

EUROPE

RETHINKING INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

FOR ALL



IMPRINT

Europe for All – Rethinking International Volunteering

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REINHARD GRIEP

Director and Managing Director
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“Europe for All – an initiative for the integration of young people with fewer opportunities into the EVS”, is the name of the Strategic Partnership which the Youth Academy Walberberg together with its international partners, Achieve More from Scotland, Porta Nuova Europa from Italy and Association Inspiration from Bulgaria has been pursuing since 2018. The project is scientifically accompanied by the TH Köln - University of Applied Sciences.

Implementing a diversity-conscious and inclusive perspective in the international youth work as well as in international voluntary work plays an important role in the Youth Academy’s concept, since its profile emphasises the educational work for young people with fewer opportunities in all education fields, especially in the Youth Academy’s international work.

Evaluating nearly all national and international volunteer programmes has revealed that the target group “young people with fewer opportunities” has been underrepresented in the relevant youth programmes. In this regard, we have clearly improved this situation by implementing measures in individual formats focused on these groups.

The Strategic Partnership “Europe for All” strives to identify and implement common conditions for success in the context of international partnerships in improving the inclusion of these target groups. The Youth Academy Walberberg and its partners involved at national and international level have received very invaluable impulses to implement high-quality voluntary service projects for the diverse target group of young people with fewer opportunities. It also aims to offer further international networking and integration with local youth work. Naturally, we will need to continue strengthening ties in both areas and establish them in future projects.

This publication is divided into three parts. The first part relates the project in its key features to the requirements of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) / European Solidarity Corps (ESC) funding system and the format of Strategic Partnerships. It outlines the tension between funding requirements and hands-on experience from the various voluntary service formats for young people with fewer opportunities.

The second part describes the scientific accompaniment of the project - in its approach, its research assumptions and its results. It provides important input to analyse approaches theoretically of young people with different disadvantages as well as local project partners in the different formats of the EVS/ESC. It also considers the connection between local and international youth work and provides innovative ideas for a more resource-oriented connection between the two fields.

In the third part of the publication, the authors mainly analyse the content-related elements of the project and, drawing on these, present important ideas to target integration of young people with fewer opportunities in the various voluntary service and peer formats. And finally, it presents a series of selected examples of good practice which, because they encourage innovation, have been specially adapted to facilitate integrating young people with fewer opportunities into various international voluntary service formats.

Several colleagues have contributed to preparing this publication. My particular appreciation goes to Silke Dust, Dorothea Ewald, Anna So-Shim Schumacher and Miriam Staufenbiel, who have, for the past two years, supported the project on behalf of the Youth Academy Walberberg. I would particularly like to thank the project supervisors of the participating European partner organisations for sharing their different views on a diversity-conscious and inclusive European Voluntary Service and for their utmost commitment and cooperation within the framework of our partnership: Carla Fyfe,

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I would like to thank the project team for their valuable work and also the participating practitioners from the international network, who were eager to share their views, experiences and examples of good practice from the various fields of activity in this publication. A special thank you goes to the many young people who actively participated in the various voluntary services and peer formats and who gave us a profound insight into the opportunities and limitations through their discussions.

Thanks to Patricia Pawlyk and her contribution to the translation work we can provide this publication in English. I also thank all those involved in editing and designing this publication – especially Luna Carmona, Astrid Germanus, Dr. Michael Fletcher and Paul Fletcher. I would particularly like to thank the colleagues of the Youth Academy Walberberg, who supported the project full of enthusiasm, both in terms of organisation and expertise!

Finally, I would like to express special thanks to our sponsors, without whom we would not have made this project and this valuable publication possible: the employees of the German National Agency YOUTH for Europe. They not only provided the funding for the project but also continually enhanced the common working process. I would also like to thank the TH Köln – University of Applied Sciences who generously provided the funds to cover the printing expenses.

I am confident this publication will provide significant incentives for all young people to participate in international voluntary service formats. I would be delighted if our project inspired other organisations to follow suit.

As the Strategic Partnership “Europe for all” was set up before the European Solidarity Corps was launched we use European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. If we want to refer to the previous programme “European Voluntary Service (EVS)” we indicate it. If we only want to refer to the new programme “European Solidarity Corps” we will use this term solely.



GRAHAM CAMPBELL

Glasgow City Councillor

As a Glasgow City Councillor and as a person who is in touch with the needs of young people in Glasgow on a political level, I am very impressed with the involvement of Achieve More in the national and European programmes especially in the project "Europe for All".

"Europe for All" is a project which helps young people from the north of Glasgow to have access to European programmes, European voluntary activities and peer education on a European level by way of building a European network of young people and youth organisations.

I have been continually impressed with the standard of programmes that Achieve More Scotland (together with the other European partners) has been producing, especially in the north of Glasgow and this one is no exception.

Volunteering can provide many benefits for young people, and that initial step outside of your comfort zone is often the first step into a world of new and exciting employment, personal and community development opportunities. That Achieve More Scotland has been instrumental in delivering these opportunities to young people across Glasgow and beyond is a credit to the spirit and drive of the organisation's extremely dedicated leadership, staff and volunteers and its Board of Trustees.

International volunteering is also extremely valuable in building partnerships across nations and cultures, expanding horizons and learning from others most positively. It is influential in building capacity, self-esteem and self-confidence amongst young people - not just on a personal level for those who have taken part, but for our nation as a whole.

European Structural Funds were created to redistribute wealth across EU Member States, but with programmes like the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps, we are also seeing a rebalancing of opportunity. Young people who face economic hardship are engaging with partnerships across nations to create new projects and opportunities.

All young people who attended the different volunteering formats abroad within the project came back to Scotland with a different and broadened outlook which is extremely important for those who have never had the opportunity to leave Glasgow before.

I don't want to see any young person growing up in Glasgow being priced out of having access to their shared identity as Scottish Europeans.

This way, if the UK does leave the EU, as looks almost certain now, and if Scotland is pulled out against the majority's will, every effort must be made for these funds and partnerships to be replaced at Scottish level and that in the transition period the UK and the EU must agree to continue these European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps resources as seamlessly as possible.

This partnership is a good start for continuing engagement in European programmes but future programmes will increasingly depend on Scotland taking its future in its own hands and retaking its rightful place in the heart of Europe.

Scotland's young citizens have so much to offer to the world and I'm delighted that participants within this programme are spreading this message at home and across Europe.

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) and the previous programme European Voluntary Service (EVS) offers young people the opportunity to volunteer abroad in a non-profit project. Voluntary services, such as included in the European Solidarity Corps, offer a particular format that distinguishes itself by combining a meaningful and practical activity in the projects with individual educational initiatives within the framework of educational support and seminars. The strong relationship between activity, learning and education can be considered a characteristic feature of this non-formal educational setting. Voluntary service is, therefore, more than simply altruistic and social commitment. Such services are closely connected with the aspect of career and personal orientation, as well as the management of social expectations in the transition from school to career. At the same time, non-formal education in voluntary services goes beyond the concept of orientation and coping strategies, enabling individuals to educate themselves, become independent, participate actively in society and share responsibility. In this regard, one can assume that voluntary services - including the European Solidarity Corps –carry a critical, emancipatory educational potential (Bonus/ Vogt/ Schäfer 2019).

However, the European Solidarity Corps also tends to functionalise this space of non-formal education, in the sense of dependence on the economic and societal requirements of the work and knowledge society. Especially considering the rising rate of youth unemployment in several European countries, voluntary services seem to be a youth policy instrument with a labour policy function. However, a clear division between voluntary services and corresponding employment policies should be supported by youth work research and non-formal education. Rather than focusing on youth policies, effective measures for addressing youth unemployment should be developed in the context of the labour market and training policies. Given the increasing processes of social polarisation, solidarity has become the political-ethical guiding concept of the new programme. European youth policy, international youth work and the efforts to reactivate democracy, civic education and European solidarity have become more relevant than ever. The theme “young people with fewer opportunities” moves within this field of tension between critical-emancipatory aspiration, political demands and the functionalisation of non-formal education in voluntary services. From a social policy perspective, focusing on this very heterogeneous target group is an attempt to create more participation opportunities for young people regardless of income, origin, background, health, illness, disability, etc. However, this not only involves youth education goals. It also involves integration, social and employment policy goals, such as increasing employment, as well as political goals such as promoting cohesion in the European Union. The risks contained in these policies, of instrumentalisation, of reproducing stereotypes and of creating exclusion mechanisms must be critically reflected upon. The legitimacy of this strategic construction should be continuously tested.

