ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

YOUTH WORK DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING
The mission of the Youth Forum is to create channels through which young people can participate in order to build up an active, peaceful and democratic society. In pursuit of this vision and for a long time, the European Youth Forum has been devoted to the development of sustainable and independent youth organisations at the national and international levels.

However, working for a dream like this brings with it many obstacles. These barriers can be overcome with large doses of enthusiasm, idealism and solidarity, which are at the core of youth organisations’ values and which act as pillars in sustaining our dream: the dream of democracy. However, in order to build a democratic society, we need to erect houses that can stand by themselves, by using specific devices and structures that our strong pillars can carry, preventing them from falling down with the mere blow of a wind.

For this reason, the European Youth Forum has undertaken, as a priority, to work towards the sustainability of youth organisations so they can make their great contribution to society. We prioritise our work in those areas in which the wind of history has weakened their democratic structures, namely the SEE and EECA regions. Still, youth organisations have stood firmly, representing the growing possibility for democracy to thrive and have its own space. In sometimes difficult contexts, we commit ourselves to providing the necessary support to facilitate cooperation processes among youth organisations on national levels, which can potentially lead to the establishment of national youth platforms.

As good architects of society, the European Youth Forum utilises tools that can ensure the sustainability and strength of these democratic structures. Training has proven itself to be the primary tool in which youth organisations have been granted mechanisms for good maintenance. Specific programmes have been developed by our Institutional Partners in the field of Youth Work Development and Training, in which

the European Youth Forum has undertaken, as a priority, to work towards the sustainability of youth organisations so they can make their great contribution to society

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In this magazine, you will find voices from different people who, with their valuable contribution, stone by stone, are acting as architects in building the democratic society in which we all dream to live.
More than ever in the history of Europe, young people assert their rights to participate in decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their communities. Thousands of Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (YNGOs) have been created throughout Europe, and have joined efforts in making national and international platforms for coordination and communication among each other and with state and institutional partners on a wide range of issues relevant for youth.

The European Youth Forum was established by national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations in this very spirit of co-ordination and co-operation and with the main view of representation of the youth sector to European institutions and other partners.

The diversity of models and processes of young people organising themselves and creating representation systems at the national and international level challenges the European Youth Forum and its member organisations in their coordination, close follow-up and provision of expertise. The European Youth Forum, whilst representing the common interests of all its members, very much focuses on their sustainable development and on the creation of conditions for other young people to set up co-ordination and democratic representative structures in the regions or on the topics not covered as of yet. Support, in terms of advice on strategic thinking, comparative approaches in developing coherent legislative framework, contribution to the development of sustainable relations between governmental and non-governmental structures with a view of increased recognition of the role of youth organisations in decision-making processes are only examples of the Youth Forum’s work in the field.

In order to fully achieve its aims and implement its actions, the European Youth Forum calls for increased attention from the side of institutions (national and international) to the civil society in general and to the youth NGOs in particular. These processes also led to the increased interest

THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH FORUM IS ENSURING THAT DEMOCRATIC AIMS AND STRUCTURES ARE AT THE VERY BASIS OF THESE ORGANISATIONS

THE EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AND IN SOCIETY IN GENERAL ARE A PRIMARY FOCUS OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM AS WELL
of youth NGOs to set up representation platforms. The role of the Youth Forum in ensuring that democratic aims and structures are at the very basis of these organisations, that they are open to all youth organisations and appropriate space is provided to all young people of these organisations to actively participate in the spirit of solidarity, co-operation and respect.

The empowerment of young people and their active participation in youth organisations and in society in general are a primary focus of the European Youth Forum as well. In order to contribute to the achievement of this goal, the Youth Forum has committed itself to the provision and promotion of training and education - formal, informal and non-formal.

In this context, the Youth Forum sees training as a mainstreaming element for the various policies related to youth and as a tool for the promotion of sustainable and inclusive youth organisations. Whilst being a safe space conducive to the development of skills which enable young people to actively participate in a rapidly changing environment, training is also used by the European Youth Forum as a framework for constant assessment of young people's needs.

Through the implementation of an effective training policy, the European Youth Forum can improve, support and sustain all areas of its work. Training facilitates informed decision-making, which is fundamental to the functioning of youth organisations. Young people should be able to create an active role for themselves in society, and training enables them not only to understand their position, but also to communicate and act. Therefore, YFJ supports training as a form of non-formal education.

Youth training is a central tool in the development of youth organisations; its multiplying effect benefits the structures and young people in general.

Research, analysis, and methodology development are but a few areas where YNGOs make continuous contribution. Furthermore, YNGOs are indispensable partners in the development of coherent, cross-sector youth policies that answer to the interests and needs of young people all over Europe.

Increased recognition of the role of youth organisations in society has been achieved from European institutions and governmental structures, but the levels of recognition still vary to a large extent from region to region and topic to topic. Many challenges are still ahead of youth organisations, and the European Youth Forum has always placed them as priorities on its agenda. In this context, the European Youth Form and its member organisations have initiated a wide debate on the sustainability of YNGOs, the importance of youth policy and the existence of adequate support mechanisms at the international, national and local levels.

The advocacy work undertaken by the European Youth Forum has therefore always been accompanied by long-term strategic planning, a priority for YNGOs that wish to secure a sustainable future.
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SUSTAINABILITY OF YOUTH WORK

BEING YOUNG AND MOTIVATED TO MAKE A CHANGE, TO HELP AND SUPPORT THE OTHERS AND LEARN MORE ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND YOU SO YOU CAN FIND THE RIGHT PATH FOR YOURSELF IN LIFE.

This sentence you have almost certainly heard before or thought yourself. It is also an overview of what it means being young and being active. Nevertheless, there are plenty of challenges facing the initiative to engage yourself into the realization of one’s believes.

Since the period in life called youth is limited by its nature, as well as societal norms, frequent change of direction of personal interests and motivation of people in this period of life is very normal. Not enough time to make all the plans come true, one would say. This fact is a central issue that should guide the life and organisational management of a youth organisation.

I have witnessed several times that generation change within youth organisations, especially on international level, lead to the loss of knowledge base and know-how. This is the very problem that lies in core of sustainability of YNGOs. The question is how to solve it?

Sustainable development of the youth organisation should be shaped by the limits of youth work and engagement. Both organisational work and activities are following this line.

The first step is to accept this fact and to not try to prevent the change of people by prolonging the period of their involvement and giving them a lasting mandate in the executive boards of the organisation. Being an organisation’s executive for too long is no good either for the person or for the organisation itself and it only postpones the imminent - transfer of knowledge.

In order to assure that transfer is taking place, the organisation has to develop tools to facilitate this process. Transfer is a process and not a one-off activity! All processes taking place in the organisation throughout one generation have to be recorded, summarized and clarified. Minutes of the meetings and reports from the sessions are maybe good for them but are not at all a practical tool for the transfer of knowledge. Supplementary endeavors have to be completed to recognize good-practice and constructive information points that can be used by the next generation.

THE VALUES THAT GATHER PEOPLE UNDER THE SAME ORGANISATIONAL ROOF ARE THE MILESTONE OF SUSTAINABILITY.

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIC
Office coordinator
FYEG

Planning for sustainability
The good work of a board is not just in the quantity of documents and activities developed but in the quality of it as well. The precondition for any quality work is to assure diversity. Only a group that is geographically and gender balanced and accompanies people from diverse educational and experience milieus can claim to have an overview of the circumstances and the capabilities to react appropriately to the initiatives of the members and the society.

