FAST
WORLD
SLOW
YOUTH WORK
A study across Latvia, Ireland and North Macedonia

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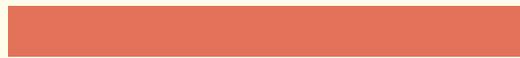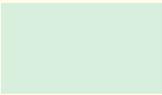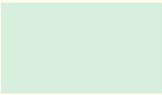Martina Jachevska and Sintija Lase

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises findings from an Erasmus + funded project with youth work practitioners and researchers from Ireland, Latvia and North Macedonia. The project aims to promote long-term and inclusive youth work policy and practice in partner countries, and across Europe. Its findings suggests that youth work which can contribute most to society necessitates time, depth, process, continuity, sustainability and autonomy. Project partners have coined the term Slow Youth Work to capture these and other elements, further explored and described in this research. Factors which enable or constrain this type of youth work are also considered. Findings demonstrate several ways in which fast policy and programme demands and influences impact on youth work practice, highlighting how current youth policy favours quick solutions, many of which are short term, therapeutic based, individual focused and measured using quantitative 'measurement' tools. This report suggests that viewing youth work as Slow Youth Work, emphasises its best characteristics. It recommends policy and practice frameworks to protect the integrity of the practice, including strengthened mechanisms for dialogue between young people, youth workers and youth and youth work policy.

FOREWORD

Youth work as an intervention seeking to improve the lives of young people, their communities and society is becoming more widely established across Europe.

This increase in recognition has led, in some cases, to a shift in focus with governments regarding youth work as a mechanism to address policy and societal challenges. At the same time, important features of good youth work requiring time well spent become engulfed in a society influenced by neo-liberalism and consumed with speed, efficiency and risk avoidance. As a result, the quality of the services that young people receive and the potential of youth work as a whole suffers. With these concerns in mind, this project set out to examine what good youth work is and what it necessitates. Acknowledging that time and depth are important features of good youth work practice, we adopt the term Slow Youth Work to describe holistic processes which place young people at the centre of their development, with subsequent outcomes emanating from the short term needs and long-term interests of young people themselves.

Project partners across Ireland, Latvia and North Macedonia examine the characteristics of Slow Youth Work, how it is impacted by youth work policy in our own contexts and the conditions needed for it to happen, while offering recommendations for change. We hope this document will stimulate a conversation about Slow Youth Work and increase the possibilities for it to happen through improved connection and understanding between young people, youth workers and youth work policy makers.

INTRO-
DUCTION

Across Europe the practice of youth work, and corresponding policy frameworks varies considerably. The Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work defines it as;

"

a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making. Despite different traditions and definitions, there is a common understanding that the primary function of youth work is to motivate and support young people to find and pursue constructive pathways in life, thus contributing to their personal and social development and to society at large.

"

As a group of youth work practitioners and educators active at European Level, this project was designed and funded by Erasmus +. to explore the conditions under which youth work can best make this contribution to young people and society. Drawing from their positive and negative experiences from EU and Western Balkans countries, project partners coined the term 'Slow Youth Work' to distinguish youth work practice which emphasises a deep value-based, process centred, long-term approach to working to address the holistic needs and interests of young people from diverse backgrounds. The term is influenced by the thinking of the Slow Movement as a global call for a deceleration of the pace of modern technological life and a challenge to the logic that equates speed with efficiency. However, as the concept of slow youth work is new this project set out to explore it in more detail as well as the practice and policy conditions which might enable or constrain it. We contrast Slow Youth Work with an increasing prescribed outcomes emphasis in youth work as a 'fast' approach to youth policy and practice, to indicate the interventionist, fast changing, and fragmented nature of the approach. The project aims to promote long-term and inclusive 'slow' youth work policy and practice in partner countries and across Europe.

It's objectives are:

1 to identify the implications and impact of outcomes-oriented youth work on experiences of youth work of young people and youth work professionals

2 to develop and promote the idea and practice of 'slow' youth work focused around holistic, youth-centred, deep value-based, long-term thinking about youth work in diverse contexts

3 to support youth work professionals in developing a language for expressing the value of youth work beyond the quantifiable indicators
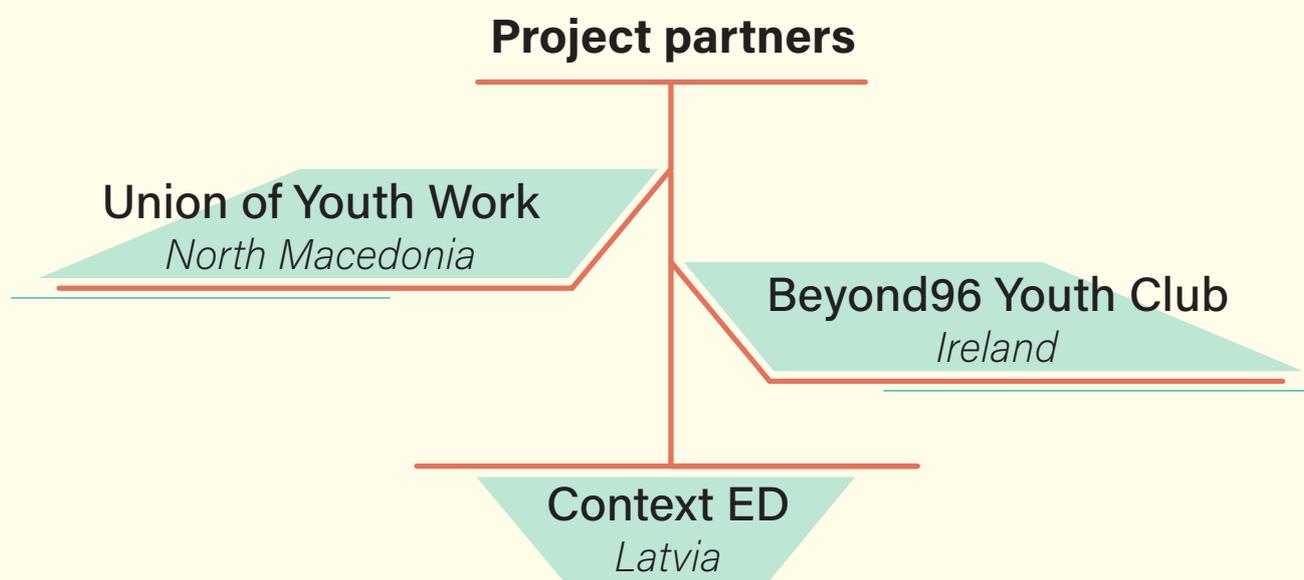
4 to contribute to better evidence-based policy making in the youth field and to promote better youth work practice by disseminating project's results to interested and affected parties

5 to advance the capacity in youth interest advocacy of all involved organisations through forging new partnerships and alliances

The overall structure of this report takes the form of six sections, including this introductory section. Section Two elaborates on the methodology. A description of Slow Youth Work is presented in Section Three. Section Four introduces the findings from this research on how youth work policy impacts on youth work which embraces the features of Slow practice. Section Five presents the key conclusions and recommendations, followed by references and appendices.

Project partners

Union of Youth Work
North Macedonia

Beyond96 Youth Club
Ireland

Context ED
Latvia

Associate partners

- *The National Youth Council of Latvia*
- *The National Youth Council of Macedonia*
- *creACTive from North Macedonia*
- *Centre for Youth Research and Development (CYRD)*
- *Department of Applied Social Studies (DAPPSS) in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Maynooth*

The knowledge produced through this research seeks to illuminate youth work practice and policy environments with different historic backgrounds, national structures and stages of youth work development in various parts of Europe. It is of direct interest to youth policy makers, youth workers and youth interest advocates, in the three participating countries and across Europe. As well as this report, other outputs of this collaboration will be a Compendium and Guidelines for designing 'slow' youth work practice, and a Policy Pack for youth work advocacy strategy and messaging related to promotion of 'slow' youth work. It is hoped that the project's results will contribute to better decisions in youth work policy and practice to focus meaningfully on the needs of young people.

