other paths from youth work lead to the public sphere. Typical activities in this sense are cooperation in policy making, youth advocacy or representation of an organisation at events.

We clearly cannot claim that all paths of young people in youth work follow the same pattern, set out above. However, qualitative research through focus groups, undertaken by the National Council of Slovenia in 2007 and 2008, within the project "Educational outcomes of youth work", show a large presence of this pattern.

A convincing majority of participants in the research claimed that involvement in youth work in the starting phase meant mainly life in a group, spontaneous fun and meeting friends. By taking on more responsible tasks, they began to understand its learning dimension. This is when they started to delve deeper into different areas related to the focus of their organisation, and to gain the soft skills often typical for the entire youth work. In this period they also began to better understand the structure and functioning of their organisations, which fits in the category of activity in the wider civil society. Later on, most also recalled networking within the borders of their own organisations, meeting like-minded organisations and representatives of the authorities. Some also found employment in the youth sector.

### **3.2 Youth work connects the private and the public sphere**

Youth work brings the public sphere and the market closer to young people. It opens them up to the environment they grow up in, they become more employable and more interested in public concerns.

On the other hand this same youth work enables decision makers (the public sphere) to better understand the youth's private sphere. To them youth work is an instrument that eases the implementation of measures in the context of youth policy.

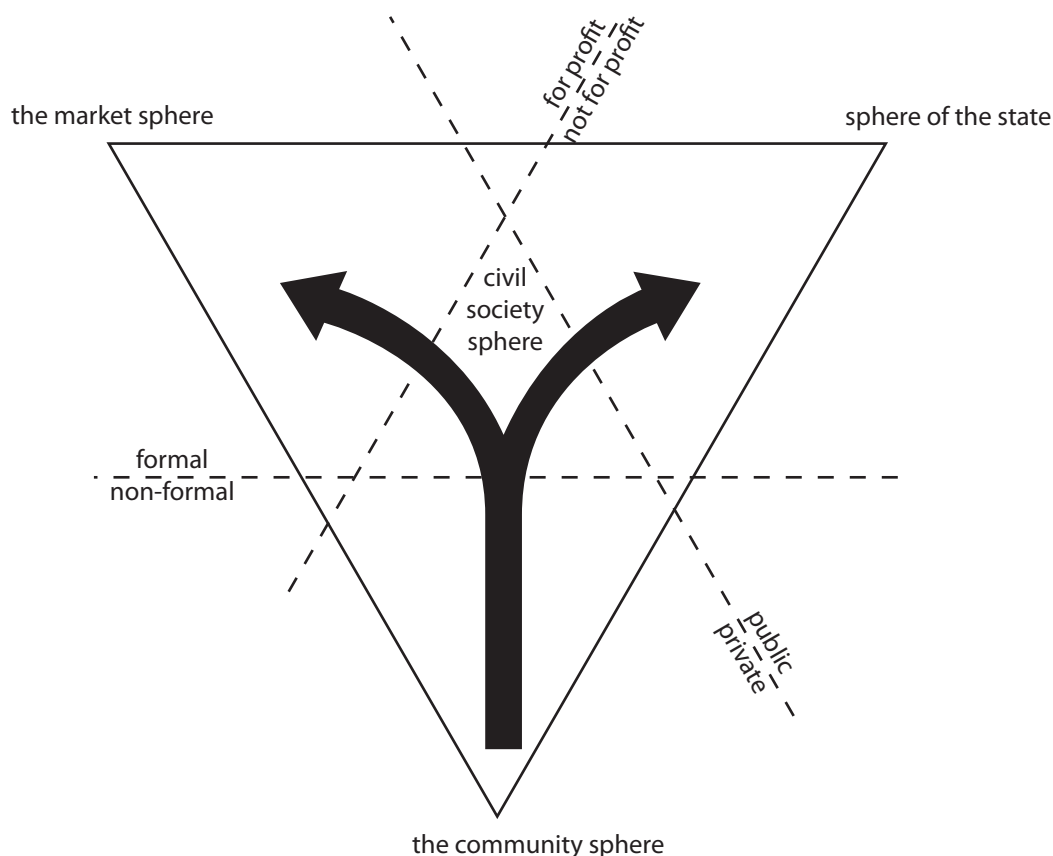
Youth work is thus a connection between the private and the public sphere, and lies at the crossroad of two interests:

- the private – youth work benefits individuals, and
- the public – youth work benefits society as a whole.