**Balancing the development**

The values that gather people under the same organisational roof are the milestone of sustainability. Sometimes we are taking this for granted driven by miscellaneous daily challenges that the organisation is facing. Values are heaving beneath a lot of weight particularly in situations where the organisation is swiftly growing and is becoming more professional within this progression.

The term sustainable development came into light when people discovered that constant growth is not bringing only positive aspects to the society but as well a bunch of negative ones that are moving us further away from our believes. Professionalism and large budgets are bringing numerous positive aspects to the organisation (less stress, more activities, larger staff) but at the same time, it can cause countless internal problems (faceless bureaucracy, power struggle, lack of voluntarism and motivation, etc.) that are very effortlessly leading to external problems; all because the organisation is moving away from its original believes and values. This is why organisations have to assure steady growth which is at the core of sustainable development. Our values are bringing people together and this fact should be on our mind at all times.

**Defending democracy**

Young people in South Eastern and Eastern Europe did not have good role models in the form of politicians and public figures. Their behaviour of endless speeches, broken promises, disrespect for the decisions made and the fact that they always somehow managed to stay on and survive on the stage, even against the odds, created a strong feeling that the system and the values could always be “bent” so as to reflect one’s needs and desires. Even the new system, that is trying to transform these countries into modern democratic-based societies, is being various times abused and has proven irrelevant for them.

This is why we need to promote democracy. Someone once said: “Democracy is a good thing but it takes a lot of free afternoons”. It may be so, but we have not come across a better one yet. Young people in South Eastern and Eastern Europe are hungry for a chance and for the challenge to have a role in society.

They are hungry for an opportunity to replace the people that are leaving future generations’ interests at the end of their agenda.

Democracy is a system that can give them this chance. Young people do not want to be trained or bossed around by older people. They want to learn by themselves and put into practice the system so one day they will be capable of living and working in this system without the baggage that the present generation has. This is why YNGOs have a vital responsibility in supporting the democratic process through informal education. Assuring sustainability is important to assuring democracy.

Building bridges of cooperation between people is a great job, but also a challenging one. Promotion of diversity, equality and democracy in South Eastern Europe is re-building the broken bridges of the Yugoslav dream that once existed. Promotion of inclusion, solidarity and understanding is building a bridge of trust between Western and Eastern Europe. In these processes YNGOs are playing a vital part which takes their time, dedication and energy and this is why their well-being is of utmost importance for Europe.

Results come as a consequence of good planning and much effort. Sustainability is a linking spot between plans and efforts that will assure the long-term life of our achievements - for the benefit of our generation and that of generations to come.
The European Youth Forum’s mission is to empower young people to actively participate in the shaping of Europe and the society in which they live. One of the main criteria to measure this achievement is to see how well developed the youth sector is in any given country, how strong the youth organisations are and how much their opinion is fed into the policy development and implementation processes at the national, regional and local levels. With regards to this, the area of Youth Work Development (YWD) has been established to support the work of Youth Non-Governmental Organisations (YNGOs) and to increase their capacity of advocates for youth rights and needs all over Europe.

Since its establishment, YWD has become a policy area which supports the strengthening and consolidation of YNGOs at national level, offering a comprehensive set of tools from capacity building, to facilitating partnership development with state actors, and developing an inclusive, cross-sectorial youth policy that answers the needs of young people in the country. Taking a pro-active approach to strengthening the youth sector in Europe, the European Youth Forum has developed policy guidelines that answer thematic and geographic needs of youth work throughout Europe. Values and recognition of youth work have been inscribed in policy documents that are now forming part of everyday lobby documents of YNGOs in all corners of Europe.

Rising challenges for youth work recognition called on renewed efforts to strengthen YWD, and in April, 2004, the European Youth Forum opened a wide debate among its member organisations on the sustainability of youth work in Europe, addressing the continuously changing realities and their impact on the participation of YNGOs in national and local youth policy processes.

Today, the European Youth Forum is a recognized partner at European and national levels in the field of youth policy, offering its expertise on the issue to YNGOs and governments in the countries that initiate such processes. Member and partner organisations from Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Malta are but a few that have developed or revised national youth policy in the last two years.

Two geographic areas have been identified as priority regions for the 2005-2006 Work Plan, recognizing the need of stronger investment in YNGOs and their working environment. These regions are Southeast Europe and Eastern Europe and Caucasus, which are primary beneficiaries of all the actions taken within the framework of youth work development, as well as active advocacy and lobbying work for youth policy development and implementation.

Following the implementation of the three-year Balkan Youth Project, the European Youth Forum is initiating holistic support to YNGO and youth policy development in this region. Study visits to Turkey and Bulgaria have contributed to the consolidation of YNGOs and youth policy implementation at the national level. Study visits to the other Balkan countries will be carried out in the coming months to initiate policy advocacy in five former Yugoslav countries, except for Slovenia.

Supporting cooperation processes among youth organisations on national levels, which potentially lead to the establishment of national youth platforms, the European Youth Forum also encourages and works closely with the International Youth NGOs to better involve its branches not only in the creation of national youth councils but actively participate in the design and participation of national youth policy.

New member states of the European Union are joining the White Paper and Open Method of Coordination process in the field of youth, and the European Youth Forum is supporting them in this initial phase, as well as continuing to strengthen the youth sector in the development of a viable legal environment, by encouraging dialogue between YNGOs, decision makers and other actors in the definition and implementation of youth policies in each country.

Regional and cross-regional cooperation processes in Europe have intensified and brought new meaning to cooperation in the field of youth. These partnerships enable member organisations of the European Youth Forum to formulate YNGO’s needs and interests from a regional perspective, transfer and lobby for them to different national and European institutions, as well as constantly exchange models and expertise in this field. With a view to this, the European Youth Forum remains committed at all levels to ensuring continuity of all youth work and policy development processes throughout Europe.
Is it possible to move forward youth policy and youth work issues on the national level, using the opportunity of hosting a big international youth event? This was an interesting question for many youth organisations and youth platforms, to which the National Youth Council of Latvia gave an answer last year.

In 2001 LJP started the process of elaboration of the draft for Youth Law, involving all the key actors in youth policy: young people, youth NGOs, organisations and institutions working with youth, local and national authorities. At that moment, we made the decision to co-organise and host a big youth event of the European Youth Forum, being already at the stage of last consultations and lobby work for the Youth Law. Therefore, we thought that it might be useful to draw the attention of the governmental institutions, the NGO sector as a whole, and the rest of society as to the situation of youth policy.

While lobbying for the interest of young people in our country, we saw how important it is to know the situation in other countries and the work other youth councils and national youth NGOs are doing.

These were the reasons upon which our decision to host the youth event of the European Youth Forum were based. Now we can express our satisfaction with the experience and knowledge we received from working in cooperation with the Secretariat and the Bureau of YFJ.

To finish, I would like to mention that for organising the youth event, we asked for support from our authorities - such as Riga’s City Council, Ministry of Education and Science, and Secretariat for Society Integration - and this was also a great and challenging experience, which gave us a good basis and ideas for developing future strategies on co-operation with the state authorities.