METHODOLOGY

02

This research examines socially inclusive, transformative youth work practice and how government priorities and policies regarding young people impact on this practice by cross referencing policy developments with the perspectives of youth workers and young people across Latvia, Ireland, and North Macedonia. The inquiry integrated several components: desk research, reviewing relevant literature and national policy documents; country specific focus groups with youth workers and youth work managers; narrative accounts by young people who are participants in youth projects, and finally, a survey with youth workers. These dimensions are further elaborated on below.

Following a scoping of relevant youth work literature, project researchers reviewed recent and significant European and National policy documents with direct relevance to youth work. The review sought to identify and analyse trends in youth work policy, and examine the impact, if any, on youth work and ultimately young people.

In order to hear from their perspectives about the value of youth work, young people across the 3 countries were invited to highlight their experiences of youth work using Photovoice. Partners asked youth workers to invite a small number of young people engaged in youth work to describe about what they felt was useful or important about youth work. Photovoice is a community-based participatory action research (PAR) method which provides a voice to marginalised groups, usually those who are excluded from the political arena (Sutton-Brown, 2014). The research team designed an information sheet to guide participants through the Photovoice process.

Four focus groups took place with youth workers and youth work managers across the three partners countries to elicit their perspectives on youth work, policy, and practice. Participants were selected on the basis of being youth workers with more than five years experience and from a good mix of different types of youth organisations, municipalities and from different regions willing to share their experiences and opinions in the context of this research. Focus groups were chosen as a research method because group work is a familiar process in youth work and because 'participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weed out false or extreme views' (Patton, 2002: 386). In each country, participantsW were contacted by email introducing the research and inviting them to join an online focus group discussion, which took 1- 1.5 hours. At the outset, participants were asked to create the conditions for maximum participation by listening, valuing all opinions, encouraging the

participation of others, and sharing time. The researchers acted as a moderator to run the focus group without imposing one's own agenda and to 'guide discussion without overly directing it' (Ruane, 2005: 158). The focus groups were loosely structured using an interview guide, with a final comment invited to add further detail or emphasis. Focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis to highlight commonalities and differences. A number of case studies illuminating the impact of youth work policy in practice were also subsequently developed.

RESEARCH METHOD	FOCUS	DETAIL
Desk Research	Review of Youth Work Literature Review of recent Significant/Influential European and National Policy Documents	From a European and national perspective, what are these documents already telling us about; How is youth work defined? ● Common trends in the direction of youth work over the last decade ● Impact of these trends on social inclusion/exclusion ● Growing focus on outcomes related to youth work. Whose agenda does this serve? ● The relationship between policy planning and youth work provision
Focus group with national youth work organisations or experienced youth workers	Focus group interview using a general interview guide	● What does good youth work look like? ● What supports good youth work? ● What inhibits good youth work? ● How does policy impact on your youth work practice? ● What do you see as the future role of policy in supporting or influencing the purpose and potential of youth work? ● Can you observe a growing focus on outcomes from a policy level? If yes, what implications does this have on youth work practice? ● How is youth work policy decided? ● What role if any, do youth work stakeholders have in influencing policy?
Narratives with/from young people	Inspired by Photovoice	Youth workers ask participants to briefly document their experience of youth work using photos or images ● What does good youth work look like? People can describe or use an image to illustrate ● What differences has youth work made to your life?
Survey with youth workers	Examining the pace and allocation of time in practice	Exploring how, and where time is spent in daily youth work practice

SLOW YOUTH WORK

This section introduces the findings from this research on the main characteristics and features of Slow Youth Work.

In the design of this project partners coined the term 'Slow Youth Work' to emphasise a deep value-based, long-term approach to working to address the holistic needs of young people from diverse backgrounds. However, the concept of Slow Youth Work is new, so research participants were asked what they considered to be the essential elements of good youth work.

This was further explored through focus groups with practitioners and PhotoVoice with young people across the three countries. The data generated from these methods described youth work practice with resonance from the Council of Europe Youth Department's description of youth work as value-driven, youth-centric, voluntary, developmental, self-reflective and critical, as well as relational (Council of Europe, 2015: 8). These features were analysed alongside partners emerging understanding of slow youth work as necessitating time, depth, process, sustainability, continuity and autonomy. This analysis concluded that what project participants understand by good youth work in fact emphasises features of Slow Youth Work.

These characteristics and requirements are as follows:

03

Relationship centred

> Developing communication and building trust happens gradually

Inclusive, democratic and open

> Engaging with a wide group of young people, reflecting, and celebrating the diversity existing in local communities. Physical spaces are open to all, creating a sense of safety, integration, and ownership where young people participate because it meets their needs and interests. The creation of inclusive, democratic spaces where young people feel ownership is complex work requires persistent effort.

Planned, but uncertain and adaptable

> Designed through on-going cooperation and communication between youth workers and young people, with work planned according to the needs and requests of young people themselves, while being flexible enough to follow emerging trends.

Responsive

> Slow youth work can also be fast! Essentially this means that youth work can be spontaneous and diverge from pre-set and prescribed outcomes and agendas to respond quickly to a problem that comes up for a young person/group and issues that emerge

Educational and developmental

> Non-formal educational processes start where young people are at but over time, facilitates their growth and development

Group based

> Its education process works with and through groups – through the relationships between young people and youth worker – but also through the relationships between the young people in the group, facilitating peer education.

Collaborative and contributory

> Based on partnerships with young people and the communities they are part of and systematic in how it establishes consolidated connections and integrates with other organisations who engage with young people.

Creative and innovative

> Can try out new approaches; can make and learn from mistakes, seeks to learn from and improve practice. Improvements are made over time through youth worker reflection and supervision.

Sustainable

> Youth workers act as a stable, dependable presence in the lives of young people, establishing important relationships which are built and maintained over time. It is not limited to short-term interventions or single-issue agendas.

Skilled and demanding

> Requiring practitioners to acquire knowledge, skills, values, and principles applied continuously in conscious, reflective practice.

Impactful

> The collective impact of these principles in action has a visible positive impact on the individual and collective lives of young people. Young people feel comfortable, listened to, encouraged, and empowered to make the changes they need to make in their own lives, the youth service, their communities, and society.

Taken together, this list of principles communicates youth work as a deep, holistic, youth-centred, long-term process seeking to transform the individual and collective lives of young people. The research also highlights that for these principles to shape practice, certain baseline specifications are required. However, indications are that many of these specifications are not in place. A recent (2021) European Commission Study of Youth Work in the EU found that 33% of youth workers felt that they are too busy, also reflected in our survey conducted with youth workers across the three countries. 45% of respondents felt that the pace of their work was too fast. 21% specified that most of their time was spent on administration, with only 18% spending most of their time in face-to-face work with young people. 30% indicated that prior to delivering a programme with a group of young people they do not have enough time to assess and understand their needs. To maximise the potential of youth work policy and practice needs to align to create the conditions for the best outcomes for young people. The following section presents literature and analysis on current issues and challenges in policy and practice and subsequently outlines the requirements which practitioners, employers, funders and policy makers need to provide for Slow Youth Work to happen.

YOUTH WORK POLICY AND PRACTICE 04

This section introduces the findings from this research in relation to how youth work policy impacts on youth work which embraces the features of Slow practice.

The first part gives an overview of literature on the themes of this inquiry.
Next, findings from the focus groups are synthesized to offer an insight into the possibilities and challenges of policy impacting on Slow Youth Work practice.
Finally, a summary of the practice and policy requirements necessary for Slow Youth Work to happen is presented.

Policy is a statement of values, aims and objectives that a government wishes to realise, together with strategies and instruments for achieving them, underpinned by the key values of the government of the day. Youth work has recently become viewed as an important instrument for the development and delivery of youth policy aspirations at a European level, helping empower young people in their life (Williamson et al, 2021). However, although successful youth work is founded on the ability of young people to drive their own learning and development while moving from support and guidance to autonomy and self-reliance (Williamson, 2008) funding and policy requirements placed on youth organisations sometimes restricts this autonomy. In recent years, a significant contributory factor in this regard is that of managerialism, which assumes that professional practice should 'take the form of specifying goals explicitly, selecting strategies for achieving them on the basis of objective evidence about their effectiveness, and then measuring outcomes in order to assess their degree of success' (Hammersley, 2001: 5). What gets valued as evidence or deemed appropriate tools for measurement is a problem in this regard, according to Vähämäki et al (2011). They suggest that funders who must demonstrate accountability of public sector spending frequently favour evaluation methodologies with a results-based management focus, critiqued for its over emphasis on quantitative results. The authors point to what they call 'an "obsessive measurement disorder" because the projects that are most transformational are also the least measurable'.