The accompanying study of the Strategic Partnership “Europe for All” used these contradictions as a starting point to inquire about access and barriers for young people and new participant organisations in the European Solidarity Corps that had not yet received funding. In line with the practice research approach utilised by the Research Unit Non-Formal Education, the study sought to support the further development of practice. The elements of practical counselling, quality development and intellectual output all played a role. The findings will be made available to the scientific and professional communities, as well as political policy-makers. The aim is to provide impulses for further cross-border discussions.

The findings constitute a call for stronger commitment to political education, youth work and more involvement of civil society organisations and actors in the development of the European Solidarity Corps programme. Especially smaller civil society and voluntary associations, initiatives and youth organisations must receive access to the European funding system. The administrative management of funding requires greater adjustment to the area of non-formal education. Urgent action is needed in structural youth policy and at the political, programmatic and organisational levels. This Strategic Partnership also demonstrates the importance of connecting the local, national and European levels of youth policy.

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SILKE DUST | PROJECT LEADER "EUROPE FOR ALL" | YOUTH ACADEMY WALBERBERG

"EUROPEANS ON THE ROAD"

AN INTRODUCTION

Professionals, working in the field of international youth mobility, as well as scientific evidence, have already revealed the positive effects international cross-border mobility (i.e. international youth exchanges, youth encounters, international voluntary services, internships abroad) have on every young person's development as well as on integrating young persons within society. (Thomas 2012). Various studies show on the one hand the extremely positive effects of international youth mobility measures for the target group. On the other hand, so-called youth with access barriers (those with a migrant background, who do not pursue higher education, who live in precarious circumstances, are disabled or experience discrimination or marginalisation) do not take part in these mobility measures to a high extent. These target groups are underrepresented, particularly in the international voluntary services as one form of international youth mobility.

Various studies (Geudens/Hagleitner/Labadie/Stevens 2015, Thomas 2012) show that particularly young people with fewer opportunities benefit to a high extent from cross-border mobility measures. They use their international experiences to develop positive attitudes towards their futures and plans of their lives. They also gain strong interests in political lives and become more enthusiastic towards European issues, not to mention expand their skills in the field of intercultural learning (Ilg/Dubinski 2014). The non-existent impact of international youth exchange measures cannot be the reason for the target groups being significantly underrepresented in the mobility process. However, numerous barriers seem to be preventing young persons with different access barriers from getting contacted. Not only can this be observed in long-term international voluntary services but also, to a lesser degree, in the area of international youth exchanges, and international workcamps.

This phenomenon continues to exist, although there are numerous support programmes today in the field of international youth work that explicitly focus on youth with fewer opportunities, and wish to approach them specifically (Brandtner/Wisser 2016) and although each young person has the right to social participation in these programmes and its adjacent offers (Thimmel 2015, AGJ discussion paper 2010, 3ff)! So why has the international voluntary service format not found their way into primary and secondary schools, open youth clubs or areas where young people often go to who do not have implicit access to such formats. The Youth Academy Walberberg met with three international partners and the TH Köln - University of Applied Sciences to explore this question in-depth and to find ways to enable a more diverse group of young people to gain access to the European Voluntary Service (EVS)/European Solidarity Corps (ESC).

EUROPE FOR ALL – THE GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

The Youth Academy Walberberg, as coordinating organisation of the “Europe for All” project, and its three international partner organisations, participating in the project laid out the ideal basic requirements for this project as all organisations have got a long tradition working in the field of international youth exchange/international voluntary services for young people with fewer opportunities.

The Youth Academy Walberberg has been working in this field since the 1970s and in the area of EVS since the 1990s in the area of EVS-seminars as well as in the field of sending, hosting and coordinating EVS projects. International youth work done at the Youth Academy Walberberg has always been focusing on implementing international mobility projects targeting young people with fewer opportunities.

This, however, did not originate from the funding programme’s main priority. It started at the root of the institution, where Christians imagine the human, to either turn away or impede all who enter such resources like as education, health, work and money, acknowledgement and social influence.

Diversity-conscious education thus provides the framework for a place that recognises and utilises the diversity of people while pursuing the goal of opposing all forms of discrimination and social impairments. The Youth Academy Walberberg has gathered much expertise conducting national and international seminars with young people with fewer opportunities from the very beginning. Since the EVS focused on target group “young people with fewer opportunities” from the very start, the Youth Academy could utilise the available international network in the field of youth exchanges to further expand offers to include the EVS.

Various model projects, for example, targeted to conceptually link the area of international youth exchange with that of the EVS enabling young persons with fewer opportunities to par-

ticipate in long-term EVS. The first European network project called “takeAway” was created. Local partner networks were set up in each country to strengthen and link local and international youth work.

Couldn’t a successful project approach be set as a rule of thumb, even five years later when other attempts at project approaches were made to refresh “takeAway” due to changes in funding?

Even then, major questions came up as to how one can provide a target group of adolescents with various access barriers high-quality voluntary work in EVS financially, personally as well as conceptually so that everyone, providing the services can shoulder the responsibility.

These rather fundamental questions came up going beyond risk minimisation:

How can you attract and accompany young people with fewer opportunities even when they lack support from home/social environment?

What formats do the young persons need to gain experience from EVS and to further make use of these learned skills to get a foothold in future occupations?

How can one inspire local youth work institutions towards international youth work in the long term?

What resources are needed to ensure that additional expenses or perfect-fitting support are guaranteed?

Do these questions warrant any realistic consideration?

“TOGETHER, WE ARE MORE THAN JUST INDIVIDUAL PARTS IN EUROPE”

PARTNERS IN THE PROJECT

With the introduction of Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships in the Erasmus + Programme, the Youth Academy Walberberg made renewed efforts in building a network of international youth mobility on local as well as international level for international voluntary services for young people with fewer opportunities. Partners from the "Europe for All" project had already had similar experiences with international mobility projects dealing with integrating successful project approached in the field of "international mobility projects for young people with fewer opportunities". They shared the wish to explore conditions needed for international youth work which focuses on young people with fewer opportunities and to improve these conditions at the level of youth policy. This was at least the vision.

ACHIEVE MORE

Achieve More (A&M) from Glasgow, Scotland, is headquartered in Glasgow's "social hotbed" of high youth unemployment, high crime rates, precarious family living conditions, generally lacking any prospects for the young target group. International youth work is an integral part of youth work, collaborating with local partners. A&M has proven its expertise, particularly implementing short-term volunteer service projects and group volunteer services. However, it has yet lacked to easily involve young persons in long-term volunteer services. Maybe one could approach the young persons and especially their social environment differently or at different venues to get them interested in longterm voluntary-services on the other side of the British Isles.

ASSOCIAZIONE PORTA NUOVA EUROPA

The Italian partner, Associazione Porta Nuova Europa, an organisation in Pavia, Italy has many years' of experience in international mobility projects funded by the EU in formal as well as non-formal education. Among them experience with target groups of adolescents with various access barriers either due to unemployment or precarious family situations. Porta Nuova Europa has gained the broadest knowledge across the board of formal international mobility programmes during its many years of involvement in a wide range of European mobility programmes.

This knowledge accompanied expertise from other organisations. However, they have only been able to interest young persons from precarious life situations to job and internship programmes abroad, not to join international voluntary services. In addition, neither did international youth work play a role in the local youth organisations nor ever appear in the organisations' programme.

ASSOCIATION INSPIRATION

The fourth Bulgarian partner, Association Inspiration from Ruse/Bulgaria, is located in a small town, on the border to Romania, in a very secluded, rural region. Most young persons want to leave. Attracting these young persons to mobility would probably be quite easy. However, they prefer emigrating abroad to work not to do voluntary services. At the same time, all partners involved in local youth work in Ruse are linked to youth policies, among them to improve young persons' living situation in areas affected by the exodus wave and socio-economic living conditions.

“THE LONG JOURNEY STARTS WITH THE FIRST STEP”

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT:

It took several steps before the initial step was jointly made towards the Strategic Partnership, as previously described. These steps started with the development of objectives designed for the “Europe for All” project. The following general objectives were formulated at the international network prep meeting in Walberberg in 2017:

| Generate conditions for tailored-made European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps projects for the regional and national quite diverse target groups of young people with fewer opportunities.

| Test different formats in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps (i.e. short-and long-term voluntary services as well as volunteering teams) to suit the diverse target groups of young persons.

| Develop conceptual and structural prerequisites to suit tailor-made voluntary service projects in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps for volunteers.

| Test different participation opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities to develop appropriate offers to the target group in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps.

| Develop useful formats in the field of Peer and Blended Learning for young persons and professionals involved in the project to make suitable offers at national and European levels.

| Test strategies for adequate and accessible public relations aimed at the target groups.

| Analyse structural framework conditions, similarities and differences within the (international) youth work and their origins (e.g. political and economic situations of the youth work, young persons’ socially determined national and global challenges, the professionalisation of youth work, implementation of Europeans programmes and EU Youth Strategy, etc.).

| Formulate recommendations for across-the-board cooperation between youth work and youth policy to improve youth policy conditions for international youth work in various parts of Europe (in terms of transparency, structural improvements in resources, etc.).