In brief, the YFJ event was the first one we organised of such size and level, and all the results we achieved after it were useful, not only for us.
When thinking of development of youth work, there are many factors to take into consideration. Probably one of the biggest concerns when projecting the life of your organisation in time is how to manage a good relationship with the different generations of youth workers that will pass through, how to promote your values and integrate new people and how to acknowledge and pass on the experience of your organisation’s members. Change and continuity are a couple that don’t always get along well. Part of what we identify as youth work development means finding good strategies to combine these two factors. There are many ways one can think have proven to be efficient but training may be the biggest investment of the youth movement in Europe today.

In youth organisations training is playing the dual role of supporting change and ensuring continuity. It emerges as an expression of non-formal education. By its fluid nature, emerging from the needs of civil society, it is filling in the ‘spaces between’. In the gaps left by the complex net of educational systems, professionals and institutions, training finds a place to grow. Non-formal education through training provides a space to grow.

Although education is never neutral, the training culture in youth work development is liberated from directives of heavy curricula. It is generated to promote each organisation’s values and tries to stay close to the target group’s expectations and different learning and communication styles. A training experience is often much more than an opportunity to develop knowledge. It becomes a group experience generating affective bonds between people. The emotional connection to the training experience facilitates the learning itself.

Especially within the youth context, empowerment through training offers the society new models of youth, presenting young people not as a problem, but as a relevant part of the solution. Young people are the best experts in issues that concern them. Through training, they become active agents in the education of their peers; development takes place bringing youth on board in the vanguard of change. The main European institutions partnering with the European Youth Forum acknowledge the added value that training represents in the context of non-formal education and Youth work development.

Every day new project opportunities in training are seeing the light of day, contributing to the growth of expertise within the youth movement.

Pedagogical approach of Training in Youth Work: Training is an expression of non-formal education. By its fluid nature, emerging from the needs of civil society, it is filling in the ‘spaces between’. In the gaps left by the complex net of educational systems, professionals and institutions, training finds a place to grow. Non-formal education through training provides a space to grow.

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Transfer of knowledge, as a general concept, is a fundamental element necessary for development of our societies. Many different sayings and wisdoms from different times, places and people throughout human history have reflected on that. All of these saying held one strand in common - in order to learn something, one must go through the learning process, where mistakes are obvious but very useful companions all along the way and where one discovers that Learning is a Life-Long phenomenon!

When talking about youth policy development, we consider the transfer of knowledge as the milestone and the guarantee of smooth, dynamic, hand in hand interaction of experience and enthusiasm, knowledge and motivation, power and energy, and duty and voluntarism. This process brings together all those linked to the issue either directly or indirectly, from the individual up to international institutions.

50:50 Training Course is an activity, introduced by the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe and specially designed in order to strengthen one of the important links in the process of knowledge transfer and cooperation, more precisely, between Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (50%) and Governmental Bodies (50%).

50:50 TC is a tool that allows for a better understanding of the challenges and the importance of youth policies. In doing so it helps governments and NGOs to better conceive, formulate and implement the policy. This training focuses on the importance for youth policies to create the necessary conditions for effective participation of young people in society and for ensuring their well-being. Additionally, it promotes young people’s autonomy, a prerequisite for effective participation, and facilitates their participation in decision-making processes.

The Training for Trainers, known also as TTT or ToT, is one of the most interesting knowledge transfer mechanisms in youth work, as it combines theory and practice transfer together with new individual input from old and new generations of trainers and their organisational backgrounds. Today there are numerous organisations that carry out the TTT helping beginners in training to acquire the needed competencies in European youth work.

We would like to refer to the TTT organized by the Council of Europe, which has performed a good tradition of transferring the experience and knowledge to younger colleagues. It does not ensure only individual development, but also sustainability of youth organisations. Overall, the training is not an aim in itself, it is a way to accomplish better work, service, training for doing things, education on working for the benefit of young people, which is of course often done through youth organisations and youth departments, so the transferred knowledge is a contribution to the multiplier effect and general quality of organisations’ delivered services.

The knowledge gets transferred and used in the organisations through individual learning and development. TTT is one of the forums where trainers can meet, learn from each other, and from their older and more experienced colleagues, where they can get the theory and practice of training, touch ethical questions of working with young people, discuss their own new approaches, and try them out in a safe experimental environment. Then, trainers can take this practice and competence back to their own organisations ensuring quality training and multiplication of the knowledge and skills for other members, who are indirectly benefiting from the TTT. The organisation is thus able to interiorize the practice of the training in Europe and also make developments based on that. So the TTT becomes one way to ensure the updated and creative approach to delivering youth services and granting the training of multipliers in their structures, developing local trainers ready to contribute.
The Pool of Trainers, A Source of Expertise for the European Youth Forum and its Organisations; An Actor in the Sphere of European Youth Training

The Pool of Trainers of the European Youth Forum, also known under its short name, the "PoT", has developed over the last years as a growing resource of expertise in the field of European youth training. Created in 1998, the Pool is made of young trainers who are active, all over Europe, in the Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum.

PoT: Who are they?

The PoT is composed of 40 trainers, facilitators and policy experts, all of them being less than 35 years old, coming from 27 different countries. The Pool is refreshed every two years, and was refreshed at the beginning of 2005, in order to give a chance to a new generation of trainers. All of them are active volunteers in more than 30 member organizations of the European Youth Forum, either International Youth NGOs or National Youth Councils. In that sense, the members of the Pool are a living example of the diversity of the YFJ and of its Members Organizations. These experienced trainers are not professional trainers, but all of them have already been involved in several International training courses. They contribute, on a very regular basis, to the training policy of their organization; in that regard they are familiar with the reality of youth work. They are also familiar with youth pedagogy, and with youth policies at the national, European and global level.

The PoT: what is it for?

Before all, the YFJ Pool of Trainers is a resource made available for the Member Organisations of the Youth Forum, who can request a trainer from the PoT for any activity, seminar or Training Course they organize. The fields of competences of the Pool of Trainers are very wide, since the trainers have been selected in order to cover a comprehensive range of fields of expertise. All of them have their own skills, their own experience and their own style, and therefore any organization will be able to find the right person in the PoT to run a specific training course. Trainers from the PoT can also help an organization to develop the concept of a training course or a seminar. Last but not least, Trainers can organize trainings, facilitate meetings, but they can also train trainers, which gives to their action a valuable multiplying effect for the organization.

PoT trainers are also used to facilitate youth activities organized by the YFJ, or by the Institutional partners of the YFJ, for example the Youth Event of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the last Youth Summit of the Council of Europe in Warsaw or the 10th anniversary of the Committee of the Regions.

Working with the Institutions

Over the years, solid and active partnerships have been established between the Pool of Trainers and different Institutions active in the field of European youth training.
In the area of training, the Youth Forum cooperates with the youth units of the European Commission, with SALTO Resource Centres, with the Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sports Field Activities Unit, and with the Framework partnership agreement between the European Commission and the Council of Europe. This allows the YFJ to nominate, on an ad-hoc basis or on a more regular basis, trainers to the activities, seminars or training courses organized by these institutions, which find in these partnerships the opportunity to have a representative of youth organizations in their team of trainers. The participation of PoT members is also sometimes requested in order to bring their expertise of grass-root practitioners of the youth field to contribute to publications, training kits, or design of training courses developed by these institutions. Another example of co-operation is the availability of PoT trainers on the Trainers Online for Youth “TOY” database developed by the SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre, which also hosts the European training calendar and the training toolbox.