Writing specifically about youth work in the UK, Hampson and Howell (2018) point to a recent obsession with evidence-based practice and measurable outcomes, while according to Jones (2012), predetermined outcomes and regulation systems required by funders have drifted the profession away from its frontline priorities. Nojd & Siurala (2018) highlight tensions between outcome oriented and value-based youth work in Finland, suggesting that the emphasis in recent years has changed 'from empowering all young people to be active citizens and from promoting non-formal learning to improving young peoples' employability, designing measures to NEETs and measuring the effectiveness and quality of youth work'. de St Croix (2016) suggests that in the current economic climate, successful youth work is 'judged by its return on investment, which explains why many open access youth centres led by young people, not the agendas of the state, struggle to shine through the bureaucracy that smothers them'. Davies (2010:10) points to evidence of: greater state control and determination of youth work's aims through the use of outcomes and targets; increased interest in targeted youth work with certain young people categorised as 'at risk' to the detriment of universal youth work that does not label young people and is open to all; and an emphasis on 'rescue and rehabilitation' approaches to work with young people to the detriment of an informal education approach that 'starts where young people are at'. These policy shifts, he suggests, are leading youth work away from a practice 'as youth workers define it' (Davies, 2008; 2011a; 2013). Williamson et al (2021: 154) echo this issue regarding universal or targeted provision arguing that even when youth policy targets vulnerable groups significant numbers of young peoples' needs can be overlooked and as a result, 'fall between the gaps'. With resonance to the concept of slow youth work Batsleer (2010: 160) uses the term 'liquid youth work' to describe youth work that is promoted by policy makers because of its short-lived, project-based, individualized forms of engagement and its privileging of demonstrable outcomes, quick successes, and capacity for replication and rebranding.

While much of the literature referenced above does not refer directly to the three countries under consideration for this research, various sources suggest the challenges are widespread. For example, a European Commission (2014) broad study of youth work in the EU Member States highlights discrepancies between youth work's purpose and the expectations of 'measurable' outcomes and standards; Increasing targeting of young people towards the labour market and education alongside a growing expectation for youth work to fill the gaps left by mainstream services as well as a decline in upfront financing of activities. It points the need for a systematic and holistic approach to enhance the recognition of and funding for youth work, through qualitative as well as quantitative methodologies, as well as the increasing importance of youth policy in recent years alongside dialogue between youth work and policy makers.

At a European level, in order to influence the agendas of the state rather than just be influenced by them, youth work needs to be more active in policy processes and agendas. This is a key conclusion of the Council of Europe's Youth Sector Strategy 2030 and the 3rd European Youth Work Convention suggesting that youth work should be 'an integral part of youth policy, systematically incorporating the needs and measures into youth policies, both vertically and horizontally.' Both the previous and current EU Youth Strategies are instrumental in influencing relevant policy in member states including through cross-sectorial policy-making and joined-up implementation. The current strategy Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 invites member states to concentrate on targeted actions translating EU priorities into the national context, to be identified in National Action Plans. These plans should draw on cross-sectoral cooperation between youth and other policy areas, building on existing governance mechanisms. Both the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 call for the development of a European Youth Work Agenda. In this call, the EU Youth Strategy encouraged synergies to further develop youth work practices and policies.

The European Youth Work Convention (EYWC) is the central platform for discussing the latest developments in youth work practice and youth policy in Europe. The 3rd EYWC concluded by agreeing that priority areas for growing youth work throughout Europe include that youth work should be an integral part of youth policy, and a strategic framework for youth work development could support the growth of youth work throughout Europe if European institutions further aligned their visions for youth work within their respective youth strategies.

The European Commission' s 2021 Study of Youth Work in the EU was the second of such inquiries with the previous study published in 2014. The 2021 study with 789 respondents from across the EU illustrated findings with relevance to this inquiry. All the focus group participants voiced the need for structural and long-term funding and away from project-based funding to ensure quality youth work. The absence of sustainable structural funding according to the research participants hinders long-term planning and investment, for instance in infrastructure (e.g. digitalisation), the ability to innovate, support structures (to provide guidance, advice and support to apply for funding) or continuous training and development. Policy gaps perceived by youth workers included that national policy priorities often do not (fully) meet their needs, with 39% identifying that national policies did not meet their needs at all. A key finding of the research is for closer cooperation between youth work and policy-makers to raise awareness of the value of youth work and further research on the impacts and

outcomes of youth work should be supported and better communicated to national policy makers Finally, with resonance to the speed and pace of youth work across the EU, 33% of youth workers felt that they are too busy.

Finally, Ord et al (2018: 20) suggests that some of the difficulty regarding youth work policy is that the process of youth work is not understood by policy makers. 'At the heart of this process is an autonomous practice that unfolds in negotiation with the young people. It is not a pre-ordained programme delivered to achieve a set of prescribed outcomes.' However, the authors also note that sometimes youth workers themselves are unsure as to what youth work is, and as a result can unquestioningly respond to:

> whatever new requirements are stipulated by policy makers – be this in terms of preventing drug abuse or risky behaviour, promoting sexual health, fostering the participation of youth in society, enabling intercultural exchange and mutual understanding, enhancing the mobility of young people, fostering creativity, imparting media literacy, communicating values and attitudes, increasing solidarity in society, enabling global citizenship, providing space and time for young persons, providing non-formal education, increasing young people's employability, or – more recently – de-radicalising extremist youth

The literature above points to some common challenges for youth work and youth workers related to how youth work is understood, how outcomes in youth work are determined and by whom, and how they are evaluated. In the absence of young people ultimately leading the direction of youth work and naming the benefits of the work in their own terms, youth work practice suffers and real potential is lost. With regard to evaluation methods, an over emphasis on quantitative over qualitative evaluation methods is noted. Finally, a growing emphasis on youth policy and youth work policy is observable across Europe, with increasing recognition of the value of dialogue between young people, youth workers and policy makers for influencing such policies.

CASE STUDY

When European Policy meets local Youth Work Practice

Erasmus+ 2021-2027 is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe towards meaningful participation in democratic society, intercultural understanding, and successful transition in the labour market. In line with the EU Youth strategy, the programme will promote projects aiming at engaging, connecting, and empowering young people with the following specific objectives:

- promote learning mobility of individuals and groups, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of education and training;

- promote non-formal and informal learning mobility and active participation among young people, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of youth;

- promote learning mobility of sport staff, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies.

While this programme, clearly has benefits to young people and youth projects as a source of funding, knowledge development and sharing of innovation and good practice, there are challenges with the fund with regard to pre-determined outcomes and the exclusion of some groups. For example, the Erasmus + programme has its own set of objectives and priorities at macro level with outcomes are already predetermined by the objectives of the funds. The majority of the Erasmus+ key actions address EU goals with some connection to national goals but not the local needs of young people. Despite this, unplanned outcomes such as increased self-esteem and/or sense of autonomy and identity as an EU citizen also result from young people participating in this programme. However, in Erasmus+ 2021-2027 informal groups around Europe were excluded from applying for KA2 activities presenting further barriers to participation and inclusion for young people with fewer opportunities.

In the previous Erasmus+ programme informal groups were also excluded from KA3 Structured Dialogue projects, negating the Commissions own objectives to bring young people from disadvantaged communities and policy makers together in a structured dialogue process with a view to bringing about social change. This means that as national organisations are often the ones leading out on structured dialogue processes, only young people who can already participate in high level discussions are involved in these processes. This development contradicts the importance in Slow Youth Work of inclusive, democratic and open engagement with young people.

4.1 COUNTRY CONTEXTS

This project focuses on the individual and collective experiences of youth work and youth work policy in Latvia, Ireland and North Macedonia. While the 3 countries are in different stages of development regarding youth work, there are also striking similarities. This section highlights country specific developments and challenges regarding youth work as found in this research, followed by a collective analysis of country contexts.