The current publication aims at giving an impression of how participating partners answered the questions, which objectives have changed, which gained more importance during the process of the project, which lost importance and which finally were shifted aside. It also reveals how different people repetitiously view various stages of the project unfolding a kaleidoscope of issues. Ultimately, not all threads of equal strengths can be woven into one common project. In the end, some thicker-, some thinner- and even some unravelled threads eventually kept spinning wheel running and weaving.

This publication is divided into an introductory section that presents the basic framework of the “Europe for All” project: a dynamically developing and updated support programme “European Voluntary Service”, EVS, transferred to the European Solidarity Corps in 2018. In this section, essential framework conditions, those of particular importance for the integration of young people with fewer opportunities are closely examined. They are set with lived practices to uncover dilemmas between practice and funding conditions.

In the second part, Stefanie Bonus outlines the inspiring and valuable process of the scientific accompaniment: the research method of scientific accompaniment, steps of the work and work results – not to mention the deviations and wrong turns, the milestones and the tiny but significant steps all resulting from the critically constructive relationship of practice, conceptual consideration, state of the research and practice reflection. The kaleidoscopic light then shines on the main topics representing the range of topics discussed within the network. It gives an insight to the example of “high - quality” voluntary projects for all young people – particularly for those with fewer opportunities.

Finally, one should note that the project results given in this publication intend to invite you to continue and think ahead. Europeans on the road never finish their journey!



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SILKE DUST | PROJECT LEADER "EUROPE FOR ALL" | YOUTH ACADEMY WALBERBERG

THE EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR ALL: NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE?

The European Voluntary Service (EVS) offered to all youths, was first launched as a youth policy pilot project in 1996 to strengthen the idea of the diversity of European cultures and to create an ever closer sense of belonging in societies existing in Europe (Sieveking 2000). It was the first format which linked international voluntary services within and outside Europe with the socio-political interest of strengthening cohesion within Europe – that Europe would be more than the European Economic Area. The following contribution not only provides an insight into the basic principles of the EVS as well as into its design in a constantly changing and further developing support scheme with its variety of accompanying measures, but it also examines possible pitfalls.

THE BASIC PRINCIPLE: "LOCAL TO LOCAL"

Unlike many national and international voluntary services, the European Voluntary Service initially intended to set up volunteering projects between two local organisations in two different countries. Both local organisations had the prerequisites to apply, no longer needing a major coordinating organiser to "interconnect". This "local to local" principle offered exchange of diverse practices as well as enabled professionals from two European organisations to network with each other and exchange ideas on common topics.

Quite a novelty in the international landscape of voluntary services, organisations initially hesitated with the idea because major coordinating organisations became redundant if smaller organisations dared to implement EVS projects. As a result, a colourful mélange of small and large,

public and independent organisations ensued, becoming active in a variety of social, cultural, environmental and political projects in the context of the European Voluntary Service. Some of these services are still active today. Some organisations even used the EVS to enter the field of international youth work, particularly international voluntary services. Taking into account that youth work reaches a third of all cases through multipliers working in the field of international youth work, (Becker/Thimmel 2019), this development is very remarkable as in general more international youth work formats could be more closely brought to young people.

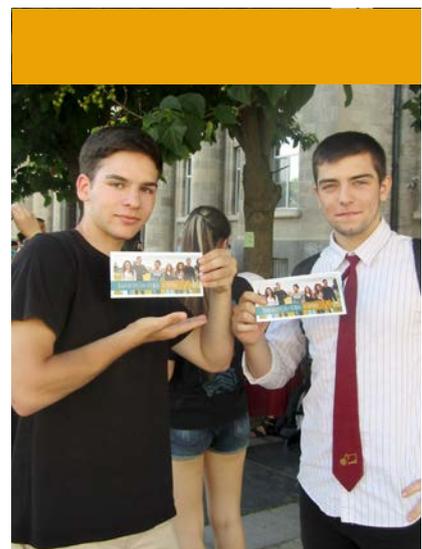
EXPANDING TARGET GROUPS

Secondly, the European Voluntary Service even introduced a larger novelty: the first international voluntary service programme in Germany and Europe to explicitly approach so-called "disadvantaged" young persons – those who did not have access to the field of international voluntary services, those who lacked information, those who did not follow the comprehensive application procedures and who lacked family or social support to join an international voluntary service.

Even if many big voluntary service organisations were open towards the implementation of voluntary service projects for young persons with various disadvantages they lacked the resources, access and strategies to offer international volunteer services to young people with disadvantages, who did not possess a secondary education, who came from precarious living conditions or who have got an immigrant history. Some were guessing how they could reach these target groups more successfully, some left it well alone with the explanation, that

long-term volunteer services may not be the appropriate format to reach young people with fewer opportunities.

While there were scant hints in user manuals during the first phases of the programme, that explained what includes so-called "disadvantaged young persons" and there was no mention of a consistent European definition of "disadvantaged youth", nowadays the "Inclusion and Diversity Strategy – in the youth section" makes a classification by the European Commission¹. It indicates exclusion factors and obstacles that could eventually hinder young persons from participating in cross-border mobility. These youths include those with disabilities, health issues and mental disorders, those with learning difficulties, migrant or immigrant history who lack access to international mobility programmes due to economic, social and/or geographic barriers. This paper even stated that the description of living conditions is incomplete and therefore some young person may be negatively affected by more than one access barrier. Exclusion risks also differ from country to country and depend on the context. In addition to the context factors, the paper also





mentions the need to consider “absolute exclusion factors” such as homelessness or people living in poverty. They should receive preferential access to these programmes.

The National Inclusion and Diversity Strategy of 2018² recognises the European Inclusion Strategy as fundamentally justified in its mission to strengthen promoting certain target groups of youth. At the same time, it contradicts the diversity-approach of non-formal youth education by delimiting itself in the sense that negative descriptions of exclusion factors would eventually lead to positive discrimination of the target group of young people.

From the outset, the national inclusion and diversity strategy strives to “look at the diversity of young persons as an attitude and principle from the start” and to “fully involve them in the fields of cross-border learning mobility”. It states that, with regards to young people, “diversity is the norm” and must measure implementing the national inclusion and diversity strategy, both on the individual as well as on the structural level. Deciphering how far categorising might help, whether some examples of categorising should be resolved or hidden, or at all needed, has become one of the major issues in the project. This will be examined in more detail later in this publication.

FREE VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

The EVS received funds so it could offer services free of charge to volunteers from precarious living situations who would otherwise not be able to afford these services. This was a novelty in the field of international volunteer services. It differed from the other funding systems used by some organisation who enabled the young volunteers to create support groups to raise financial resources for their voluntary service. With this concept, volunteers would donate parts of their donations to fund their voluntary services. In turn, donors would be a part of the experience of their learning services. This system poses major obstacles to youth from precarious life situations. Not only is collecting donations difficult but it is also difficult to relay one’s message to one’s social environment that individuals as well as societies profit from international voluntary services³. This system deters young persons in precarious life situations from considering international voluntary services.

The access study on international youth exchange describes the hypothesis that living abroad is a “luxury commodity”, lasting at least 6 months and is unaffordable, particularly among those who have never participated in international youth mobility (Becker/Thimmel 2019). The practise of using “donors” as well as the expenses of

long-term student exchange or unregulated volunteer services seems to support this hypothesis, even when more scholarships are being offered and donation goals are being significantly reduced if volunteers cannot afford to take part in international youth mobility measures due to precarious living conditions.

In practice, the various means of financing exchange measures hardly suffices for the disadvantaged young persons, particularly if these young people get the information in bits and pieces and cannot rely on a “role model” from their social environment who tell a different story and who tell them that participating in an EVS is free of charge. EVS could become a prerequisite to enable young persons, especially those from precarious situations, to participate in international voluntary services without paying for it. Nevertheless, it was one of the key questions in the project, that if the funding issue is one of the key reasons why youth with access difficulties do not participate in international measures to a higher extent? Or are there, in fact, more urgent reasons which are much more prevailing and more important and need to be closely examined first? Regarding scientific accompaniment provided by the TH Köln - University of Applied Sciences, the consortium has promised findings in this area as young people with fewer opportunities should also be able to state their views.