In how far youth work is in private and in public interest, largely depends on the mission and form of functioning of a group or organisation. The practice shows that this proportion also significantly affects the form of funding and individual activities. If a certain activity largely responds to the private interest, it usually cannot be publicly funded (e.g. bowling for group members, in the context of celebrating a project). Such activities are normally funded by participants themselves.

However, if an activity is largely placed in the public sphere (e.g. participation of youth organisations in a consultation of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs), it is usually publicly funded. For such activities it is extremely difficult to raise private funding, i.e. participants' own funds.

The vast majority of youth work takes place in the civil society sphere, which is placed in the middle of the welfare state triangle, outlined in the chapter What is youth work?, between the other three spheres.



Young people pass into the sphere of the state and of the community

*Quality youth work is a tasty mix of the private and public interest.*

For this very reason non-governmental organisations, in which the Slovenian law most commonly includes associations, networks of associations, foundations and private institutions, are probably the most appropriate legal and organisational formats for youth organisations and/or organisations for youth.

### 3.3 Two types of impact

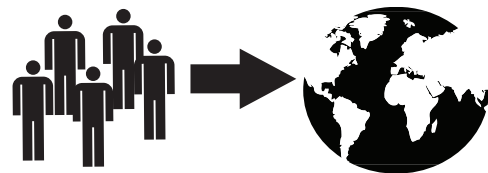
The impact of youth work can also be seen from the two mentioned aspects: the one of the individual and the one of the society. The table shows some examples:

- individual impact: spending time with friends, usefully spent free time, travel, gaining new knowledge, recognition of personal skills, understanding the place and role of the individual within the group, improved communication skills, better image of self, better self-confidence, new challenges, ...
- society impact: youth participation, strengthened social capital, intergenerational cooperation, better youth employability and competences, stimulation of a healthy lifestyle, contribution to social cohesion, release of the innovative potential of youth, more tolerance in the society, civic education...

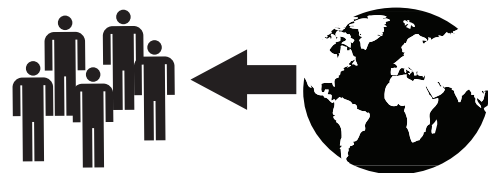
We notice than some impacts, albeit with different terms, are present in both the left and right column. This is correct. The individual impact is often closely related to society impact. It may even be the same thing, only that it is described more generally from the viewpoint of the individual, and in a more expert language from the viewpoint of the society..

### 3.4 Do young people change the society or does society change young people

Concluding the discussion on the impact of youth work on the individual and the society, we shall attempt to answer the question of the relation between individuals and the society in youth work. Do we see youth work mainly as young people's initiatives, which manifest themselves through action in the environment, or is youth work first and foremost an initiative of the environment (mainly decision makers, institutions and consequently youth workers) to guide young people, and thus channel their energy in the right direction?



Young people change the environment.



The environment changes young people.

In practice both situations can be found in youth work. We often come across young people who achieve a breakthrough on their own initiative and successfully put it into practice. And we also often come across already planned projects, where young people become involved only in their implementation phase, successfully take part and thus also benefit.

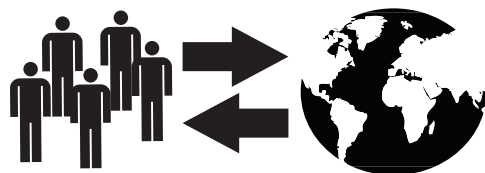
The first picture shows a process we could call social youth participation, whilst the second picture is a process we can relate to with terms such as integration, social inclusion (especially with regard to young people

with fewer opportunities), socialisation and inculturation, depending on the context.

*Young people take part in youth activities and thus change their environment; at the same time, through the on-going learning process they themselves change or the environment changes them. Both processes run in parallel.*

In participation, we emphasise the change in the society as a consequence of one's activity; on the other hand, in integration, the change of the individual is the focal consequence of the societal development. To simplify: young people change the world through participation, and the (opposite) process of integration is one where the world changes young people.

It seems, however, that the true nature of youth work lies in a proportionate consideration of both approaches, as shown below.



Young people change the world, and the world changes young people.

Youth work is integration and participation at the same time. Young people take part in youth activities and thus change the environment; at the same time the on-going learning process changes them too, i.e. the environment changes them. These processes run in parallel and form a sort of constant dialogue, flow and communication between young people and the environment. Quality dialogue between two or more people happens when communication flows both ways and commits both sides. This actually means that the participants in the dialogue allow to be changed. Any time we enter in quality and genuine dialogue, we can expect that we will

not leave it unchanged. However, people – both young people and adults – are usually afraid of change. The fear of change is actually one of the fundamental potential obstacles in youth work, which everyone involved might experience – young people but perhaps even more youth workers and decision makers. Nevertheless, we simply cannot do without.