**Developing a Community of Trainers**

Gathering trainers with such a wide range of competences and diverse experiences is necessarily giving birth to synergies, which need to be mainstreamed and organized in order to make them valuable to the PoT and to the European Youth Forum.

The exchange of experiences which takes place during every meeting of the Pool makes the Pool a unique structure in the field of European Youth training. PoT members have shown their willingness to develop the PoT as a resource that, developing itself, would contribute better to the development of the YFJ and its Members Organisations. During the last annual meeting of the PoT, trainers decided to include in their action plan the development of their community of trainers. Reports, tools, country guides and methodologies are being put in common, and will be developed by informal interest groups that aim at sharing training knowledge and experience among the PoT members.

**Contributing to the development of the European Youth Forum**

Since 2005, following the adoption of the work plan 2004-2006, the Pool of Trainers has developed the concept of sub-group meetings. These meetings are held with a limited number of trainers, generally five or six, who gather during a limited period of time along with Bureau and staff members, develop tools and reflect on some areas of interest for the YFJ. Developing the use of subgroups meetings contributes to a better use of the expertise of the trainers in the work of the YFJ, and also gives more opportunities to the trainers to develop their community. The more trainers meet, the more opportunities they have to put their knowledge in common and contribute efficiently to the work of the YFJ.

As all the trainers from the PoT are from YFJ Member organizations, their knowledge of the YFJ is very valuable when it comes to working on the development of the European Youth Forum, or when services for Member Organizations are developed. In that context, a first subgroup meeting was held, at the invitation of the Bureau of the European Youth Forum, to review the methodologies used during the statutory meetings of the YFJ. Trainers established guidelines and made suggestions to the Bureau and to the Secretary General on how to improve the meetings. Another subgroup on “adapting training methodologies to Eastern Europe and Caucasus realities” took place in July, and developed a tool that will be disseminated to YFJ Member Organizations, to provide them with useful guidelines and methodologies for the development of youth work in the region. Other issues are also on the agenda of the PoT subgroups. In the forthcoming months, a subgroup focusing on Global Education will gather trainers from the PoT in the framework of the University on Youth and Development in Mollina, Spain, and another subgroup on developing lobbying methodologies will be organized. By the end of 2005, at least four subgroups will have been held.

A well developed and active youth sector can be taken as one of the key elements to measure the state of civil society in the country or region. In the last years, the youth sector has achieved higher political recognition at the European level through the adoption and implementation of new youth policies and priorities. Having reached these achievements, we could think that everything is fine and we could take a small break and enjoy the fruits of our previous efforts. Nevertheless, due to the rapidly changing nature and environment of youth work, its socio-political determination, and the diversity of development levels in different countries of Europe, the changing youth sector needs continuous effort to support the development and maintain sustainability. This is the main reason why the Youth Work Development working group (YWDWG) was established.

The Working Group on Youth Work Development

The cornerstone of the YWD working group was laid down back in 90’s when increased support for the development of civil society in Eastern Europe was required due to political changes in the region and emergence of new democratic countries. YWDWG was officially launched in the year 2000 and primarily concentrated on country by country studies on the situation of the youth organisations and youth policy in Central and Eastern Europe, CIS and Southeast Europe.

Since then, the mandate of the YWDWG has been broadened, comprising the development of youth community work at all levels of society, gaining greater recognition for youth non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and fostering the awareness that non-governmental organisations are of vital importance to the development of modern-day society. In this respect, the Youth Work Development department at the European Youth Forum is also responsible for promoting the development of national youth policy.

The working group is composed of seven persons from the Youth Forum Bureau and Member Organisations, and the YWD Policy Officer from the Secretariat of the European Youth Forum for two years. The members of the working group bring their experience in youth work from local to national and European level. They are active in their organisations and participate in the youth work development processes in their countries as well as in Europe.

Keeping up with the processes of youth work development as well as to supporting recognition of youth work, the YWDWG
is always organized in different countries of Europe, where meetings with youth organisations reveal the situation of youth work and the challenges that can be addressed by the working group and the European Youth Forum in their work.

In the last four years, two different working groups have developed new policy papers on regional development and recognition of youth work in Europe, as well as new policy areas such as mobility. With regards to this, the YWDWG keeps track of the development of youth work in the whole of Europe, outlines barriers, and develops proposals to tackle those barriers, with the ultimate objective to contribute to the long-term sustainability of national youth work in Europe.

The challenges

This year YWDWG renewed its composition and has set new ambitious goals. The main objectives of the working group for the upcoming two years are:

• Increase the visibility of youth work and to improve its sustainability;

We believe that visibility and recognition of youth NGOs leads to the empowerment and encouragement of young people to actively participate in shaping the future of the societies in which they live. Participation in youth work goes far beyond improvement of employability of young people; it serves to ensure their social inclusion and to encourage them to active citizenship, solidarity, personal development and self-fulfilment as well as attaching real value to the potential that young people bring to society.

• Strengthen cross-pillar cooperation and communication between International Non-governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) and National Youth Councils (NYCs);

Both pillars of the European Youth Forum - NYCs and INGYOs - are working for and with young people, so better cooperation between them would create synergy and give added value to their work. YWDWG is promoting the strengthening of cross-pillar communication and cooperation which may increase the value and results of their efforts in each country at national level. The YW is also active in promoting closer co-operation in the youth field around Europe. Regional co-operation between neighbouring countries in Europe must be seen as a useful approach to closer pan-European co-operation and integration between all countries.

• Create support mechanisms for youth NGOs and respond to loss of their independence;

At the moment we are facing a situation where youth NGOs are losing their independence or recognition. The European Youth Forum manifests the fundamental principle that government must support and maintain a non-governmental youth sector that is free from direct influence and whose independence is truly guaranteed. In case of violation of this fundamental right, YWDWG will always be ready to propose actions that aim at improving the environment in which youth NGOs work and increase the spirit of trust and cooperation with state authorities.

• Review the new mechanisms of the European Union towards its neighbours, and the new EU member states’ development programmes in the light of youth work development and cooperation.

The working group is examining all possible programmes, political and economical treaties that could be used to ensure a youth perspective and strengthen the youth sector in each particular country and Europe-wide. In conclusion, the YWDWG is an excellent combination of high motivation, active spirit and true dedication of a small group of people, who are dedicated to the strengthening of the youth sector in every country and at the European level.
In 2000, RADA became a full member of the European Youth Forum, being this a major achievement. As the only organisation in the country with a European model and structure in the field of youth, all RADA’s activities from 1997 until 2004 were based on two main points: mastering the European model of national Youth policy and promoting this model inside the country.

On the first point RADA became a real champion, but on the second one, it was a total fiasco. RADA knows how Youth policy "lives" in Europe, understanding the priorities of that policy and speaking with the European structures in the same language. However, promoting this model inside the country was blocked from the side of the state.

In Belarus there is a model of Youth policy with the following main features:

1) Active "cleaning up" the field of Youth policy: YNGOs, which try to keep their independence and autonomy, are being liquidated now under different formal reasons.
2) Artificial and violent creation of a monopole actor of pro-state Youth policy by the state.

State Youth policy becomes a part of implementing the ideological mechanism; however the aims of such a policy are not connected to real youth interests and problems. On the contrary, the state uses such a youth policy to speak on behalf of young people and make decisions in their place. Any dialogue or independent opinions are shut down, and all youth initiatives have to be controlled by the Government.