CHANGES IN FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

During EVS's more than 20-year programme history, significant changes in funding opportunities have been made to reach the target groups of young people with fewer opportunities. In 2005, it was possible to apply for extra funding for reinforced mentorship to support young people with special needs. These funds would cover additional incurred costs for reinforced mentorship – in case the “additional needs” could be plausibly justified. Once again, this additional support system was removed in 2007 with the implementation of the new programme phase.

From then on it is possible to apply for “exceptional costs” which includes reinforced mentorship, assistants required to accompany the disabled young person, special transport costs, specially equipped rooms, etc.. Also, in 2018 with the introduction of the European Solidarity Corps, it is possible to apply for extra individual support for reinforced mentorship and for “exceptional costs” and thus claim additional funding.

Since 2014, it was no longer necessary to fit projects to those volunteers who have already applied. The volunteer, as well as the partner organisation, can be kept open in the application. This gives organisations the necessary flexibility to act should a volunteer

leave the European Voluntary Service/ European Solidarity Corps prematurely, or is not content with a particular hosting project. Thus matching volunteers to partner organisations can be done within a tailor-made approach. Generally, one can see that a whole set of measures has been developed to attract organisations, working with the target groups of young people with fewer opportunities, to European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps.

We also need to further examine the effects, changes in funding have on implementing European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps projects with young people with special needs and whether the measures were adequate.

SHORT-TERM FORMAT POSSIBILITIES

Based on data collected during the pilot phase of the EVS, the possibility of conducting “short-term voluntary services”, lasting from three weeks to three months, was introduced in 1998⁴. The format extensions in the EVS was very attractive for young people with fewer opportunities because young persons, particularly those who are getting training, receiving social welfare or do not have a permanent legal residence, could participate in shorter exchanges more easily. The introduction of the European Solidarity Corps also enabled young people to take part in a volunteering team. Although

young people with fewer opportunities find these formats very useful the number of applications in this field is still very low. The Strategic Partnership has tested a variety of formats. The results of these tests will be presented in-depth in this publication.

QUALIFICATION OF PROFESSIONALS

The access study repeatedly identified the importance of professionals in providing access to international youth work. (Becker/Thimmel 2019). Qualification generally includes knowing the complexities of different formats in international youth work and in considering these formats as part of their local youth work. Experience has shown that professionals, working in youth welfare, will set up international mobility measures when already having acquired their own experience in international mobility measures. According to our experience, they become more motivated in presenting offers of cross-border mobility measures to young persons and thus develop the appropriate formats with them. For the past 15 years, SALTO Centres have offered professionals in the field of international youth work a variety of comprehensive qualifications, designed and conducted at the European level. These include providing entry-level coaching to international youth work through partner contact seminars on specific key topics for conducting conferences and meeting in the

field of young people with fewer opportunities. These measures eventually lead to a comprehensive exchange of experience on an international level and enable specialists to network and get qualified. Regarding the Strategic Partnership “Europe for All”, the Scottish and Bulgarian cooperation resulted from a partner contact seminar given to organisations that had an interest in joint European projects as well as working with young people with different access barriers. Before this Strategic Partnership, the Italian partner also had already participated in similar multilateral encounter seminars. Another Strategic Partnership preparation seminar was conducted to provide the opportunity to exchange motivations, share interests, develop common goals and create various forms of cooperation and activities. These initial steps paved the way for future cooperation within the framework of the Strategic Partnership because they introduced an effective and well-planned approach.

PEER EDUCATION

Different approaches in peer education have been proven effective in getting youths of the same age interested in international voluntary service programmes because a more authentic and specific targeting is possible (Schröder 2013). Research findings suggest that the initiation phase and access to the international youth work system are extremely difficult for young people with fewer opportunities and thus requires the support of third parties to win the trust and gain access into the new system more easily (Becker/Thimmel 2019). In international youth work as well as in the field of international voluntary services, former participants have traditionally attracted future participants in getting involved. In 2005, the Europeans network was first set up in Germany within the frame of the Youth in Action programme.

Young people who have participated in a format in the framework of Youth in Action, Erasmus + Youth in Action or the European Solidarity Corps continued and continue to promote European

programmes in international youth work, for social participation. They also share their experiences with Europe and encourage reflecting critically on EU policy. The network has since expanded to other European countries⁵. Practical experience reveals that young people with fewer opportunities are neither distinctly represented in the network of Europeans nor the network of other Ex-volunteers. In the context of previous international projects targeting young people with fewer opportunities, the Youth Academy Walberberg has had a positive experience with former participants of international youth mobility measures getting other young people with fewer opportunities involved by “advertising” formats of international youth mobility. This is particularly the case in Scotland where there has been a long tradition and sophisticated system of involving peers.

Thus, it was an explicit goal for the Strategic Partnership “Europe for All” to consider different approaches and formats in the area of peer education and look at successes in terms of approach ways of reaching a target group. “Europe for All” Strategic Partnership specifically aimed toward looking at different approaches and formats in the area of peer education and consider its successes in terms of appropriate means of reaching the target group. In addition to conventional formats for the integration of former participants, the question arose as to whether there should have been any supplementary offers or other formats to recruit more youth with fewer opportunities.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

The measures mentioned describing some developments towards creating access possibilities for young people with fewer opportunities. In terms of a heuristic appreciation, one can say that the further development of the European youth programmes proved to be dynamic. They incorporated reflections from practice and created model projects for goal-oriented sub-questions which strategically influ-

enced the course of the programme. Research findings of the Youth in Action programme (2007-2013) show that these measures have significantly raised the participation rate of young people with fewer opportunities⁶. Though, the evaluation carried out does not differentiate between international youth exchange, European Voluntary Service and measures on a political level. However, compared to other formats of international youth mobility, further research shows that, since 1996, the European Voluntary Service has not witnessed a similar increase in participation among young people with fewer opportunities. These target groups are still being underrepresented. Below, various pitfalls will be shown with the help of several dilemmas from practice why the programme has just not yet simply approached all young people.

¹ Cf. Erasmus+ Strategie zu Inklusion und Diversität – im Jugendbereich, EC DG EaC, German edition, April 2015.

² Cf. Inclusion first. Nationale Inklusions- und Diversitätsstrategie, March 2018.

³ This experience coincides with results of the access survey which sites major expenses, particularly for long term services, as a reason why young persons, who have not yet participated in such offers, not participate. See Becker/Thimmel 2019.

⁴ Cf. ABLEG N. 1 L 214 from 37.07.1998.

⁵ More information under <https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/ueber-jfe/projekte/europeers/>

⁶ Cf. Erasmus+ Strategie zu Inklusion und Diversität – im Jugendbereich, EC DG EaC, German edition, April 2015.

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“BETWEEN THE DISADVANTAGED AND THE PRIVILEGED”

REFLECTING THE DIVISION IN CATEGORIES OF DIFFERENCES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EVERYDAY PROJECT LIFE.

When one makes access barriers a subject of discussion and describes them, one refers to disadvantages and structurally unequal circumstances. They can be described and named as discrimination is not only a condition individuals experience but also observed from outer living circumstances as well (Naddaf 2019). The following contribution will show practical experience that refers to a certain dilemma with the dichotomy of “disadvantaged” versus “privileged”.

Within the framework of the European programmes, one needs not only to describe certain “disabilities” but also consider how descriptions and attribution influences financial resources of European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps projects. It is necessary to financially identify and estimate “exceptional costs” stemming from these disabilities and/or limitations. In this logical sense, binary structures and categorising would lead to the participation of “normal” volunteers, who do not require additional financial funding and young persons with more needs who could receive additional funding.

Responsible organisations should act as a mediator and describe appropriate additional costs even if the organisation has had little or no contact with the young person to be described. Following the financial logic of international mobility programmes, one assumes that some young persons would “do more work than others” as a project worker describes it (Nadaff 2019). They would need more resources. Involving young people with fewer opportunities is first of all a question of funding, the anticipated additional work is due to experience. The arising dilemma of how to deal with a difference will be shown with the help of the following example:

As part of the cooperation with an organisation for youths, weary of schooling, the Youth Academy Walberberg once received an application from 16-year-old Johannes*, (name has been altered) which he wrote together with his social worker for a one-year EVS. The interview immediately revealed that this youth had already had extensive experience with detention centres, that the youth welfare office was giving his family constant support and that he had already possessed an impressive dropout record. However, he was extremely interested and highly motivated to participate in a long-term voluntary service. Given his background, the staff of the Youth Academy Walberberg was not convinced that the 250 Euro a month requested would suffice to ensure that Johannes would

receive adequate psychological support or whether the partner project, which works exclusively with youth with fewer opportunities, would have sufficient means to take care of this youth.