Latvia

Latvia's accession to the European Union in 2004 and the subsequent integration of the EU's common policy planning objectives into Latvian policy was seen as a key milestone in the development of youth policy and youth work, although there remains no dedicated policy on youth work. Youth Law (Act) 2008 is the main legislative document that recognizes and regulates youth work in Latvia. Under this Act, young people are named as 13-25 years old and youth work is defined as 'A set of planned practical measures oriented towards young people, which ensures the implementation of youth policy, the development of the value orientation of young people and the strengthening of general human values'.

The first attempts to define youth as a separate target group of public policy took place in the mid-1990s, but the first Youth Law was finally adopted in 2008. In recent years on the national level there is a purposeful and strategic development of youth policy in Latvia, as the Ministry of Education and Science has defined youth areas within the framework of the State program annual priorities and activities to be implemented. Nonetheless, to date the Youth Law (or any other Law) does not require the municipalities to implement youth work but offers/suggests them the rights to do it and offers guidelines or principles on how to do it. In total, only a few national youth level organisations get direct state funding while others are invited to apply for projects. With inadequate national and municipal funding, the development of youth work has also been affected by the limited availability of foreign financial instruments. Therefore, in Latvia, youth work provision is irregular, from well-developed and recognized local youth work with well-developed youth policy documents, open youth centres and grants for youth initiatives, to no youth work taking place in some municipalities. Where youth work does take place, the focus is short term but with 'municipalities expecting fast and obvious results' resulting in only quantitative data being requested and valued, while financial reporting requirements are seen as burdensome This causes challenges for long-term recognition and sustainability of youth work. Youth workers in the focus group for this research argue that the lack of a systemic municipal framework and supports (financial, practical, informative, and emotional) emphasises fast and immediate results over quality sustainable outcomes. As

a result, youth work generally is very fragmented, the profession is poorly paid and regarded, youth work education and training is undeveloped and disjointed and there are few youth workers, all impacting on the quality of youth work and its potential outcomes.

However, forthcoming regional administrative reform in Latvia will have significant implications for the future of youth work in Latvia. The new edition of Municipality Law will dictate that youth work is one of the municipality's autonomous functions and obliges municipalities to provide youth work regionally. This is an important turn in Youth work history in Latvia. The Youth Policy Guidelines and Implementation Plan 2021-2027 are also being finalised at the time of writing this report. These guidelines set out to create opportunities for the development and welfare of all young people, to strengthen youth integration in society and their participation in all aspects of life, as well as to promote establishment and development of quality and sustainable youth work system at national and municipal level. This is the first national level youth policy planning document that gives such a prominent and central place to the development of youth work. It was noted with regret by this research participants that the drafting of the new youth policy guidelines lacked in-depth of discussion on the quality and future of youth work in Latvia. The State Program for Youth Policy for 2021-2023 offers some promise for youth work by pledging increased engagement with policy makers. For example, there is a stated commitment within the timeline of the plan to hold 42 'meetings with decision-makers and youth workers in 42 municipalities with the aim of strengthening youth participation mechanisms after administrative territorial reform and discussing the implementation of youth work in municipalities.'

Case Study from Latvia

Since 2009 youth work in Latvia has been formulated in Youth Act as a right, but not duty for municipalities with a list of general principles on how to implement youth work. This recommendation rather than rule therefore, means youth work provision varies from zero to high in different municipalities in Latvia, and the local elections every 4 years have also impacted the situation. In 2021, ongoing regional reform that reorganizes the borders between the municipalities, also affects the youth sector, resulting for some municipalities in widening best practices, and in others the risk of resource cuts to the sector. However, this regional reform also promises changes in Municipality Law to place youth services as one of the defined responsibilities to be provided by the municipality.

General overview shows that youth work is rarely systematised in Latvian municipalities – often it relies on short-term enthusiasm of individuals and lots of short-term events and fragmented volunteer work. Also, the hierarchy in the municipality (under what division or department youth work is subordinated) plays an important role for youth field development and recognition, and impacts the focus and priorities in youth field, what resources are available, how the youth work is recognized and how it can be organized. Because municipalities could until recently choose their own way to provide (or not) youth work, there is a variety of different approaches: from one single part-time youth worker for the whole municipality to separate youth departments with a team of Youth Affairs specialists and several youth work-

ers, and youth project managers. In some cases, youth work services are fully delegated to an NGO based on a contract with the municipality.

In some municipalities youth work is subordinated under interest (hobby/talent) education or culture department, bringing limitations in operations and youth policy development. There is one municipality where youth work is actively practiced and widely visible, even recognized as best practice on a national level, but on a municipal structural level ("on paper") youth work is not even mentioned as an existing separate unit in this municipality.

"Support from the municipality can be different – financial, practical, informative or emotional. It is not only financial support that youth workers and youth need. And youth work has to be systematic, regular, with long-term focus and well-incorporated in the municipality system. It is important that not only youth workers think about young people, but every sector thinks about youth as a target group," emphasizes one of Latvian youth worker from the research focus group.

One of the forms to ensure horizontal strategic approach on youth policy development in municipalities is the Advisory Council of Youth Affairs. This Council is usually led by a youth affairs specialist or youth worker, involving also representatives from various youth-related institutions (such as social service, police, schools, library etc.). When the Council is steered well, it contributes well on youth work recognition and development. In best case scenario it "really helps and supports youth policy development in the municipality". However, they only exist in some municipalities, and others do not work efficiently, but when run and resourced well, they do provide a useful strategic mechanism for youth work practice and to strengthen collaboration with other youth-related institutions.

According to many youth workers, one of the most critical issues in the daily youth work is that "municipalities expect fast, visible results from the youth field. Because of these expectations, youth workers focus on short-term activities, events where they often do something just because of doing, not necessarily connected with long-term goals in the municipality, but just to show that they are active," one of Latvian youth affairs specialists illustrates the issues. In annual reports, most of the municipalities are mainly focusing on numbers – numbers of events and youngsters involved, and how the budget is spent, but rarely they measure or assess quality and long-term impact.

North Macedonia

Youth work has become increasingly established in N. Macedonia in recent years. This has been significantly influenced by the Union of Youth Work, an umbrella association of youth workers and organizations which are providers of youth work. In 2018 a vocational standard for youth workers was officially adopted, which represented the first official recognition of one of the profiles of youth workers. One year later, the Union of Youth Work, in partnership with the Agency for Youth and Sport and the National Youth Council of Macedonia, prepared and published two key documents: Quality Standards for Youth Work and the National Portfolio for Youth Workers. These documents were created through a broad consultative process

involving youth workers, youth work providers, young people, and policy makers in the field of youth, with support from the Erasmus+ Programme. In 2020, the Macedonian Parliament adopted the Law for Youth Participation and Youth Policy. This law, for the first-time defined youth work and youth workers in national law. Under this law, youth work is defined as "an organized and systematic process of education and support of the authentic development of young people in order to achieve their full personal, social and societal potential and their active involvement in community life." The law also defines youth centres as one of the youth services, establishes a responsibility for all local municipalities to create conditions for establishing at least one youth centre in the next five years and names youth workers as responsible for working with young people in the youth centres. However, there are only a few youth centres existing in the country at the moment. Three of these youth centres are in line with the Law for Youth Polices and Youth Participation and the Quality Standards for youth centres, among which the first one was opened in Kavadarci in July 2021, and just recently (February 2022) the two in Kumanovo and Ohrid. There are also few more that are managed by CSOs and depend on foreign funding. This causes a lack of sustainability due to the risk they will stop operating when the project ends, and control over the quality of youth work, apart from possible internal practices of the CSO or requirements by the donor. Additionally, currently, there is an on-going process, a pilot phase – led by the Agency of Youth and Sport in partnership with 4 municipalities and the Union of Youth Work - for establishing of the first youth centres supported by the local governments. In aiming to ensure quality in the services of the youth centres, the Agency also adopted Standards for work of youth centres in April 2021, which were developed through a process with significant participation from the Union of Youth Work and are based on the above referenced publications. The Union of Youth Work, with support of the Agency of Youth and Sport, designed and realized the first formal training programme for the first level of youth workers – workers of youth, and during June 2021, 14 received their certificates and are the first formally recognized youth workers in the country. As we are preparing this research, the second generation of workers of youth started attending the training (15th of Febrauary 2022).