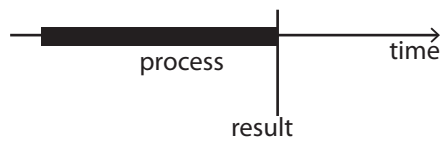
How come most literature about youth work emphasises youth participation so much? Youth work is one of few, if not the only space where young people appear as equal partners in the society. In most other environments (formal education system, labour market, politics, etc.) young people, also young adults, are not equal partners in all phases of a process, i.e. in planning, implementation and evaluation. It is precisely equal partnership between young people and adults that is one of the basic principles of youth work.

#### 4 Impact of youth work as result and as process

We can distinguish the impact of youth work also according to results and processes. What is a result and what is a process in youth work? The difference is in the simplest way explained in linguistic terms through the use of perfect and imperfect tense.

- The result is something that has happened (the project has taken place, young people have been satisfied, they have learned something)
- The process is what is going on (the people are meeting, playing roles, having fun)

Every result is in fact the consequence of certain processes.



Processes in results in youth work.

Let us look at two examples:

- A group of young people are preparing a video to present their project to the wider public. The first result most people think of is the video itself. However, in the steps of creating it different processes take place. Group members socialise, use technical and programme equipment. Relations form within the group, conflicts arise, sympathies develop.
- A group of 16 young people from different European countries take part in a training on active citizenship. At the end of the training participants in four groups develop projects they will implement after returning home. The project plans are the outcome of the training but whilst preparing them the participants also gain ideas, are creative and network among themselves. In fact, such a project plan is not the only result, although it is the only tangible one. We can also recognise new knowledge, ideas and interpersonal relations of the participants as results of the project planning.

#### 4.1 We mainly measure results, and mainly observe processes

When measuring results, we typically compare the beginning and the ending situation, thus the one before the onset and after the closing of an activity. Here are three examples:

- Two hours ago the tents at the scout camp were not yet set up, now they are.
- At the beginning of the school year there were eight people in the group, now there are twelve.

- At the beginning of the training the participants were neutral to the project, at the end they are mildly positive.

Results can be measured in many ways. The most reliable and the one we tend to prefer is measuring in numbers. This is how we measure the number of participants at an event, financial income of a project, the number of photos that entered a competition, or the number of planted trees. This is not the only way, however. We will, for example, have difficulty numerically measuring individuals' opinions on a certain phenomenon. Grade scales make things easier. Similarly, school grades (1 to 5) are not mathematical numbers but the numbers serve as names. It does not necessarily mean that a student who gets a 4 knows twice as much as the student who gets a 2.

The more tangible a result is, the easier it is to measure. It is, for example, much easier to measure the quantity of collected rubbish than to measure the knowledge acquired in a training. Much more difficult to measure yet are processes. Processes entail development that requires constant attention by the observer, not only at the beginning and the end. Those not involved in the activity usually do not perceive the processes, only the results. Seeing results of course often allows making conclusions on processes, too. If we, for instance, note that participants in a training end up being closely connected and if we know that they did not know each other before this training, we can conclude that intense socialising took place during the training.

#### 4.2 Processes in youth work are often overlooked

Results often blur processes. Let us attempt to illustrate this thesis with a real case. A group of young people who are taking part in a national volunteering project at their own initiative have three days to complete

their task: they have to direct, film and produce two project videos. They have to collect enough quality video material from work activities, spread throughout Slovenia, prepare two videos, one 30 seconds and one five minutes long, and ensure that both are seen at least by 500 people over the internet. The expected results are clear and challenging. Let us write them down:

- production of two videos with certain characteristics,
- visit to a number of places in Slovenia to gather video material, and
- a certain number of views/clicks.

A professional team of four young journalism students might achieve these in less than two days. But a group of nine high school students without experience in filming and production need three days for the same task, and do not complete it fully even in the given time. Can we thus claim that the journalism students spent considerably more quality time than the youth group? Also, did youth work in this case bring more impact? In youth work we cannot make such claims. And although the journalists managed to achieve the result with half as many people and twice as fast as the other group, we cannot say anything about the quality and impact – we only know the results but not the processes.

*A large proportion of (mostly unplanned) impacts of youth work are noticed only when we consciously observe the processes taking place during the activities!*

During the filming of a video many planned and unplanned processes take place. In our case, the planned processes are learning to use the information technology (camera, sound, editing software, publishing a video on the internet), learning to work in a team, learning about Slovenia, script writing, gaining basic skills in directing, and others.