This example shows the importance of human and financial resources needed to be approached in international youth work to conduct projects of high quality. At the same time, risk assessment distracts from that a young person, who obviously has a disadvantage to getting funding and thus anticipate possible costs. Practically, Johannes experienced an individually enriching learning service and psychological support was well below expected hourly average. However, the major challenge arose when the volunteer returned to Germany. He risked falling into old habits and cycles that would later require long-term monitoring after the EVS. The Youth Academy Walberberg could no longer afford this. A social worker then tried to provide adequate support and advice on their assigned tasks.

The second example reveals Hannah’s* case (name has been altered). Hannah came to the Youth Academy Walberberg as a European volunteer through a partner organisation, previously unknown to the Youth Academy. Hannah spent half of her youth growing up in Poland and half in England, received her A-Levels in England and wanted to do her EVS at the Youth Academy. According to the organisation in charge of sending her to the Youth Academy, she would not require any additional support. However, the first week proved otherwise. She started showing clear signs of depression and anxiety disorders and experienced serious difficulties dealing with day-to-day work at the youth education centre, a workplace that required independence and trust in oneself. The previous disorders and the gravity of the acute crisis needed immediate psychological support by the Youth Academy’s team of professionals in this field as well as by an independent counselling centre. Unfortunately, it is not possible to apply for extra financial support for such needs retrospectively. Therefore, the hosting project needed to solve the problem of additional human and financial means by itself.

These two examples reveal the question of how helpful it is if one must assess such cases beforehand to determine extra support requirements for young people. In Hannah’s case, successful A-Levels, good foreign language skills and residing abroad for a longer period does not necessarily mean that she would not require further psychological help. On



the other hand, a volunteer's drop-out history and delinquent behaviour would not automatically mean he would need additional care during the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Concerning international youth mobility, the access study identified "phantom hypotheses", in dealing with young persons involved in international youth exchanges (Becker/Thimmel 2019). One of these "phantom hypotheses" among multipliers in the field of international youth work says, A-Level students would not require as much mentorship as young people with disadvantages and organisations would be able to minimise the risk when working with well-educated youth. At the same time, the same lump sums which are the same for every young person to finance the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps gives the impression that there is such thing as a "normal"/"average" volunteer existing. The financing system is not thought – as common in youth work- from the individual young person. Rather, youths are sought out for a financing system that suits that particular individual. Another example describes this problem from an institution's perspective. The third example shows the dilemma of providing adequate support when looking for volunteers.

The Youth Academy Walberberg gained extensive experience in the "Europe for All" project, providing a tailor-made short-term volunteer service with Sebastian* (name has been altered) who relies on a wheelchair. Finding wheelchair-friendly housing in the Cologne-Bonn area posed severe problems during the short-term service. He had wanted to extend this European Voluntary Service but despite looking extensively, one simply could not find a suitable apartment. The volunteer stayed in the Youth Academy dormitories during his EVS. The same applied to a long-term volunteer service designed for a young person who wanted to go to the Scottish partner and required a wheelchair accessible flat there. Since she could not find any affordable place to stay during the service she resorted to staying in a hostel. Both did complete short-term volunteer services although they would have wanted to extend to a long-term European Voluntary Service. After Sebastian's first short-term voluntary service, the Youth Academy originally planned to apply for three long-term voluntary places for young people dependent

on wheelchairs. After they could not find appropriate accommodation for Sebastian they gave up on this idea in the first instance.

These examples illustrate that even though volunteers and all partners involved in the project are highly motivated, certain factors, like finding adequate housing (a task difficult even for anybody in congested urban areas) may complicate the volunteer project. Besides, organisations need to include anticipated funding requirements in the application if volunteers have not yet become involved. For whatever reason, the institution assumes the risks of not finding volunteers suitable for the funding needs. They must also ask potential candidates about any impairments when they receive open applications from outside the network. Many young people immediately face the question of confidence. Knowing that there are more applicants than available positions, they would better not be honest about revealing their special needs as it could negatively affect their chances of being accepted. These examples show the frame of reference that influenced the "Europe for All" project. The following questions arise with regard to the binary classification of the difference "with" versus "without" increased funding requirements:

- | What significance does the funding structure (currently a supply orientation) have for integrating young people with fewer opportunities? Are there adequate possibilities that can match the young persons' demand orientation with the currently existing supply orientation?
- | Does the description of the privileged versus disadvantaged position help? Does the structure not ultimately maintain the differences already established between privileged and disadvantaged?
- | Are there any contexts existing within the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps when it is necessary to continue describing specific disabilities in order to approach certain target groups, or to offer more adequate support options?

The latter question not only concerned us in dealing with success but also, in particular, in the area of peer education. The same question not only concerned us in dealing with success but also, in particular, in the area of peer education.

PEER-FORMATS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES – DOES THIS STRATEGY MAKE SENSE?

When one of the core questions was if it makes sense to describe target groups as privileged or disadvantaged and at the same time, one assumes that young people coming from the same social environment are significant advertising media when it comes to attracting young persons for international mobility measures, a dilemma is posed. On the one hand, all young persons should be considered in existing peer formats, including Europeers. On the other hand, the Youth Academy Walberberg has learned that young people with fewer opportunities who participated in short- or long-term services do not turn up to the evaluation seminars offered by the German National Agency nor got involved in the Europeers, afraid that their own short-term, as well as long-term volunteer services, would be deemed less valuable, that no one they know would attend the events or that other peer-volunteers would find themselves in a similar life situation, before or after their studies. At the same time, young people who have just returned from their voluntary services, generally seem to express interest in remaining involved socially and report about their voluntary service at events organised by the Youth Academy Walberberg. Thus, the project raised the question whether developing one's own international youth network, linking it to international partner structures such as local youth networks in participating countries could provide a goal-oriented strategy to encourage young people to become involved more politically and socially as well as introduce their volunteering activity into their peer groups.

IS A YEAR WORTH MORE THAN TWO WEEKS? – CONSIDERING VARIOUS VOLUNTEER FORMATS

Even after the European Commission swiftly allowed the possible extension to short-term voluntary services from two-weeks to two-months (see above) at the end of the pilot phase of the EVS, particularly giving young people with fewer opportunities simplified access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps, few have taken advantage of this format. Without any reliable figures, one can only speculate the reason as no reliable figures are prevailing. The access study presumes that many young people still believe that a voluntary service would last at least six months, would be expensive leisure time and be a format high school students would attend (Becker/Thimmel 2019). Organisations of youth work think similarly or are hardly aware of these formats. Providers of international voluntary services experience obstacles that short-term formats would comparably be more expensive than long-term formats. Preparing and following-up short-term formats take the same amount of time as it does for long-term formats. However, this does not include financial claims because they do not pertain to target groups but rather to those of long-term services. Thus, the short-term formats seem to be less attractive for organisations even though the “Europe for All” project was founded on the hypothesis that it provides youth with fewer opportunities an ideal introduction into international youth work - particularly when the volunteers are sent and

received in a two-tandem process or the volunteer service format consists of volunteering teams. The protected framework and the shorter time frame have the advantage of foreseeing separation from family and friends. The tandems can discuss and consider certain anxieties that may arise before and while staying in the teams. The service can adapt better to the professional or school time plan and better adapt their missing language skills to those in the team. The access study shows that there is a lack of information about the variety of formats (Becker/Thimmel 2019). As the title of this paragraph indicates, there is another problem that plays a role regarding formats and offers: how much are these offers worth? What significance does the short-term voluntary service compared to the long-term voluntary service have in the peer group? How are these short-term formats presented to the public? What image is conveyed? The international partners in the “Europe for All” project asked these and similar questions. And of course, the question of how one can manage to present the short-term projects with its advantages.

“EUROPE IS TOO FAR AWAY” – ACCESS BARRIERS VERSUS STRENGTHENING STRUCTURES AT THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

“Integrating the volunteer application process and support into my normal work, while trying to keep my youth centre open does not get me any closer to Europe. Besides that, we are a small institution. Who should pay us the extra work? We need all the strength we can get to do education work here. Who is going to help us when we get problems with the volunteers?”

The statement was made during an accreditation interview in one former projects with a youth social worker from a local youth centre. This very small local youth welfare project offered an attractive “local-to-local” exchange possibility between Cologne and Lisbon. However, the project failed to materialise because the staff was not able to easily deal with the extra support he had to offer to the young person from Lisbon - even if the project offered an enriching skilled manual job for the young person. Although this project failed, the experience from this project showed that young people, particularly those who leave their neighbourhoods for the first time, who do not have the supportive social environment and who experience difficulties in learning the language, adapting to a daily work routine, need psychological care locally. Thus, the initial central hypothesis in this project was that placing and receiving young people with the most varied access barriers can only work if supporting local networks of partners are linked with each other.