The Civil Society Sector in N. Macedonia has played a key role in pushing for these developments in youth policy. They have been working tirelessly for almost 2 decades to create a positive climate and environment for young people through cooperation with institutions, lobbying, initiating and leading processes and participating in every relevant process. However, the processes move very slowly and remain dependent on "political will". In relation to policy influence, implementation and monitoring, youth organizations which comprise the youth networks do have an influence although there is no mechanism for structured engagement by many other youth workers in policy making. Research participants suggest that current youth work policy - although newly emerging - appears to be in a relatively good place. Further improvements and regulation by a specific of Law on Youth Work are also expected in the near future, requiring (according to research participants) the continued involvement and influence of the Union of Youth Work and the CSO sector – to advocate and monitor policy implementation in the coming years.

Case Study from N. Macedonia
Developing Youth Work policy - A Youth Sector perspective

Youth work was one of the topics discussed at the 59th thematic session of the Government of N Macedonia held on 20th March 2018. It concluded with a plan to establish a Working Group (WG) with representatives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Education and Science, Center for Vocational Education and Training, Agency of Youth and Sport and the Union of Youth Work. Their brief was to develop a plan, programme and policy for establishment of a system of youth work, for which the WG ought to prepare and submit (back to the Government) an information with specific proposals, plan/programme for work and expected future activities by the Government and the other state institutions, within 30 days.

A representative of the Union of Youth Work was present at the thematic session and later in the Working Group, however, disappointingly, no definite conclusions or follow-up decisions or actions resulted, suggesting a policy development which looks good in theory but not in practice. But at the same time, it is the belief of the Union of Youth Work that all the processes which subsequently emerged (connected to the Law, our standards and portfolio, the standard for worker with youth etc…) were somehow connected to this Working Group. While we cannot point to concrete developments which came from this Working Group, everything started to happen after that meeting, so, we're not quite certain that it was actually fruitless. We believe that our contribution at the Working Group may have helped change how youth work was understood and regarded, perhaps through the conversations which took place and relationships which developed. It is our held view that while change is slow and patience is needed, the processes of youth work such as building relationships, establishing understanding and connecting through dialogue can apply also usefully to our engagement with decision-makers.

Ireland

For several decades now, youth work in Ireland has been defined in the youth work legislation as:

> A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement, and which is complementary to their formal, academic, or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations (Youth Work Act 2001, Part 1, Section 3)

Most youth work is carried out by civil society organisations, very often funded by the state. This was estimated as more than 40 national youth work organisations, a large number of local projects, clubs, and programmes, with approximately 1,400 paid youth workers (Indecon, 2012:11). While statutory recognition and governance of youth work is provided through the Youth Work Act 2001, the establishment of the Department for Children and Young People

(DCYA) and the appointment of the first ever Cabinet level Minister in 2011 and the Education and Training Boards Act 2013, placed the state's responsibility for youth work on a full statutory footing. Significant policy developments also include Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for children and young people 2014-2020 (BOBF) which presented an umbrella framework for coordinating all policy dealing with young people aged 0 – 24 years of age. Priority objectives and actions for its implementation to be undertaken by Government Departments, state agencies and the youth and broader community and voluntary sectors for people aged 10 – 24 years of age were provided with the first ever National Youth Strategy 2015-2020. It aims to enable all young people to realise their maximum potential, by respecting their rights and hearing their voices, while protecting and supporting them as they transition from childhood to adulthood. The Strategy is 'evidence informed, and outcomes focused'. recognises the importance of strong engagement by, and collaboration between, statutory bodies/agencies and non-governmental organisations in the pursuit of better outcomes for young people. It acknowledges the interconnection between all of these areas of work, and that young people benefit most when the work of all stakeholders is mutually reinforcing.' In 2013 the DCYA carried out a Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes (VFMPR) to economically assess certain youth work programmes and provide a range of reform recommendations.

Following (and in some cases because of) these developments youth workers suggest shortcomings related to policy affecting young people. As is the case with other aspects of civil society the youth work sector and youth work organisations have been badly impacted by economic recession and an extended period of austerity policies from the Irish government. At a national level, there is a tension between institutional recognition and the cumulative impact of disproportionate cuts which limit the ability of the sector to offer quality youth work practice.

Many participants felt that the focus for youth work programmes is becoming increasingly more short term and outcome-oriented, impacting negatively on the long-term vision and process orientation. Qualitative indicators are also often missing from youth work evaluations, also losing out on the process dimensions of the work. There is an increasing push towards targeted provision, which participants suggest is further excluding young people. They argue instead for diverse mainstream provision rather than narrow targeted interventions. Increasingly, workers are under pressure to achieve more in broader areas but with less resources than before, impacting negatively on Slow Youth Work processes.

Participants also pointed out that government policy can influence youth work in a positive way through strengthening recognition of youth work as well as supporting the sector to strengthen planning and evaluation in line with a specific set of objectives and outcomes for young people. For example, outcomes-oriented frameworks (such as BOBF) can be a useful anchor to their work and reporting requirements such as logic modelling offered a standardized structure behind groups and programmes, also helpful in new staff inductions. However, participants acknowledged that a change of government at any time can (and does) lead to new policies which could undermine and/ or replace existing ones and also criticised the lack of a structural mechanism for on-going consultation and engagement between youth workers and youth related policy.

Case Study from Ireland
UBU Your Place Your Space - new policy, new programme, new challenges

In 2013, in line with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) 'strategic objective of ensuring high standards of compliance on governance and accountability', a Value for Money and Policy Review of the Youth Funding Programmes (VFMPR) was conducted. The Value for Money process was overseen by an independent steering committee with no youth sector representation and all seven members noted as having expertise in either finance, economics, auditing or evaluation (see DCYA, 2014b:20). The programme logic model (PLM) was the standard methodology used involving mapping the objectives, inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes of the evaluated spending programme (DPER, 2013).

This review examined three of the targeted funding schemes (with a value of over €38.5 million) administered by the DCYA: which supported the provision of youth services for young people aged 10-24 who are at risk of drugs, alcohol misuse, early school leaving, homelessness, or who are living in disadvantaged communities. A key recommendation of the VFMPR advocated that these schemes be amalgamated into one funding scheme for targeted youth programmes. UBU - Your Place, Your Space was launched late 2019 as the youth funding scheme to provide services that support young people to develop the personal and social skills required to improve their life chances. These include services covering health, education, employment, and social connectedness.

Young people aged 10-24 years who are described in the National Youth Strategy as marginalised, disadvantaged, or vulnerable are the primary target group for services available through UBU. The specific seven personal and social development skills encompassed within the provision of UBU Your Place Your Space are: Communication skills/ Confidence and agency/ Planning and problem-solving/ Relationships/ Creativity and imagination/ Resilience and determination/ Emotional intelligence. Funding is allocated to each county Education and Training Board (ETB), responsible for the governance and administration of funds to independent youth organisations and youth projects are funded based on 'an evidenced demonstration of young people's needs by the Education and Training Boards.'

Youth workers in Ireland have criticised this policy in practice. While expressing absolute commitment to working with marginalised young people, several youth workers already working with marginalised young people within socially excluded communities, felt that the over emphasis on specific groups of young people ignored significant numbers of young peoples' needs, critiquing the emphasis on rescue and rehabilitation approaches as 'goodies for baddies' approaches.

Many felt that the paperwork associated with this fund is exhaustive, burdensome and sometimes confusing due to causes duplication, as other reporting structures remain in place. Youth Workers felt that this funding stream is inflexible in meeting the needs of all young people in a meaningful way. One example of this is the inability for youth workers to any longer liaise with young people through their schools. One youth worker described this as dismantling years of collaboration with schools at a time when students are facing serious mental health and other challenges as a result of the Covid pandemic. He commented; "we collaborated with a school in our local area for fifteen years. Working together with this

school we identified students who were most at risk of leaving school early and experiencing mental health issues. This year because of UBU we had to tell the school that we could no longer collaborate with them during school time". According to this youth worker "it was like as if all of our efforts were erased just because someone at policy level didn't understand the importance of our collaboration at local level in our own community".