Obviously, from RADA's point of view such a situation is a crisis. Its main features are the ones that follow:

- Full exclusion of RADA from state youth policy and, as a result, the absence of any acceptable basis for dialogue with the state.
- Decreasing membership of RADA.
- Majority of RADA member organisations feeling the impossibility of implementing the European model of national umbrella structures under constantly worsening conditions.

Part 2 - Where to from here?

Recognising this increasing pressure, RADA has spoken more openly against state actions in the field of youth policy. After many consultations, meetings and discussions with NGOs and initiatives on different levels, youth leaders and experts, RADA made the following conclusion: the situation will worsen possibilities for legal work of independent youth NGOs. Therefore, independent youth NGOs have to find new ways to adapt their missions, aims and working methods to the current conditions.

Working conception of alternative Youth policy.
RADA will continue to follow its basic principals and values: openness, democracy, equality, respect, independence, non-interference in internal activities of organisations.

Aims of the policy:

1) consolidating youth NGOs and initiatives at any level, defending the right to freedom of unions and associations;
2) promoting and popularising the European model of Youth policy;
3) creating a real mechanism of mutual support of independent youth and children’s organisations;
4) creating a tool to form the alternative model of Youth policy.

RADA stands behind the idea of creating a "Forum of youth NGOs", which will serve as a consolidating mechanism for youth and children’s NGOs and forming a common non-formal platform. An organisation has to make maximum efforts in order to use the most adequate way to face this situation. In this context, when the court case on RADA began, the Action of Solidarity from the European Youth Forum helped RADA very much - as the most non-aggressive but powerful way of influencing the situation. As a result, the court case was stopped to analyse all the received letters.

In conclusion, while each situation is very specific and there is no equally applicable solution, each country, each organisation and each person should find the most optimal way to reform a stagnant or worsening system. Youth NGOs should support as much as possible the organisations undertaking such a difficult task.
**Involving non-organised youth**

The Dutch National Youth Council (DNYC) is an umbrella of democratic organisations that are run for and by young people. The Dutch National Youth Council wants to give young people the possibility to become active, to think and to decide about any field of their interest. The main tasks are to defend the interests of youth and youth organisations, to inform them, to represent all youth towards government and society and to represent Dutch youth at important organisations and events.

Although we work intensively with our member organisations, the main focus of the DNYC is to include the non-organised youth in its work. Non-organised youth have the possibility to participate within the structures of the Youth Council and they form the main target group for our activities and projects. Non-organised youth have the possibility to participate in the Board, Committees, Working groups and Project groups of the Youth Council. Each year the members of the DNYC elect new youth representatives for five different international institutions as the General Assembly of the UN, the Commission for Sustainable Development of the UN, the World Summit for Information Society, UNESCO and the European Youth Forum. The Youth Council believes it is very important for young people to continue voicing their opinion and make sure it is understood as to what young people think and want. In the end, young people are the only real experts on youth issues, whether they belong to a youth organisation or not.

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Once upon a time, Flanders had some big associations with fabulous names like the Catholic Youth Council, the Forum for Pluralistic Youth Ngo’s, the Socialistic Youth Association and the Liberal Youth organizations: four umbrella organizations, which together represented about 100 Youth Ngo’s. On the initiative of the Youth sector and supported by the Minister of Youth this all changed in January 2002. After a long and intensive process, a new structure was created. The new Flemish Youth Council (Vlaamse Jeugdraad) and Service Point Youth (Steunpunt Jeugd) were born.

Before this moment, the Flemish Youth Council was a Youth Work Council. This means representing youth organisations (Youth movements, Youth associations...), not Youth in general. The renewed Flemish Youth Council is open for young people in general. Not only youth workers, but also young people can take part in the General Assembly and board, in the Congress and in the different working groups and commissions. During the Statutory Congress, organised every three years, the general assembly is elected. The general assembly is composed by:

- 10 young people
- 12 representatives of youth organisations
- 1 representative of the pupils association (which is member of Obessu)
- 1 representative of the students association (which is member of Esib)

The first Congress took place on November 23, 2002. To take part in the statutory congress or to become a member it’s necessary to sign a Charter with the rules of democracy and the mission of the Flemish Youth Council.

Young people should be part of their own future. They therefore should be enabled to fully participate in today’s society. Participation is a basic criterion for adequate and relevant youth policy. That’s why at the moment the Flemish Youth Council wants to make the voices and opinions of children and youngsters, youth NGO’s and advisory councils visible in different policy levels. With a new law, the Flemish Government is now, through its responsible minister on youth affairs, obliged to request formal advice by the Youth Council on all issues that are directly and indirectly related to young people.

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MODELS AND CASES

KHAALID HASSAN
Youth Representative of European Affairs
Dutch Youth Council

BART VERHAEGHE
Staff member responsible for International Youth Policy
Flemish Youth Council
Building a national youth platform is possible? Yes, indeed! But it costs a lot of work... It needs continuous and sustainable efforts not only from the people that volunteer for this challenging project but also from the organisations that gives mandate to them. The Italian Forum is now a candidate member of the European Youth Forum and we are in a crucial phase of its development.

From the side of the organisations we are already more than 50 organisations (we doubled in one year and a half our membership): we are growing fast, engaging enthusiastic people and organisations that believe firmly in the project. But not everything was easy.

In fact, we are assessing our internal structure, getting a permanent office, still fighting with the government to get a grant that the National Parliament entitled us to the budget law for 2005. Building a model of youth work in Italy with all the relevant components, a regulatory framework, a cooperation process with the state, lobbying for state structures responsible for youth, strengthening the internal and external work of FNG - all those are the challenges that we are currently working on and debating within and outside the structure, involving as many actors as possible in a process that costs a lot of work but gives to youth work much more in terms of new synergies, cooperation, capacity building and... dreaming!

As an IYNGO, IGLYO can be considered a success story on various levels. Created amidst high turmoil from the onset of the AIDS virus to the toppling of the Communist bloc, IGLYO had come out as the voice of young lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). Some things can only be explained through time and history and that’s what IGLYO has to offer to you - a history of stories, life experiences, and challenges - a history of ebbs and flows. It would be unreal if we just present one side of the story - like all NGOs, IGLYO has faced and still faces its challenges - challenges which vary from empty pockets to frowns to the issues it proudly represents.

However hundreds of people who brushed their lives with IGLYO recognized that these challenges were the key to the continuity of IGLYO, to the establishment and strengthening of what is now the IGLYO Network. Despite the differences we find from one country to another, from one organization to another, we have gained an insight on how to come together through non-formal learning environments. The sharing of knowledge, whilst holding on to democratic values and the dignity of our lives have carved IGLYO’s name in stone thus maintaining the continuous work towards attaining better life conditions to LGBT young people and their diverse cultures and societies.

IGLYO is the story of courageous young activists who work on the local, national, regional and international levels for the recognition and acceptance of diverse sexualities in our society. It’s the same society which prevents us as young LGBT to live our lives fully and with dignity. It’s the same society which makes it difficult for young LGBT to come forward for fear or shame. It’s the same society which denies us basic rights because we recognize another level to our sexuality. It’s the same society which nurtures all of us. It is the society which together we can change.