It was thus stated within the framework of this “local approach” to aim towards carefully

| What resources (financial, human resources etc.) are necessary to enable EVS/ESC projects to be conducted with local partners, particularly with the target group of young people with fewer opportunities?



| **What initially encouraged the organisations, which included local youth work, to go international? What role does the employees' previous experience have in the field of international youth work? What significance does leadership have in the "get going" process?**

| **How do different discourses on international youth work (especially international voluntary work) play in different countries?**

| **Are there any competing systems of local/municipal international voluntary service work?**

| **What new formats does one need in the field of international youth work to enable national/local networking of parties working with the most diverse target groups of young people with fewer opportunities, particularly because networking nationally in the Erasmus+ programme is difficult due to the European nature of the programme?**

The question came up as to whether staff should receive extra training to get them to think "more internationally". Skilled employees should also receive this training to better qualify them in international youth work/international voluntary services. This question can only be marginally approached within the framework of the project. It is also an important issue that needs further examination within the framework of formats on the topic of "qualification in the field of youth".

EUROPE COMING TO THE COMMUNITIES – YOUTH POLICY ISSUES OF THE PROJECT

Because sufficient funds for support measures were lacking, the forerunner projects of "Europe for All" focused on developing a sustainable international network where volunteers could be recruited and placed and where skilled workers in each country received proper training. These projects all reached their project goals to increase the number of young people with fewer opportunities in the EVS and to train the

skilled workers accordingly. Though, these successful projects had to be discontinued due to insufficient funding. Appropriate EU funding expired or the EU had changed the eligibility conditions in the EVS making it impossible to receive adequate funding for personnel costs.

To continue this project at the end of the funding period and to maintain what has painstakingly been built up, the Strategic Partnership "Europe for All" announces its goal to also focus on the youth policy framework for international youth work (particularly the international voluntary services), to see the international youth work as part of youth work in communities and work out policy recommendations. Preparing the Strategic Partnership has already revealed that there are differences in relationships between national and international youth work in the countries involved in the project, also due to the different social and political systems in the national youth work as well as due to economic reasons. It revealed that both national, as well as European social policy developments, play a significant role in designing adequate framework conditions for (international) youth work (Thimmel und Friesenhahn 2012). Cooperation also varies greatly in each country among international youth work, youth work and youth policy. An analysis of the structures helps generate new concepts for international voluntary services for young people with fewer opportunities, possibly interesting to the different local/regional structures at the youth work and youth policy interface. Testing solution strategies, even here, it is important to consider the different contexts. Some strategies work in one particular region of a country but not in another. Some solution strategies can be transferred to serve other regions or countries. The following questions also apply to the issue:

| **How do international voluntary services work, in the individual communities and how are they related to the youth policy? Are international voluntary services even considered in youth work or youth policy?**

| **Which existing "best practice" models have successfully achieved integrating international youth work, youth work and youth policy? Which formats have successfully increased cooperation?**

| **What forms of cooperation are needed, both at the level of local government associations as well as the ministry level, among individual ministries on a national level so that the various national, as well as international programmes of international youth work/ international voluntary service work, can be considered working together to allow all young people to gather experience abroad?**

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THE FORMAT "STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP" AS A POSSIBILITY FOR LONG-TERM COOPERATION

VIEWS FROM THE PROJECT MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE

Since 2014, the EU-Programme Erasmus+ Youth in Action has provided organisations with an opportunity to apply for and receive support for international networking for medium to long-term projects. They either receive it for networking and exchanging good practices or for developing innovative approaches in the field of sustainable development aimed at international youth work. Strategic Partnerships have opened opportunities for partners to work intensively with partners from other countries to conduct peer-learning processes and to develop forward-looking ideas for several years.

It offers the possibility to strengthen and expand existing networks, further develop the partners' as well on one's practice in the international youth field, improve existing offers and create new formats. They also provide the opportunity for cross-sectoral collaboration (i.e. between science and practice) and thus give partners the possibility to reflect critically and change past practices. Due to their complexity and time spent, they are suitable for seizing youth policy focal points, while at the same time, achieving youth policy effects.

In principle, one can apply for a "Strategic Partnership" in all sectors of the Erasmus+ programme. One can implement both project types "innovation" and "networking and exchanging good practice" in all sectors as well. However, the German national agency, YOUTH for Europe, has developed its support strategy for the youth sector. Funded projects should have the maximum impact in the field, manifesting itself in the following

- | A clear reference to the area of youths, possibly assigning projects to areas of child and youth welfare
- | Comprehensible reference to the topic of European youth policy, particularly to the EU Youth Strategy – also ideally referring to the countries respective national youth policies
- | Constitution of organisations: They should have sufficient knowledge of participating countries in the youth field and create a network sufficient enough to introduce needs and experience into the product design and to be able to get these effects in this area.
- | Projects derive from the original needs of this field.
- | Projects have a noticeable impact on the area.



Erasmus+ Youth in Action would like to implement European policies in education and youth that are much stronger than available in previous programmes. The frame of reference for Erasmus+ Youth in Action is the European Strategy and focusses on equal opportunities for all young persons and social involvement, promoting all young persons' social inclusion and solidarity. Due to this fact, the framework of the Strategic Partnership for the "Europe for All" project was particularly suitable, particularly with creating thematic references focusing on "Young peoples's Active European Citizenship" and "Further Development of Youth Welfare".

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO MAKE ROOM

As described earlier, the integration of young people with fewer opportunities into the European Voluntary Service was a key concern of the European Commission. This priority objective remains today in the new programme, the European Solidarity Corps. One of the main goals of the Strategic Partnership, "Europe of All" presented, in the sense of the promotion strategy and funding priorities, was to research conditions for greater involvement of the target group(s) mentioned. Practical experience gained by the participating partner organisations, of all who work with different underrepresented target groups, coincided with previous findings of the accompanying scientific research. This research showed the mere fact that young people with fewer opportunities benefit from international mobility measures does not necessarily lead to developing more measures for these target groups. It neither gains more local projects nor attracts more youths through public relations aimed towards target groups.

It started with the hypothesis that sustainable integration of young persons with various access difficulties can only succeed if the project partners, who work with respective target groups at a regional/local level will collaborate in forming regional/local networks and can acquire regional/local promoters. There have been various model projects in Germany, (e.g. the initiative, "JiVE – Youth Social Work Goes International", the sub-initiative, "Kommune goes international", the project, "Further development of international youth work with special consideration of disadvan-

taged young persons in North-Rhine Westphalia). There are also some documentation and evaluations of these projects (including the BAG ORT "Youth Social Work International" about the cooperation group on youth social work, "Further development of formats and methods of international youth work, adapted to the needs of disadvantaged young persons) which support this thesis. The results and practical experience of these pilot projects should be used for the Strategic Partnerships and extended to the European framework. To enable more EVS/ESC projects for the disadvantaged target groups, the consortium had assumed that different regional structures, different structural requirements in the area of youth social work and youth welfare as well as a different understanding of international voluntary services and their role in society would lead to the need to develop regional/national tailor-made projects approaches.

THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP CONSISTED MAINLY OF THREE AREAS:

The first area was to set up and develop an **international network** whose purpose was to identify the premises of the professional field and create a common conceptual working basis to work on common topic and issues, thus creating a professional basis for the practical work. The members of the network, themselves, set up the main topics of the international network meetings that took place in the participating partner countries. Not only did the members of the consortium participate in these meetings but one young participant from each country attended as well. The idea was to actively introduce and gather their perspective. In addition, the local partner organisations (in particular the local youth welfare services, local partners etc.) also attended the meetings. All participants could also visit a youth work/youth welfare facility which acquired the extension of the international network.

Scientific accompaniment of this project enabled professionals and young people participating to introduce their own practical and experiential knowledge gained from daily project work and relate them to scientific discourse, reflect their activities and experience again. To invite

discussion, approach different perspectives and contradictions and find common ground, the participants analysed terms such as “disadvantage”, “participation” and the meaning of “non-formal learning” and theoretically embodied into the international voluntary services. In the framework of the project, the TH Köln - University of Applied Sciences researched the above-mentioned issues using methods of qualitative social research. The network repeatedly referred to and discussed the findings of this research. During this process, participants drew up recommendations for further development of the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as well as for further developing the area of international voluntary services in the field of youth work.

AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, THE YOUTH ACADEMY WALBERBERG ALSO APPLIED TO A PROJECT IN THE AREA OF THE “STRATEGIC EVS” TITLED, “SOCIAL CHANGE – BY SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED YOUTH”.