Another youth worker pointed out "under the new UBU framework we are expected be to jack of all trades" social workers, drugs workers even mental health workers" this youth worker expressed concern that the essence of youth work in responding to individual and groups needs is being lost. UBU also allows for unplanned spot checks to individual youth services, leading to concerns about confidentiality and a sense of distrust, with services now reluctant to ask for support for fear that they are perceived as poor service providers.

Youth Workers argue that they need a platform/structure to voice their experiences and concerns relating to UBU. They suggest that continuous improvement planning meetings could take place quarterly between members of the Youth Sector and the Education Boards to make UBU more relevant to the needs of the sector and young people.

Examining this case study through the lens of Slow Youth Work, it confirms the increased reporting burden negatively impacting on direct work with young people and a general disconnect between youth work policy and youth work practice.

05 COMMON THEMES AND KEY DIFFERENCES

Analysing the findings from the focus groups and policy analysis across Ireland, Latvia, and North Macedonia and elsewhere in Europe, it is evident that there are both notable differences and significant commonalities. With regard to differences, the scale and infrastructure for youth work varies considerably across the 3 countries. Ireland has its own Department of Child & Youth Affairs as well as Education and Training Boards to administer funds and support development of youth work at local level. In Latvia youth work provision is irregular, with only 2 or 3 national youth level organisations receiving direct state funding and with no youth work taking place in some municipalities. Until recently, the only youth centres in N Macedonia were funded through foreign donors. Additionally, currently, there is an on-going process, a pilot phase – led by the Agency of Youth and Sport in partnership with 4 munici-

palities and the Union of Youth Work - for establishing of the first youth centres supported by the local governments Ireland has specific youth work legislation to regulate youth work as a profession while policy on youth work in Latvia is only recently emerging through broader youth policy. In Macedonia, recent policy developments include initiatives to regulate youth work as a profession through mechanisms such as codes of ethics, occupational standards or establishment of professional bodies for youth workers. The professional education and training dimension is again varied in that no formal professional education and training for youth work exists in Latvia, while such processes are only at an early stage in Macedonia. In Ireland specialized professional education and training for youth workers at honours level is embedded across several Universities and other training providers. As a consequence of these developments, the quality of youth work is considerably varied across all three countries.

Definitions of youth work in Latvia and N Macedonia suggest the potential of youth work to connect young people with decision-making. Latvia is explicit in recognising the role of youth work in ensuring 'the implementation of youth policy.' In N Macedonia, youth work is stated as supporting the 'authentic development of young people in aim of fulfilling their overall personal, social and civic potential and their active involvement in the life of the community (our emphasis). However, in Ireland democratic participation of young people is not an evident feature of youth work policy and the current programme emphasis is on individual personal development rather than political engagement or community development. Paying attention to who participates, at present Ireland is the only country with an increasing targeting and profiling of the young person. Irish research participants felt that this narrows the potential of youth work and called instead for diverse mainstream provision rather than a narrow, targeted approach.

Despite these significant differences, there are striking commonalities. The lack of recognition for how Youth Work contributes to society was a commonly identified challenge, as well lack of understanding of the professional role of the youth worker. Even in Ireland where youth work has existed for a long-time, youth workers often find themselves treated as less than equal to other social professionals.

The lack of sustainable funding and chronic under- resourcing of youth work was identified as a major challenge across all countries and demands made of youth work organisations exacerbated this challenge with financial reporting obligations being described as burdensome and resulting in less direct work with young people.

A recurrent issue are challenges related to long-term planning of youth work due an uncertain political landscape generally as well as cultural factors in some countries. Research participants highlighted that government elections can change political priorities and consequently impact on both policy creation and implementation. Frequent changes in policy direction changes what youth work is funded to do and outcomes expected, including specifying prescribed outcomes. As one participant suggested 'Money goes where the policy dictates.'
How these outcomes get evaluated or 'measured' raises additional challenges for youth work.

Funding tends to be linked to quantitative demands and indicators, does not differentiate between developmental and non- developmental youth work practice, and does not value the additional time and skill needed to engage with the most marginalised young people.

The short-term nature of youth work programmes and funding, presents a challenge in both providing quality work as well as 'evidence' of outcomes. 'In short, it is a pressure to achieve more and in wider area with less resources than before, and it can be brutal for quality' said one practitioner. This, they argue, is influenced by value for money perspectives and result in work becoming funding led and the long-term vision and process orientation getting lost. The principles and practice of youth work is compromised, making outcomes the driver for the work in some organisations instead of what young people want or need and the ability to be needs responsive reduced.

Across all countries, it was recognised that the youth sector needs to value and be valued in influencing future policy and "pressuring" for proper implementation of existing policies. Findings show that youth workers are key stakeholders in ensuring government policies are in the best interest of young people. This happens through the encouragement of young people's understanding of policy and creating and supporting participation pathways for young people to contribute to policy inception and development. In addition, youth workers can add their voices to key policy areas through their unique insight into lives of young people while holding policy makers accountable for what they propose. In general, there was a perceived absence of established mechanisms for structured engagement by youth workers in policy making as well as a concern that policy makers do not necessarily understand youth work. However, there were also examples identified of meaningful engagement, for example the involvement of the Union of Youth Workers in N. Macedonia is an excellent example of where youth workers are pro-active in a policy arena.

Across all three countries, research participants desire policy and practice frameworks to support their work suggesting these would lead to greater accountability, enhanced professionalism and standardized planning and reflection models. These frameworks would support youth workers to uphold standards in their practice but would recognize that professionalism, time and depth continuity and sustainability are necessary to create the conditions for youth work to fulfil its best potential. Project participants recognise that this requires sustainable resourcing and the youth sector in each country must be involved in the formulation of such frameworks to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The following list suggests frameworks necessary to create the conditions for Slow Youth Work with a transformative potential for young people, communities and society:

POLICY	Recognition of the profession of "youth worker"	● The level of skill and competence as referenced in the Salto (2016) Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally needs acknowledgement by employers and funders. ● A team of qualified and motivated youth workers necessitates comprehensive professional education and training programmes and a growth mindset for practitioners to remain open to ideas, to try new things, and to take personal responsibility for on-going professional development and learning.
	Sustainable long-term funding should be provided to allow for continuity and longevity	● Provide targeted mainstream youth work- Government policies and programmes should recognise the diversity of young people and provide for particular resourcing of youth work with socially excluded young people ● An independent infrastructure to enable youth organisations to become autonomous, sustainable and respond to new needs and trends. This includes physical, financial and material resources, and systems in place to support design and delivery. Essential to the development of its own identity, ethos, policies etc is having a separate institutional space
PRACTICE	Youth workers to engage in continuous reflective learning	● Networks and interagency engagement-Youth worker networks would facilitate greater communication; support and sharing of experiences; ideas, opportunities, information; spaces for critical reflection to share what has worked and what has not ● Educational Resources should be developed and made freely available youth work research and resources on theory, training, tools, methods, case studies and so on
	Standards in practice should be developed and maintained	● Specific job descriptions are needed for the role of youth workers, with clear division of the roles/tasks for different profiles of youth worker ● Youth workers should recognise their responsibility in maintaining the highest levels of integrity and to acknowledge, understand and balance their accountability to young people, to their employers, their colleagues, their funders and the legal system.

POLICY + PRACTICE

More strategic and co-ordinated efforts are needed to increase recognition of youth work as a profession important for society and to enhance youth work practice

● Better awareness about existing networks and the creation of new networks for increased co-operation and co-creation. These networks should play a key role in communicating in engaging ways current and emerging developments in national and European policy.

● Youth work programmes should sustainably resource mainstream youth work with recognition of diversity of young people and particular resourcing of youth work with socially excluded young people.

● An on-line platform should be created and maintained o provide wide access to already existing resources. This can then highlight what resources are missing, so the future efforts can be directed towards creating new ones instead of duplicating.