It was because we wanted a better life. We met IGLYO and did not know how to go back. This was the start of our inspiration. What about yours?
OBESSU (Organising Bureau of the European School Student Unions) is an organisation that was established in 1975, by several national school student unions, which had the idea to develop further school student cooperation and unite the school students from the different corners in Europe into a European federation of school students. It was at that time hard to discuss the formation of a federation that would unite East and West, North and South while discussing the same ideals for school democracy and education, and being aware of the need school students have to have their voice heard and represented in society. Therefore, the leaders of the organisations founders, decided not to give up the idea but to form an organising Bureau of European school student Unions.

OBESSU faced enormous progress throughout the years and continued spreading the school student representation in Europe, with the same energy and enthusiasm as when it started. As time went by, the organisation grew up into a European Federation, able to unite school students from different corners in Europe, fighting for school student expectations in education and society. Very importantly, OBESSU showed that it was an organisation that built upon diversity of opinions on education, which were developing with each new member joining the European organisation. It also built upon European school student opinions that were becoming more and more relevant as they included educational and school student aspects/approaches from more but as well, less developed regions and educational systems in Europe.

The development of school student unions in Europe, since 1975, was a gradually moving process. However, it was in the year 1999 when the members of OBESSU realized that much strategic work in long-term perspective was needed to be done. For this purpose they gathered at the study session “Building school student structures”, to develop a strategy for school student work in the different regions with less developed representation of school students. The first region chosen was the Baltic region and the establishment of school student unions in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. After completing successfully the project UNBASCO (United Baltic Cooperation) and the establishment of school student unions, in 2001 OBESSU started the first project for South East Europe countries named “Connected Students”. OBESSU had member organisations only from Macedonia (USM) and Slovenia (DOS), which made necessary the engagement in establishment of school student organisations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia and Serbia and Monte Negro.

Knowing the historical background in the SEE region, we can say that the situation was very sensitive especially in the area of work we chose: bringing the school students from different ethnical, social, religious and gender background working together on national level for the same belief in a better future. The situation motivated us to dedicate much effort in organising students and providing them with necessary tools to develop unions. We had different study visits, regional conferences, national training courses and bilateral visits for this purpose which helped to develop the platforms we initially planned to develop. The training methods we used reflect our concept of social cohesion among the different stake holders (teachers, ministries of education, school student representatives) all of which take important and irreplaceable position in the building of school democracy and education corresponding to the needs of the school students. We did not start working in SEE in order to develop school student revolution, but to encourage school student participation and active citizenship!

As we have the reality of today, on one side we have school student engagement that is something remarkable, and on the other side we face the problem of recognition of the work of school students by governments in some countries. Still we have to mention those positive examples.

Our engagement in SEE, follows the belief that we do not understand borders and limitations. The project made us understand that possibilities are something that differ from country to country, but the motivation, ideas and dedication to the work are the fundament that both the organizations with longer tradition and the newly developed ones, have in common.

At the end we can say that the voice of school students from SEE countries is now stronger than ever before and it plays a significant role in the European school student debate on educational/school democracy and development. As we are completing the SEE project in 2006, our “mission possible” will move further towards Eastern Europe where we face lack of school student representation at the moment! Encouraging the dialogue, the cooperation and the exchange of ideas/visions, all over Europe, is something that OBESSU will keep working with continuously, in the future.

School student work development will remain OBESSU’s imperative!
When ESIB was founded in 1982, its aim was to coordinate the flow of information between its members (at that time 7 national unions of students) and European and International bodies. Today ESIB is the umbrella organisation of 44 national unions of students, 4 international student organisations and 4 national student organisations from 37 countries. The aim of ESIB is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at a European level.

ESIB derives its representative and policy-making power from the member student unions, which although diverse and acting in different political and cultural settings, share a common interest in making the voice of European students heard and making sure that the needs of students all over Europe are met, such as: higher-education, open and accessible to all; quality in higher-education and better social conditions of students.

ESIB is aware that working in changing societies requires strong but also flexible student unions. The Bologna process, targeted at reforming the higher-education systems Europe-wide, for the first time recognises students as equal partners in higher-education. Therefore student unions are facing the need to develop new skills and to enhance empowerment in order to be able to make this a reality. This is especially a challenge for the transitional societies in South-East Europe. With the intention of supporting the member student unions in their efforts, ESIB organises special trainings, according to their needs such as: empowerment of student unions through the Training for Student Democracy organized in March 2003 in Macedonia, or the Bologna Process Training with special focus on its implementation in the SEE countries in July 2005 in Serbia. A South-east Student Network was also created as an informal network within ESIB, coordinating the student unions from the SEE region, which organized different activities in Cluj-Napoca, Belgrade, Ohrid, Ljubljana, Krusevo, on issues of relevance such as: higher-education legal framework, mobility, financing of higher-education, implementation of ECTS... Furthermore ESIB supports the initiatives of its member organizations through issuing press releases, lobbying in the European Institutions and thus putting pressure on governments and Universities.

During the last five years the Danish Youth Council (DUF) has facilitated the process of establishing long-term partnerships and network cooperation between our member organisations and their sister organisations in South East Europe. We call the cooperation The Twinning Programme and it consists of seven different Twinning networks.

A Twinning Network is a long-term co-operation between a youth organisation in Denmark and its sister organisations from at least two countries in South Eastern Europe. The Twinning Networks are individual, independent networks, meaning that participants in the Twinning Network themselves work and are responsible for its implementation.

The basis of the cooperation between the youth organisations in these networks is that they all have shared goals and objectives. By working through organisations with mutual fields of interest, the body of common experiences provide a natural platform for joint activities.

The exchange of perspective and experience promotes an intercultural understanding among the participants with mutual interests, beyond the boundaries of their different backgrounds. As such, the participants are given the opportunity to reflect on the existing perceptions of what constitutes “us and them”. Also, through actual implementation of the Twinning Networks projects, the participants experience democracy in practical terms by taking part in the decision-making process. They believe that taking part in a debate, where values and norms that in the past seemed unchangeable, are turned into issues to reflect upon if necessary, can make a real change.

It is, thus, an important aspect of the Twinning Networks that they are founded in youth organisations, and not among individuals alone. This is to ensure that the outcome of the activities is not in the hands of one person, but can be absorbed into the structures of the organisation, promoting a long-term sustainable effect.

The Twinning Programme has been running for more than five years now, and we are at a phase where we focus on the sustainability of the networks, in order to make them exist after the funds from the Foreign Ministry of Denmark are stopped in 2007. This means that the networks are working on different management skills, in order to attract more donors and to function without facilitation from the Danish Youth Council. This is of course a process and in order to facilitate this The Danish Youth Council opened an office in Sarajevo in spring 2005.

If you want to read more about our Twinning Programme please see: www.duf.dk/fresta
Once upon a time, at the end of the 1990s, they started cooperation with a number of youth councils in Eastern Europe. Then, little by little, the other NYCs joined and a regional cooperation was initiated. Until 2005 cooperation consisted of joint events and study visits aimed at learning each others’ realities, sharing experience and bringing our NYCs closer. It was also a chance to give the new generation, which has not lived in the Soviet system, to get to know the cultures of eastern europe, and not to allow these positive old links to dissolve. Our joint work during these years showed us that, though we are now independent countries, we still have the same problems due to fact that Soviet-style mentalities remain in all our societies. Therefore we concluded that we should cooperate closely with each other not just for one-off activities, but in the framework of constant cooperation. By strengthening each other, it would be easier for us to help our societies on the road to democracy and civil society, and to lobby at national level with the regional support and at the same time at the regional level through our cooperation.