Many processes are also unplanned. Perhaps the car will break down on the way and the participants will learn how to repair it. Perhaps a conflict will arise, to be solved by the group. Perhaps... Of course, all the unplanned processes also bring impact, mainly in the form of different types of knowledge and in the form of social capital. However, an external observer can easily overlook these if s/he only focuses on the results described in the task. One should keep one's eyes open also for the rest of the activity. A large proportion of (mostly unplanned) impacts in youth work are noted only once we consciously observe the processes going on during activities!

In this sense, reflection, evaluation and dialogue also matter. Impact must be put in words. These activities, however, often represent a large effort or at least an additional burden to young people, youth workers and decision makers, who may find it superfluous.

## 5 Impact through the lens of different organisations

### 5.1 Importance of the organisational mission

The four big names of youth work, presented in the part addressing impact through history, emphasised very different reasons as incentives for their engagement in the field of youth work. Each of them wanted – and also managed – to achieve different types of impact with youth work. Each of them saw their personal mission a bit differently. As charismatic leaders they managed to transfer their personal missions also onto the groups and organisations they were active in.

The mission of a youth organisation is key in ensuring impact. The chapter on practical examples of methods offers a range of different ways of work, linked to the organisations



that follow different missions and thus achieve different impact. Although every youth organisation follows its own goals, common impact of youth work also exists.

The Act on the Public Interest in the Youth Sector (ZJMS), adopted by the Parliament in May 2010, mentions the following areas of the youth sector:

- youth autonomy,
- non-formal learning and training and improving competences among young people,
- youth access to the labour market and development of youth entrepreneurship,
- care for young people with fewer opportunities,
- volunteering, solidarity and intergenerational cooperation,
- youth mobility and international networking,
- healthy lifestyle and prevention of different forms of addiction among young people,
- youth access to culture and support to youth creativity and innovation, and
- participation of young people in public affairs.

The question that follows is key for the understanding of the youth sector: are the areas mentioned in article 4 of ZJMS a matter of choice or are they common? In other words, can an organisation fit into one or more of these points, or must an organisation – in order to be of public interest – act in line with all or at least the vast majority of these areas?



At the time of writing no final answer has been given yet at the national level, and the law has not yet been interpreted as to this point. However, it seems that with a well-implemented activity every organisation in the field of youth work can indirectly achieve the impact on most of these areas foreseen by law.

## 5.2 The importance of organisational language

The impact of youth work can be put in words in many different ways. Youth leaders taking part in the international project Competitive Edge<sup>4</sup> survey were asked what they gained in the youth sector that they could not gain elsewhere, and gave the following replies:

- holistic personal growing from a child to an adult – as compared to sports, where one fails sooner or later,
- forming a value system,
- socialising with people who see the meaning,
- positive feedback from young people,
- meeting peers, growing up together, discovering the world,
- reflection about myself,
- discovering what I can do,
- learning from mistakes,
- capacity to manage concrete problematic situations and solve them,
- feeling of belonging,
- personal satisfaction: doing something beneficial for the society,
- confirmation,
- I have not found people who are “crazy” in the way I like it, elsewhere,
- friends forever,
- being in touch with time and trends,
- learning to be responsible for your decisions,
- a testing ground to create relationships with people in high positions.

*Every organisation formulates its impact in a different way. Not only is this correct, it is its task. It needs to grasp this right and responsibility!*

The answers differ significantly and relate to different aspects of life. They probably depend on the character of the individual and her/his prior experience, but particularly on the experience gained in youth work. The

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.competitive.si>



authors of the research have been surprised mainly at one trait in the responses: the impact of the organisational culture on the responses of the participants in the survey. It turns out that for the open questions on youth work the respondents in general used different words, but still, representatives of the same organisations expressed themselves in similar ways. For instance, representatives of one organisation used the word project much more often than others, people from another organisation talked rather about serving the society, yet another organisation mentioned activism, all three denoting a similar thing.

Why does this seem to be so important? Most types of impact of youth work happen in the participants themselves, not outside. Such impact includes knowledge, social capital, self-image, awareness, critical thinking, and others. The path to discovering this impact goes through formulating it and becoming aware of it. Individual youth organisations develop a certain jargon, and with it a certain practice of formulating sorts of impact. Since they are described differently, they gain a different connotation and manifest themselves differently in the society. Therefore, they are different – mostly through being formulated differently.