This project included meetings of experts, at the national and international level, who already worked with various target groups of young persons with access barriers towards international mobility measures or wanted to work with them. There was a goal to get a better understanding of the lives of the target groups with fewer opportunities from participating countries, facilitate the exchange of good practice in international mobility activities and offer training in the areas of “mentoring young persons with various needs for support in the area of international mobility/ international voluntary services”.

In the framework of the project, the Youth Academy applied for twelve long-term voluntary projects, between Germany and the corresponding partner countries, reserved exclusively for young people with fewer opportunities. They had already clarified that, if needed, some of the mobilities could be turned into short-term volunteer services between Germany and the participating programme countries.

The project also included two multipliers workshops for international professionals and international volunteers who had attended various European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps projects.

The goal of the workshops was to assess the corresponding voluntary service projects in an international group and develop suitable peer formats at local and regional levels for young people with fewer opportunities. The young persons were to test and reflect on the project ideas on “Peer Learning” after having held workshops in their regions. The hypothesis for this approach initially started by the fact that young people with fewer opportunities particularly find it difficult to get involved in the existing peer networks of the Europeans (which not all participating countries have).

Reliable personal accompaniment would facilitate young persons’ participation in the peer projects which is not intended in Europeans meetings. Besides, the format of the short-term-volunteer services hardly ever occurred. This is the rea-

son why young people with fewer opportunities often do not feel appreciated with their volunteer experience.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) makes the right to access information and communication (Article 9) binding. One aim of the “Europe for All” project also was to develop material for an adequate and more accessible public relation work. Content, formats and locations were carefully examined and compared with previous public relation work. Flyers in simple language were created in the languages of the project partners with special focus on a barrier-free design also for the other digital products which were produced (i.e. webpage etc.).

In addition to the so-called “Strategic EVS” a short-term voluntary service was requested for a young person dependent on a wheelchair separately to cover the additional costs for more support (i.e. daily accompaniment and assistance). At the same time, the Strategic Partnership project proved to be very fitting. Offering international volunteering activities for young people dependent on a wheelchair was not in focus of the volunteering activities of the Youth Academy Walberberg and now widens the opportunities toward a more inclusive EVS/ESC.

Similarly, three volunteering teams, that took place and were assessed within the framework of the Strategic Partnership, were applied for and evaluated separately. One was in Germany, the other two in Bulgaria. Presenting the different parts of the Strategic Partnerships may reveal the project’s complexity as well as the entwined individual issues and could be approved in the requested framework. In the following article, Stephanie Bonus presents the project’s accompanying scientific research, presents its results and classifies them into scientific discourse.



volunteering experience



Young People's Group



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STEFANIE BONUS | TH KÖLN – UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
| RESEARCH FOCUS NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

DISADVANTAGE, ACCESS BARRIERS AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION¹

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND NOTIONS OF THE STUDY

The overall goal of the accompanying study² was to reach conclusions on access and barriers in the European Voluntary Service (EVS)/European Solidarity Corps (ESC). It focused on the perspective of local (youth work) organisations that were not yet active in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps and on the volunteers themselves. This article thematically introduces the following contributions of the study. After a short definition of disadvantage, the term “young people with fewer opportunities” is considered and the idea of “barriers to access” outlined. The article then presents selected research results that provide information on barriers in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. The following describes the underlying understanding of education, by describing voluntary services as places of non-formal education. Finally, the understanding of research, the research questions and the methodical approach of the study are described. The results of the study are presented in the following separate articles.

DISADVANTAGE AND ACCESS BARRIERS

The European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps, with its different formats, is directed towards all young people. The title of the project “Europe for All” already indicates its goal to provide the same participation opportunities of young people regardless of social milieus, socio-economic status, and cultural, national or religious origin, (dis)ability, etc.. At the individual level, the project aims to encourage young people with fewer opportunities to participate in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. At the institutional level, it invites local organisations, particularly in the field of youth work, to assist in becoming a supporting or a hosting organisation.

The topic of disadvantage in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps comes from the specific discussion on “young people with fewer opportunities” within the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme and the European Solidarity Corps and the previous programme European Voluntary Service (EVS). The European Commission describes this term as follows: “These are young people who are at a disadvantage compared to their peers (...)” (European Commission 2014: 6). The European Commission identifies different disadvantaging factors in its inclusion and diversity strategy, for example, disabilities, health issues, learning and cultural difficulties, economic and social obstacles and geographic barriers (ibid.). The term, “young people with fewer opportunities” is well established within the programme language and is used as a tool to describe or label excluded groups and the disadvantaging conditions. At the same time, the term suggests that the group is homogeneous.

The Strategic Partnership “Europe for All” also uses various terms aimed to adequately describe the unequal access for certain groups of young persons (e.g. non-privileged and disadvantaged young persons, young persons with disabilities, with a migrant

background or with refugee experience). Regardless of the terminology they chose, the label “disadvantage” indicates unequal structural relationships in regard to access and participate in the programme. At the same time, one must be careful in considering using the term “disadvantaged” because it denotes individual deficit attributions. The terms discussed here, divide people into two groups; the so-called “disadvantaged” – and “non-disadvantaged” youth.

This division is particularly problematic from the perspective of youth work and non-formal education, which aim to respect young people’s self-assessments and right to self-determination. The core principles and goals of non-formal education are participation and subject orientation (see Scherr 2010). Labelling young people’s deviation from perceived norms requires a critical examination of this heteronomy using principles and theoretical concepts of child and youth work. Use of such labels does not necessarily coincide with young people’s perception of themselves. However, young people themselves can decide what identity constructions and lines of difference are relevant to them, or whether they refuse such labels such as, “young people with a migration background”, “young persons with experiences as a refugee”, “disadvantaged young persons” or “young persons with disabilities”. With its concept of “young people with fewer opportunities”, the European Commission finds itself in a tense situation between the risk of individualising disadvantage and discriminatory institutional structures.

The “Thematic Study on Policy Measures Concerning Disadvantaged Youth” by the Tübingen Institute for Regional Innovation and Social Research (IRIS e.V.) for the European Commission 2005 introduces the following definition of disadvantage:

“Disadvantage stands for unequal opportunities and risk of social exclusion in school-to-work transitions. It is described as the interplay between a structural lack of accessibility, manageability and relevance of transition opportunities and individual lack of resources.

Referring to the constellations of disadvantage rather than ‘problem groups’ avoid structural problems to become individualised.”

Walther/ Pohl 2005: 8, highlight in the original

A key part of this definition is the interaction of both structural and individual factors of disadvantage.

The Strategic Partnership study assumes that access and barriers do not exist in and of themselves, but that language (“talking about”) and practice (acting with other people and organisations) create them (Naddaf 2019: 150). Therefore, our research focuses on existing and established constructions of disadvantage, as well as the level of speech and action, which specifically constitutes and reproduces the

subject of “disadvantage.” Generally speaking, we follow post-structural approaches. We understand social phenomena as created by people and therefore changeable. (e.g. Moebius et al., 2008). This theoretical view also corresponds to differential-theoretical or inter-sectional and deconstructive approaches: these approaches understand disadvantage and differentiation as “doing difference.” (West/Fenstermaker 1995, cited by Kessl/Plöbber 2010). Such processes are socially produced. In summary, access barriers cannot be analytically described in terms of clear boundaries and strict demarcations between two sides. Barriers to access are created by social interaction (language and practice) and are characterised by an exchange of mutually conditional relationships. (Kessl/Maurer 2010: 158)

SELECTED RESEARCH RESULTS

The following section presents selected research findings that illustrate questions of access and barriers in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. For this purpose, we include research results and findings on related fields of work and formats, such as international youth work.

The evaluation study “Study on the Impact of Transnational Volunteering through the European Voluntary Service” confirms that the previous programme EVS has positive effects and, at the same time, is highly selective (EU 2017).

This study was commissioned by the European Commission and includes the funding period 1996 to 2016. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilised to examine the impact of the programme on a volunteer-, organisational- and local community level. The study shows that most EVS volunteers are female (63%), possess a university degree (61%) or have completed higher education (74%).