Despite this rose-tinted representation of the birth of our cooperation, it is not happening without the inevitable challenges involved in the creation of a new idea. All youth councils have their own vision, and the existing conflicts in our region also affect the way we think on certain issues. In addition, the economic situation in all the post-Soviet countries is bad and this means that youth organisations also have a lot of problems with uncertain sources of funding. These factors raise the concern that national financial resources alone will not be enough to sustain the cooperation and to achieve the goals we are striving for.

Although each youth council has its own agenda, we realize that this cooperation is vital for our development and sustainability in the long term, and this has shown us how to be flexible with our organisational goals for the benefit of successful partnership on the regional level.

With the ongoing support of our Swedish friends, we shaped our plans for 2006 during the rainy days in Kiev. As, even though we are East Europeans, we cannot change the world all in one year, our main focus during 2006 will be to create an information portal for Eastern European youth organisations, to create a constant mechanism for increasing the competence of youth leaders, to continue learning about each other through study visits, and last, but certainly not least, to facilitate the integration of East European youth work at the European level.

Situated at the confluence of the Aragvi and Mtkvari rivers, surrounded by green velvet mountains, Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia, inspires and encourages its visitors to … fruitful work. This fact was once again proven by the international training-seminar “Developing Viable Long-Term Cooperation in Eastern Europe”, hosted by NCYOG (the National Council of Youth Organizations of Georgia) in October 2004. The seminar was the last link in the chain of events organized by the European Youth Forum in Eastern Europe aimed at supporting the development of viable youth civil society in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

Although the worldwide renowned Georgian hospitality was a daily challenge for the effective work of 30 decision-makers from member organisations of YFJ, with the help of highly qualified trainers masterfully leading the sessions, participants reflected on political and social realities existing in the environment of youth work in Eastern Europe, explored ways for concrete actions and support measures towards the development of a realistic youth work basis in the countries of Eastern Europe as well as international exchanges between East and West, and developed bilateral and multilateral cooperation between their own organisations.

In organising such event, the European Youth Forum continues its contribution to the further successful development of youth work all over Europe and at the same time expanding cultural exchange between young people. As one of the participants said, “Intensive work in a group of youth leaders from many different countries was a very useful experience for our future international projects but it was also an experience of the cultural variety in Europe”. After all, the seminar had a great importance for NCYOG, as an additional tool for its organisational reinforcement as well as for its popularisation on the national and international level.
Since the first meeting in the scenic Polish village of Dzierzazno near Gdansk, Poland in 1994, the Baltic Youth Forum (BYF) has established itself as a sustainable platform for youth co-operation and information exchange between ten national and four regional youth councils in the Baltic Sea region, being one of the fastest growing regions in Europe. This is also true for the number of bi- and multilateral youth exchanges that have taken place since the foundation of the Baltic Youth Forum. The national youth councils realised, at an early stage, that there is a great need to empower the influence of young people in all countries around the Baltic Sea and that it is important for youth to have new perspectives on their situation within an international context and to find ways of understanding each other.

All activities and positions in the Baltic Sea co-operation are discussed at two annual meetings which are hosted by one of the member youth councils. The European Youth Forum is an observer member and it sends a representative to each meeting to provide BYF members with relevant news and updates on youth issues in other European countries. Decisions are made on the basis of consensus, meaning that common positions or activities evolve only if all participating youth councils agree on them. The youth participating in the meetings represent the positions of their respective youth councils. A secretariat, which rotates from youth council to youth council, is responsible for securing the flow of information between the meetings.

During the last eleven years there has never been a lack of ideas in the co-operation of the Baltic Youth Forum. Whether or not the ideas could be implemented often depends on securing the necessary financial funding. Additional people had to be employed to do larger projects since the international officers at the youth councils have already enough work on their hands. One example for such a project was the Baltic Sea Youth Project, which was implemented between 1998 and 2002.

The overall goal of this four-year project was to strengthen democracy in the countries around the Baltic Sea by strengthening the youth organisations and their role in society. Even if the situation seemed different in Norway or Sweden as compared to Latvia or Poland, there was a common need to strengthen youth organisations in all of these countries. The main components of the project were national training seminars, regional seminars, exchange programmes and delegation trips. We can conclude in general that the project has developed new experiences and capacities that are valuable and useful for the region.

The sustainability of the results of this project and thus the work of BYF as a whole are given by the long-term promotion of co-operation between youth organisations on a bi- and multilateral basis, regular exchange of information and international activities that develop a regional identity while at the same time providing forms of co-operation with other regions in Europe. In the framework of strategic planning for the future, BYF will do an internal evaluation of the last ten years and outline future perspectives of this regional co-operation at a meeting in St. Petersburg in October 2005.
The BBC+ is a cooperation platform between National Youth Councils involved in the European Youth Forum to discuss European issues and progress, as well as the problems faced by member organisations. Current members of the BBC+ are: BYC (UK), CGJL (Luxemburg), CSAJ (Switzerland), DNK (Germany), DNYC (the Netherlands), NYCI (Ireland), ONK (Austria), VJR (Flemish Speaking Community of Belgium), RDJ (German Speaking Community of Belgium) is an ally of the BBC+.

The main aim of the platform is that member NYCs can share and exchange best practices and experiences to developing the skills and competencies of the NYC, so the members will be able to fulfil their task as youth-advocate today and in future in an efficient way. The BBC+ meets at least twice a year. These meetings serve to identify key objectives to be achieved for every half a year, and to discuss progress made on these objectives. BBC+ objectives can focus on content, persons and projects. The cooperation is a unique and new approach to facing the difficulties and obstacles of present youth work. The members of the BBC+ strive to work together in many different areas and with many different partners.

Members of the BBC+ are geographically linked to one another. The responsibilities of each member are:

- To keep regular contact with all other members
- To inform other BBC+ members on any relevant issues within the Youth Councils
- To report back from meetings visited (notably the YFJ Bureau, COEACOM, Advisory Council, FCC, CBMA and EUACOM meetings,)
- To fulfil the responsibilities of the Chairmanship.

Between the 26th of September and 2nd of October the BBC+ will organise a Study Session in Strasbourg on "the role and functioning of National Youth Councils". The Study Session aims to strengthen the competencies of NYCs to develop new concepts and innovative initiatives, sharing and exchanging best practices and experiences to developing the skills and competencies of the NYC. The results of this session will be used in furthering the work of the NYCs and the BBC+ cooperation.
What can bring Portuguese, Spanish, Catalans, French, French-speaker Belgians, Italians, Greeks, Maltese, Cypriots and Slovenians together? This is the everlasting question that we try to answer at the Southern Youth Council Co-ordination, since the very beginning of our work.

It is difficult to determine exactly when the SYC co-ordination started to meet, but it was most likely since the very beginning of the CENYC work in 1963 - Council of European National Youth Committees, one of the platforms that gave birth to the European Youth Forum. Be it due to the shared priorities, to the so-called “southern culture”, or simply as a way to have a say in a scenario ruled by much mighty and well established national youth councils from central and northern Europe, the point is that a group of southern youth representatives started to meet informally during the general activities.

From that starting point, we have evolved towards more structured work, even though we remain an informal network. We share a similar view of the YFJ’s role and priorities and we meet periodically to identify common interest in the YFJ’s work in which we can contribute with an added value from the south.