● Already agreed frameworks such as Quality Youth Work: A common framework for the further development of youth work Report from the Expert Group on Youth Work Quality Systems in the EU Member States should be adopted and used more widely by youth organisations

Youth work needs to be incorporated as a fundamental part of youth policy

● Youth workers and youth work organisations need to be pro-active in building relationships with policy makers and politicians to inform them about youth work, advocate for sustained resources and influence policy decisions. Deliberative platforms for young people to have a real say and influence on the issues which affect them must be developed, resourced, monitored, mainstreamed. These need to be developed and resourced in a way that maximises opportunities for young people from socially excluded backgrounds to be involved, including recognition of the need for dedicated youth worker time and resources

● In order to be effective in policy influence., professional education and training of youth workers needs to support practitioners to develop the knowledge and skills to advocate as a sector and to support young people to raise their voices on policy issues. Youth Worker Education providers should therefore incorporate strong public administration and policy influence modules in their programmes. Knowledge includes an understanding of the policy and political landscape, knowing where decisions are made and influenced, and understanding the issues facing young people from evidence gathering. Skills include relationship building, consciousness raising, careful conflicting, negotiating, leadership, research, and communication.

Youth work evaluations and impact assessments must reflect youth work values and processes

● Evaluation frameworks for youth work should be rooted in youth work principles. This requires young people to be involved as active participants in developing research questions, designing the methodologies to be used and analysing the research findings.

● Qualitative methodologies should be adopted to capture youth work processes and impact over time and to compliment the quantitative requirements usually requested by funders.

CONCLUSION

Policymaking is the process whereby the government and the authorities reach decisions, set out priorities, satisfy competing interest groups and lay down the underlying approaches to their work. The youth work sector is one such interest group and successful youth work has a key role in involving young people in decision-making. Yet youth workers and young people are confronted daily by the impact of policy decisions which increasingly in recent years value fast over slow approaches. This emphasis is somewhat understandable in a neo-liberal era. Governments themselves exist for 'short terms' and this can lead to 'fast policy' with policy makers wanting quick and risk-free solutions to problems They are under pressure to 'perform' and meet promises made as well as be held accountable to the tax-payer, therefore are looking for ways to illustrate that they are 'delivering'. In order for them to look good, service providers who they contract must demonstrate their accountability and deliver value for money. Value for money is more quickly determined through comparing against set targets and outcomes etc. and accountability more easily measured using quantitative data which is fast to produce and consume.

This research illuminates specific ways in which fast policy impacts on practice in youth work. Firstly, fast policy, in its broadest context reflects how current youth policy favours quick solutions, many of which are therapeutic based, individual focused and can be easily replicated and measured as opposed to becoming slowly devised and developed in unique ways in different projects.

While fast is not the same as short – short termism can be an element of fast policy reflected in, for example, the short terms of funding rounds so that youth services must apply each year and be evaluated each year to get the next funding cycle. Practitioners are under pressure to perform in 'short' bursts of time – to achieve, prove and report. This creates 'fast' outcomes as providers fear they must produce goods in short amounts of time. Fast policy in youth work, as a result, leads to possible reliance on types of practices that are 'safe' 'evidence based' 'proven' – are quick to give results – but these are not designed by the young person – but are instead imposed by adults – in the name of efficiency and certainty. Fast – is reflected in projects and programmes that are forced to have short time horizons and tend to impart/impose a prescribed agenda. This is not always a problem, for example the delivery of a sexual health programme has real value. However, it is a problem when it becomes the dominant model of work.

While agreed definitions of youth work purpose and processes are well established in the countries examined in this research and across Europe more widely, clarity and agreement on suitable tools to evaluate youth work are less developed. Process and outcome dimensions in youth work are clearly important but different approaches and indicators are needed to evaluate each. A focus on quantifiable data and its emphasis on generalizability, statistics, numeric data are often easier to manage and more succinct to report. Yet, some change can

be observed but cannot be easily computed. For example, judgments, feeling or perceptions can also be used to measure change. In this context, qualitative and quantitative methodologies are not mutually exclusive and antagonistic paradigms, and instead combining both as a mixed method approach presents a way forward to demonstrate changes in different ways. Ultimately though, as the youth sector is caught to respond to the requests of its funders, they need to be more flexible and open in how they value and demand information from the sector.

Despite growing awareness in recent years, the lack of understanding about youth work and its potential remains an issue for youth workers, and society more broadly. Funding towards youth work will always be restricted if its value is not recognised while youth workers continue to suffer from an invisibility compared with other social professionals. Communicating youth work is a task primarily for youth workers, alongside young people. However, to communicate on a larger scale, resources, funding, media interest and skills development is needed.

Finally, those interested in improving evaluation and maximising the potential impact of any youth work intervention, should also turn their eye to professional formation processes as well including training in monitoring and evaluation. Levels of effectiveness in both areas are dependent on levels of competence, therefore any focus on measuring outcomes requires a focus on making sure that the intervention has the capacity to lead to meaningful outcomes. This has implications for the professional status of youth workers, and associated education and training processes, including employment requirements.

Across the partner countries, despite differing contexts and traditions, this research identified policy and practice requirements for Slow Youth Work. In looking towards the future, project partners and research participants are hopeful for policies and national standards frameworks which platform, promote and protect this work as a most valuable, unique, and specific profession which elevates young people's inclusion, participation, and rights. It is hoped that these would resource the continued existence and sustainability of youth work, protect the profession and create legitimacy for its development and excellence.

Across all countries, it was recognised that the youth sector needs to value and be valued in influencing future policy and "pressuring" for proper implementation of existing policies. This necessitates established mechanisms for structured engagement by young people and youth workers in policy making as well as an understanding by policy makers of the role and potential of youth work in this regard.

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Appendices

Table 1. Statutory definitions of youth work in Latvia, Ireland, North Macedonia

Latvia	Ireland	N. Macedonia
Youth Law (Act) 2008 'A set of planned practical measures oriented towards young people, which ensures the implementation of youth policy, the development of the value orientation of young people and the strengthening of general human values.'	Youth Work Act 2001 'A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involve-ment, and which is complementary to their formal, academic, or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.'	Law on Youth Policies and Youth Participation 2020 "Youth Work is an organized and systematic process of education and support of the authentic development of young people in aim of fulfilling their overall personal, social and civic potential and their active involement in the life of the community."

"Supporting Long-term Outcomes with Youth Work"
Erasmus+ programme, project number: KA205-146E36FE
IO1: Focus group guiding template

Before the focus group

Invite your participants by clearly outlining;

- the rationale for this research project
- your expectations of them in the focus group
- the duration of the focus group (max 1 hour to allow meaningful discussion on the topic)
- ask them for permission to record the session
- agree roles with your co-facilitator if you have one

During the focus group

Start by;

- set Zoom to record
- eintroducing yourself and your role in this KA2 Erasmus + research project
- housekeeping e.g. time, distribution of time for questioning etc
- follow the questions but of course use your own instinct to build on or further investigate the topic
- it's also a good idea to capture opinions in chat for those who are less confident to speak in the group

Platform for meeting

We suggest;

- using Zoom as a platform for the focus groups as most people arefamiliar with this, however if you are more familiar with another online platform please use this

Profile of participants for focus groups

- experienced Youth Workers who are willing to share and articulate their experiences and opinions in the context of this research (please use guided template sent to you by Oonagh)
- a good mix of different types of youth organisations (each country can decide based on those who are working with young people at least 5 years)
- we trust that you know who will give you what you need for this research project

Research Questions

Sent to everyone via email and stored in Google Drive

After the focus group

- thank people for their participation
- ask them if they would be happy for you to follow up further if necessary
- summarise key points from discussion and no more than 4-5 pages
- follow the agreed template/guidance for writing up focus group outcomes

"Supporting Long-term Outcomes with Youth Work"

Erasmus+ programme, project number: KA205-146E36FE
IO1: PhotoVoice guiding template

Photovoice; Aim to ensure that young people's voices are meaningfully represented in this research.

Photovoice is a community-based participatory action research (PAR) method which provides a voice to marginalised groups, usually those who are excluded from the political arena (Sutton-Brown, 2014, Liebenberg, 2018). The research team designed an information pack (see: Appendix 3) to guide participants through the photovoice process and organised a preliminary workshop on process with research participants.

The young people shared a snapshot of their lived experiences of youth work through following the instruction below and answering the following questions;

Choose an image or take a photo that represents your experiences of youth work

Add a brief description beside your image to explain why you chose this specific image

Explain the impact that youth work has had on you as a young person

What do you think makes good youth work?