## **6 The impact of youth work in policy documents**

Before we conclude, let us take a look at the impact of youth work through relevant policy documents and public calls for proposals. The most important policy documents in the area between 2000 and 2010 are:

- EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering (European Commission, 27 April 2009),
- European Youth Pact,
- European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth,

- Office for Youth Strategy in the youth field until 2010 (Slovenian Office for Youth),
- National consultation programme Living conditions of young people in Slovenia, Brdo, 17-18 November 2009,
- Be the future, be Europe – consultation compendium, Brdo, 5-6 November 2008.

The more important public calls for tenders in this period are:

- Public tender for co-funding for organisations in the field of youth work of the Office for Youth,
- Public tender for projects in the fields of social, civic and cultural competences 2009 – 2012, and
- the European Commission programme Youth in Action.

Each of these documents and tenders entails certain key areas. If we join them together, the result is a set of wider, grouped areas that are supposed to represent the impact of youth policy on youth work in Slovenia. These are:

- participation and active citizenship,
- education and employment,
- intercultural dimension,
- youth work development and volunteering development,
- capacity of young people to lead a full and autonomous life,
- cooperation of young people with other generations,
- inclusion of vulnerable groups of young people.

The documents most frequently feature terms related to participation and active citizenship and social inclusion of youth. This allows us to claim that youth work mainly focuses on the integration of young people in the society, on participation and active citizenship.

Second place is taken by the duo education – employment. This pair has lately often been put together in other policy areas, as if the school system (and youth work) equips

mainly for employment, while other areas of life are not important.

Also outstanding is the group on the development of youth work and volunteering, which actually supports the entire youth work pillar. Interestingly, this group appears in 14% of all documents, so in about every seventh one (Cepin 2009 b).

For the groups “capacity of young people to lead a full and autonomous life”, and “inter-cultural dimension” we can claim that they are incontestably present in youth work’s both traditional forms (developing strong personality, networking) as well as modern ones (as a response to the challenges of migration and increasing passivity of youth).

Vulnerable groups have appeared more prominently in recent times. Youth work, through its policy documents increasingly focuses on people whose social integration does not happen in the usual ways (the word “usual” being used in a somewhat simplified manner).

As last we mention the group on cooperation of young people with other generations. With an increasing demographic challenge and falling numbers of young people in Europe it is very pertinent to consider the relationship between working “only” with youth and community work with all generations.

To sum up, we can conclude that youth work addresses mainly the following societal challenges:

- (lack of) inclusion of young people in public life and decision-making processes,
- (in)effectiveness of education systems; they are not adapted to the individual and the roles s/he is supposed to take on in the future in the labour market, and on which the common welfare of the society largely depends,
- prolonged adolescence and incapacity of young people to take full responsibility,

- (lack of) understanding in the society at different levels (between cultures and different generations),
- exclusion and difficult living conditions of marginalised groups.

## **7 Conclusion, or “What does this now mean for our organisation?”**

Youth work responds to many more challenges than those revealed through evaluations, discussions or policy documents. It is so closely intertwined with life that it tackles absolutely all its areas.

Youth work teaches young people to cook, write letters, say “I love you” in Portuguese, to know what the iceberg model is, what the position of the government towards migrants is, what a competence is, where to get the cheapest plane ticket, how to publish news on the website, and where the cheapest accommodation in Oslo is. And the list does not end here.

Throughout the history of youth work its impact was reflected in different ways, and it is differently reflected through the lenses of different organisations or stakeholders.

It is probably most pertinent to divide the impact on that affecting the individuals and that affecting the society. They are sometimes the same, only formulated in different words.

When speaking about individual interest and societal interest, it is important that youth leaders and workers try to balance the two. Youth work is not only at the service of the individual or the society but represents one of the most efficient connections between them.

Through the instrument of participation individuals – participants in youth work –

form the society, and through the instrument of integration the society forms individuals and thus includes them.

When deciding between the two, we might emphasise the first one a bit, i.e. youth participation. It is probably the most authentic impact of youth work. However, participation is not an impact as such. It is not the end result of youth work but a process, a way of how things function in youth work. Therefore, youth work processes and approaches are often even more important than results. Hence the next chapter, fully dedicated to these approaches (i.e. methods).

Note: Perhaps some readers expected this chapter to serve a list of potential types of impact of youth work, and is now somewhat disappointed. Let us convince you to the contrary with two arguments: the only valid list of impact of youth work in the Slovenian space can be found in the Act on the Public Interest in the Youth Sector. It is included in sub-chapter 5. It is up to every individual and/or organisation to formulate the impact of youth work. One of the key characteristics of youth work is precisely its plurality and any comprehensive list, which would claim to be more than just an example, would only paralyse it.

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