In practical terms, the SYC Co-ordination supports those southern councils needing a hand in special situations, such as the newly created Italian Youth Forum (FNG), which demanded expertise in the foundation of youth councils in different countries. We organise bilateral exchanges very often aimed at getting to know each others ways of running projects, - the National Youth Council of Catalonia periodically meets the Italian Forum, the Spanish Youth Council has annual exchanges with the Portuguese, etc. - and we pay special attention to EuroMediterranean policies, as this area is of everyone’s interest.

The SYC co-ordination consists of very different councils, -some consolidated and some new councils, with more or less resources- being a Mediterranean mosaic of situations. What is the added value of our work? We are aware of our differences and we use them to enrich our joint perspective.
On the political and social scene of Europe today Inter-religious dialogue plays a crucial role. This question is being taken up when talking about the accession of Turkey to the EU, when tackling the issue of immigration and when discussing the role of religion in public life. Islamophobia has been one of the greatest fears in Europe in recent years. What is the importance of religion in public life - is it building walls or is it building bridges? All those questions are being asked frequently.

The role of youth in Europe is particularly important as youth is being involved more and more in decision-making processes and in shaping the future of Europe. While on political and bureaucratic levels Inter-religious dialogue is being talked about, the youth organisations in Europe are already engaged in the dialogue among different faiths. As many faith based youth organisations representing different faiths - Christianity, Islam and Judaism - have felt the same needs during the past years, fruitful and successful co-operation and network of European faith based youth organisations has been developed recently.

During the numerous meetings of the European faith based youth organisations - EYCE, FEMYSO, EUJS, Pax Christi, FIMCAP, JECI-MIEC, MIJARC and their branch organisations - it has become possible to define the needs and benefits in the field of Inter-religious dialogue rather clearly. It has become clear, what are the ways for conducting Inter-religious dialogue and what needs to be done in the future. It has been highlighted many times that the first hand learning experience is the foundation that gives the ground for further discussions and engagement. “Learning by doing” is the most appropriate method to be applied for Inter-religious dialogue. Instead of reading the books or attending lectures that in many cases represent certain points of view, the experience of meeting a person from other religion/faith significantly decreases the level of misinterpretations and judgements. It also brings the respect towards others which automatically excludes the disgraceful actions by knowing someone’s traditions and reasons behind certain actions. It has been successfully proved within a contact making seminar of the faith based organisations that was held in Warsaw from 13th to 16th of May that this kind of experience gives solid ground for the mutual understanding and further work in this particular field.

As it has been discovered by the mentioned organisations, one of the most important aspects of Inter-religious dialogue is finding what is in common among different religions/faiths. It can be specially emphasized when speaking about the three “religions of the book”, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As the experience shows not only tradition is partly in common, but it is possible to find a whole set of values which are of high importance to us all as human beings and not as adepts of certain religion. The human aspect is greatly important as it all comes back to the personal level and respect towards human dignity. The understanding of other traditions and reasons behind them is already a key to a peaceful living together.

It has to be underlined that with the full commitment and engagement in the Inter-religious dialogue, the faith based youth organisations have started miscellaneous work that will bring about great fruits in the future for a peaceful Europe. The cooperation is being done on different levels, such as reaching visibility by developing common statements, tackling grass-root experience of other faiths in co-organised seminars, developing action plans for the future etc. This kind of cooperation that has been started by getting to know one another and
In order to contribute to the empowerment of young people and their active participation in society, values at the core of the European Youth Forum mission, we are strongly committed to supporting and strengthening youth organisations across Europe and to the provision and promotion of training and education; formal, informal and non-formal. Long-term sustainability of youth organisations based on the principles of youth work and non-formal education is a main challenge in the years to come and must be met with a consistent emphasis on Youth Work Development and Training. For this reason, the European Youth Forum will strive to connect the areas of Training and Youth Work Development even closer in the coming years.

Looking ahead, the European Youth Forum promotes and supports regional and cross-regional youth cooperation as in the Baltic, Balkan and lately also Eastern European regions. Among the international members, for instance the faith-based organisations have shown a new way of cooperation that can serve as a good practice for other international YNGOs. Along the line of the development of youth work cooperation among Member Organisations, strengthening cooperation and communication between the International Non-governmental Youth Organisations (INGYO) and National Youth Councils (NYCs) will serve to reinforce and consolidate our European youth movement further. Leaving aside the synergies yet to be discovered, it will bring better coordination, effective joint efforts and stronger support of youth organisations at the national level.

One of the key challenges in the European Youth

Representing a wide spectrum of backgrounds and interests, the European Youth Forum acknowledges the importance of inclusiveness and being the voice of potentially all young people in Europe. Therefore, while representing the common interests of all its members and focusing on their sustainable development, the European Youth Forum also supports the creation of conditions for other young people and youth organisations to set up co-ordination and democratic representative structures, both at national and European level.
Forum’s work in the field of Training is to continue the process of mainstreaming training as an essential element for the various policies related to youth and as an vital tool for the promotion of sustainable and inclusive youth organisations. Training facilitates informed decision-making and an effective delivery of policies, which is fundamental to the functioning of youth organisations. Through the implementation of an effective training policy, the European Youth Forum seeks to continuously improve, support and sustain all areas of its work. Mainstreaming Training is also a European Youth Forum internal process to increase specialisation of trainers in its different working fields.

The levels of recognition still vary a lot from region to region and from topic to topic, while recognition of the role of youth organisations as key actors in non-formal education has been achieved from European institutions and some governmental structures. The European Youth Forum will keep working for the recognition of the importance and contribution of training as a form of non-formal education in society while striving for continued development and access to quality training, both within our own structure and in the cooperation with our institutional partners.

Training embedded in the framework of youth organisations means added value in many ways. Based on the core principle of volunteerism, it ensures long-term and multiplication effects, and socialisation within a value system. It is therefore crucial to keep a strong volunteer dimension in Training and not let processes of recognition of Non-Formal Education and Trainers lead to formalisation and professionalisation. A strong volunteer dimension is a prime value of the European Youth Forum Pool of Trainers, which facilitates the use of it by Member Organisations and institutional partners.

The benefit and values that youth organisations bring to the development of youth and society is unquestionable. In the coming years, one of the key challenges is to bring closer the triangle of politicians, researchers and youth organisations in joint effort for a sustained development of youth work. Strong youth organisations are not only the essential infrastructure of youth work but indeed also indispensable partners in the development of coherent, cross-sectorial youth policies that answer the interests and needs of young people all over Europe. Many challenges are still in front of us, and therefore European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations have initiated a wide debate on the sustainability of youth organisations, the importance of youth policy and the existence of adequate support mechanisms at the international, national and local levels.

**ONE OF THE KEY CHALLENGES IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM’S WORK IN THE FIELD OF TRAINING IS TO CONTINUE THE PROCESS OF MAINSTREAMING TRAINING AS AN ESSENTIAL**
WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM?

The European Youth Forum is an international organisation established by national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations to represent the interests of young people from all over Europe at the European and International level. Its members, which are federations in themselves, bring together tens of millions of young people from all European countries. Being a recognised partner of the European Union, the Council of Europe and United Nations, the Youth Forum serves to channel the flow of information and opinions between young people and decision-makers.

The European Youth Forum works to empower young people to actively participate in the shaping of Europe and the society in which they live. Through our member organisations and our representative role we want to improve the living conditions of young people as European citizens in today’s world.