Dimitar Iliev

The impact of this program on me is...	Youth work is important for...	Good youth work...
It has made me see and appreciate shades of myself and others that I have not realised existed. *Showed me ways in which: I can structure my thinking, evaluate more clearly what is of value and has led me on to the idea of "growth mindset"* *Helped me find a more holistic way of learning, which was probably the most useful skill I obtained through youth-work.*	*the journey of life, to have some mentor to help develop the characteristics of the individual. This is especially important for a youth who very often has either no direction or has one preset by another.* *It also fills the role of "community building", helping young people see the value in caring about the broader society. By helping to find a specific individual's role in society, it creates for them a sense of agency which will push them towards self-improvement. And to me at least, self-improvement is a societal improvement, perhaps even the only real kind of improvement an individual can offer.*	*When the mentors offer young people the tools of self-improvement by adapting to the specific characteristics of the individual, and however much is possible, without explicitly or implicitly involving ones own ideology as a way of influencing someone to support a cause. This is not to say that talking about 2 or more sides of some ideology is not good youth work. Because to me, it is. however, only if and when there is made an effort to NOT favour one side over the other, and let the individual see for themselves what is right. There seems to be more value in learning things on your own, rather than someone telling you how to think what you think.*

	The impact of this program on me is...	Youth work is important for...	Good youth work...
Ana Marija Petkoska	*My attitude about things, as well as how I coped with them, improved, for the better of course. Just because youth workers are not like instructors or teachers, I started paying more attention to them. They're easier to get along with, speak with, and interact with in general. Volunteering and youth work have allowed me to meet new people, communicate with people of higher social position, and form new friendships.*	*we should involve more young people in projects, events et cetera because that help's them to develop fully by collaborating with other youngsters and they learn how to develop themselves in personal, social, and academic aspects. Youth work enables people to develop their voice, influence and place in society and realize their full potential.*	*everything that allows young people to express themselves freely and comfortably. Good youth work is art, music, literature created by young people for young people. Good youth work is everything that awakens the idea to create something helpful and interesting for the majority of young people living in this society.*
Biljana Ivanova	*Through the youth work I have discover my potential as young person.*	*I believe that youth work is extremely important for the personal and professional development of every young person, because it puts in the first place the interests and the needs of young people in our society*	
Laze	*Youth work has a positive impact on me. I feel more confident and it allows me to grow.*	*because it opens new horizons, and perspectives of life especially to people like me*	*is the team work that is well organized and is led with good directions by people with experience and allows everyone to share their opinions*
	I've found a lot of confidence in myself and in trying to be less shy when talking to new people.	*so that young people feel empowered to have a say and will be more inclined to want to be involved with issues that do and could affect them in the future. .*	*letting young people have a voice and not only letting them speak for themselves but also speak through people who are more likely to be listened to*

The impact of this program on me is...	Youth work is important for...	Good youth work...
Youth work has helped me to grow up. I started. It has been something consistent and encouraging through my adolescent life and now into adulthood. Youth work is still as important to me because it is giving us the opportunity to do for other young people what was done for us and more. I would be a very different person if I hadn't been involved in youth work as it has provided me with so many opportunities for growth and development	*because young people need the support, to know they always have people in their corner no matter what...is such an important thing and it's what youth work provides for them.*	*being consistent, it's having faith in the young people you work with, it's a bond that develops over time. Good youth work is helping young people to develop social awareness and a sense of social solidarity. It's giving young people a voice and opportunities to use that voice.*
This program has given me a positive outlook on situations in life, it has thought me that if there's a problem, there is most likely a solution, and we can fix it (within reason).	*I think youth work is extremely important, especially within communities because it is a safe space and positive pathway for children/teenagers. It is a great way of socializing and having fun with friends. Youthwork is a supportive, reliable, and safe place for youth and offers many great opportunities throughout life.*	*should have reliable, trustworthy, and honest youth workers who can see the good in every child. Good youthwork should involve a safe space, opportunity, positive challenges, and teamwork.*

1   Please give a short description of your job title

2   In which country do you work with young people?

3   How does policy impact on youth work practice?

4   How is youth work defined in your country?

5   Can you observe a growing focus on outcomes from a policy level? If yes, please give specific examples. What implications does this have on youth work practice?

6   What do you see as the future role of policy in supporting or influencing the purpose and potential of youth work?

7   What role if any, do youth work stakeholders have in influencing policy?

8   How is youth work policy decided?

"Supporting Long-term Outcomes with Youth Work"
Erasmus+ programme, project number: KA205-146E36FE
IO1: Focus Group Guide

What does good youth work look like?

What supports good youth work?

What inhibits good youth work?

How does policy impact on your youth work practice?

What do you see as the future role of policy in supporting or influencing the purpose and potential of youth work?

Can you observe a growing focus on outcomes from a policy level? If yes, what implications does this have on youth work practice?

How is youth work policy decided?

What role if any, do youth work stakeholders have in influencing policy?

Long-term and inclusive youth work policy and practice

Erasmus + KA2 Strategic Partnership to promote long-term and inclusive youth work policy and practice in partner countries and across Europe.

This survey is part of an Erasmus + funded project "Supporting Long-term Outcomes With Youth Work" with youth work practitioners and researchers from Ireland, Latvia and North Macedonia. The project aims to promote long-term and inclusive youth work policy and practice in partner countries and across Europe. Initial findings to date suggest that youth work which can contribute most to society necessitates time, depth, process, continuity and sustainability. However a recent (2021) European Commission Study of Youth Work in the EU found that 33% of youth workers felt that they are too busy. In this survey we would like to assess youth workers perceptions of the pace of their work and where their most precious resource- time- goes.

There are 13 questions in this survey.

Introduction of Youth Work Practitioner

1. Which country are you from?

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose only **one** of the following:

- Ireland
- Latvia
- North Macedonia
- Other

2. How long have you been a Youth Worker / Youth Work Practitioner?

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose only **one** of the following:

- less than 1 year
- 1 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- more than 10 years

3. How many hours per week (on average) do you practice Youth Work?

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose only **one** of the following:

- up to 8 hours per week
- 9 - 24 hours per week
- 25 - 40 hours per week
- over 40 hours per week
- Other

4. In your daily practice, how would you rate the pace (tempo) of your work?

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose only **one** of the following:

- too slow
- slow
- fine
- fast
- too fast

5. From 1-5 with 1 being the lowest & 5 - the highest, please indicate where the majority of your time IS SPENT in your youth work practice.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	1	2	3	4	5
Administration	○	○	○	○	○
Fundraising / writing project applications and similar	○	○	○	○	○
Face to face work with young people	○	○	○	○	○
Networkling	○	○	○	○	○
Travel	○	○	○	○	○
Other	○	○	○	○	○

1 - Lowest amount of time   5 - Highest amount of time

5.1 Could you, please, list what kind of activities does "other" mean to you?
Please write your answer here:

6. If you could decide, from 1-5 with 1 being the lowest & 5 - the highest, please indicate where the majority of your time SHOULD BE SPENT in your practice?

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	1	2	3	4	5
Administration	○	○	○	○	○
Fundraising / writing project applications and similar	○	○	○	○	○
Face to face work with young people	○	○	○	○	○
Networkling	○	○	○	○	○
Travel	○	○	○	○	○
Other	○	○	○	○	○

1 - Lowest amount of time   5 - Highest amount of time

6.1. Please explain your answer.
Please write your answer here:

7. Prior to delivering a programme with a group of young people, how much time do you have to assess and understand their needs?

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose only **one** of the following:

- Enough time
- More than enough time
- Very little time
- No time at all
- Other

8. Prior to delivering a programme with a group of young people, how much time do you have available to develop meaningful relationships with them?

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose only **one** of the following:

- Enough time
- More than enough time
- Very little time
- No time at all
- Other

9. Together with the young people I work with, we have the freedom (autonomy) to determine our own programme objectives.

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose only **one** of the following:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

10. Together with the young people I work with, we have the flexibility to change our planned objectives to meet the emerging /changing/ needs of the group.

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose only **one** of the following:

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

11. Would you like to point out something that we have missed but you think that is important in this context?

Please write your answer here:

Thank you for your time