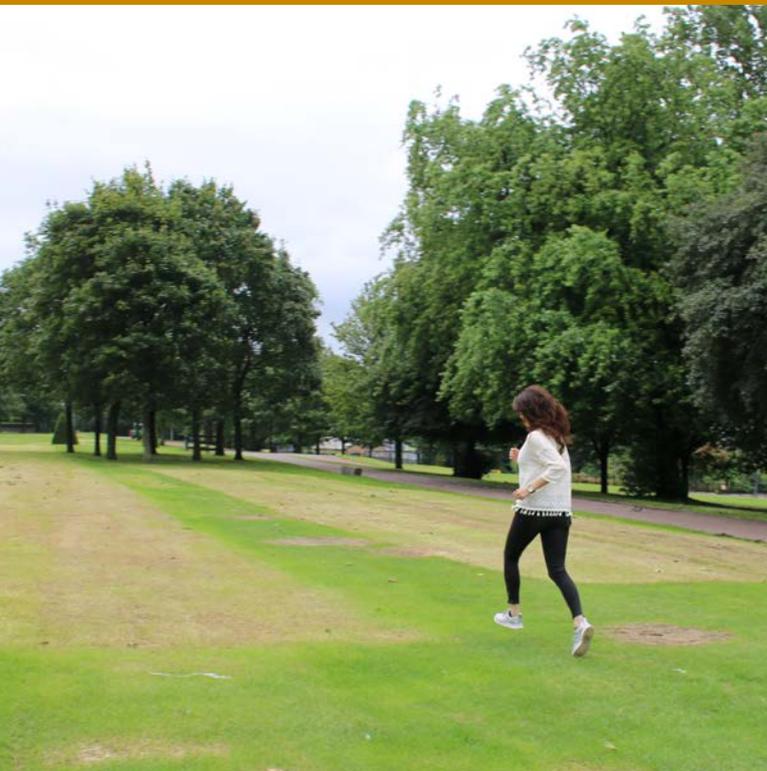
The study’s authors conclude that the reason for EVS’ high social selectivity is because volunteering as a whole is found among young people with higher educational status. Even in the control group of those who did not volunteer for the EVS but are volunteers in other contexts, the majority were university students, and school pupils who were likely to attend university (52%) (ibid.: 80).

Also, the qualitative results of the study show that short-term formats are particularly suitable for creating access for young people who have never had any volunteer experience (see EU 2017: 79).

In terms of organisations, the study finds that most of the organisations that participated were nonprofits (76%) with few employees (64% have less than 10 employees).

Most only support a small number of volunteers (2/3 of the organisations have fewer than 10 volunteers a year).

Dealing with access barriers that young people face, the study recognises that there is a lack of knowledge and in-



formation related to socio-economic conditions. Besides, people's negative perception of the benefits of voluntary services poses obstacles. The application itself and corresponding process create a structural barrier. Young people participating in the programme not only require additional financial support, but also counselling and support. Applying for visas and similar requirements create additional hurdles. The organisations report a variety of challenges including limited financial resources, the discrimination of the sending organisations, lack of incentives for disadvantaged young people to participate, difficulties in Erasmus+ accreditation, competition with other applicants and red tape (EU 2017). This study focuses hereby pays particular focus on programmatic and institutional barriers.

The German study on access (see Becker/Thimmel 2019) states that the reason for young people not participating in international youth exchange programmes is not because they are not motivated. The researchers examined the proportion of young people who participated or were interested in international youth work and school services from 2016 to 2018. In addition, they also identified access barriers to international youth exchange in Germany. The research design is explicitly non-evaluative. It used qualitative and quantitative methods of empirical social research. The results show that 74% of the youths surveyed have never participated in any format of international youth exchange. However, 63% would be interested and willing if the structural and discursive access barriers were reduced (see Borgstedt 2019). This strong interest on the part of the young people was observed across all social classes. The target group exhibited preferences for different approaches and formats, as well as different forms of communication according to the lived experience and age. In addition to all this, the authors expect an orientation on the young people's life situations and flexible formats (short-term, long-term formats, etc.) and change existing formats and political objectives (Thimmel 2019). Furthermore, the access study identifies three key access barriers at the organisational level:

| Highly bureaucratic funding structures in international youth work contradict the principles of self-organisation in youth work. Project applications and project management seem to face unnecessary red tape. At the same time, respondents to international youth work often criticise certain disproportionate relationships and lack between those applying for funding and the funding bodies.

| The issue of funding opportunities and resources often supersedes the educational work. Given the precarious financial and staffing resources, processing international youth work services is not prioritised by local youth work organisations.

| At the local level, international youth work programmes are rarely part of everyday youth work. (see Naddaf 2019, Thimmel 2019)

The results of the access study show that many access barriers to international youth exchange occur at the institutional-structural level. Also, barriers such as poverty, urban segregation, discrimination, disability and access to training and employment affect young people's particular situation. However, this is the product of societal constellations of power and hegemony and therefore is regarded as socio-structural in nature rather than an individual deficit. Focusing on these target groups and discriminatory factors allow for more salient consideration and criticism of social inequality. However, this study indicates that solutions used by different parties often focus on the target group, not on the structural access barriers mentioned above (see Naddaf 2019).

Results of former German programme evaluation, provided by the TH Köln – University of Applied Sciences, on the EVS's intercultural opening, point in a similar direction³. The evaluation and practical research project examined how participation can be improved for young people with diverse cultural backgrounds as well as grassroots organisations of young people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The research shows that the low participation of young people with diverse cultural backgrounds is not a cultural or 'ethnic' problem but rather socio-structural barriers (Chehata 2015: 158). At the same time, cultural diversity does not automatically imply a structural disadvantage. Access to the EVS for grassroots organisations of young people from diverse cultural backgrounds indicates that the organisations operate in the tension between losing and gaining autonomy. Access to support programmes, such as EVS, requires entry admission and formal processes. This preparation requires resources that are not available to volunteer-run associations and associations that are not publicly funded (see Chehata 2015a: 163). Volunteers and small organisations often lack the necessary continuity to implement long-term programmes, such as European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Organisations hesitate when faced by uncertain responsibilities. Funding programmes pose an unpredictable risk because costs cannot be reimbursed if a project is cancelled on short notice. Integration into such a funding system can mean

losing autonomy. Access is easiest when projects and funding programmes can build on structures and goals of participating organisations. (Chehata 2015a)

The different research results presented point to the need to expand and shift perspectives. An individual's motivation to volunteer always depends on societal possibilities and opportunity structures (see Chehata 2015: 159). Given this, the problem of low voluntary involvement should not be viewed as an individual problem, but rather as a socio-structural and institutional problem (ibid.).

VOLUNTARY SERVICES AS A PLACE OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION?!

As previously described, the concept of disadvantage and term “young people with fewer opportunities,” can be problematised from the perspective of non-formal education. The professional ethos of non-formal education and the idea of voluntary service constitute an essential lens of analysis for disseminating the results of this study. This perspective will be explained in detail in the following section.

It seems indisputable that voluntary services such as European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps have educational relevance. It is implied that voluntary services offer a wide range of educational opportunities, in different voluntary service formats at national as well as international level, particularly through combining social commitment, concrete action and pedagogical support. Given this, Chehata (2015b) describes the previous programme EVS as a development and orientation opportunity for young people. At the same time, this understanding of voluntary services is not self-evident, as Bonus, Vogt and Schäfer (2019: 8) postulate with regard to the German discussion on the subject:

“Education in voluntary services finds itself in a conflict between its aspiration to be critical and emancipatory and the functionalisation of education in the context of economic and societal expectations of the work and knowledge-based society.”

This refers to the politically prioritised link between the education system and employment system, which also affects voluntary services (ibid: 19). This trend holds up in European comparison. According to Schwärzel (2017: 1), these contractually-regulated, long-term voluntary services particularly seem to offer much potential for solutions in terms of “instruments of youth, education, and employment, social and even democratic policy”. The emergence of the European Solidarity Corps puts promoting solidarity at the core of European voluntary activities. One can see this development in connection with the increasingly difficult social, economic and political situation of the European Union. The revitalisation of European solidarity seems ever more important because of the deteriorating solidarity through the “new” nationalism, the effects of neo-liberal financial and economic policies, rising in youth unemployment, etc. (see Thimmel 2017). With

this in mind, the European Solidarity Corps combines voluntary services oriented toward educational and youth policy with labour market projects. The European Solidarity Corps is intended to improve employability, in addition to contributing to personal and social development, vocational orientation, promotion of access to mobility, etc. This emphasis on employment risks aligning voluntary services entirely with their economic utility. Rather than stressing what young people want to learn and be able to do, and economic orientation highlights what young people should be able to do and learn. As Schwärzel clearly explains (2017: 10, Original quote in German):

“With its two pillars of volunteering and employment, the European Solidarity Corps already represents an almost complete symbiosis. This trend risks weakening the civic determination of voluntary services in many sectors.”

With this in mind, Bonus, Vogt and Schäfer (2019) argue that voluntary services should be understood and conceptualised as places of non-formal education.

Nonformal education is understood as an activity young people do themselves in interaction with other people and their surroundings⁴. The idea of education as self-learning stands in contrast to the notion that education can be effected or forced by outside influences. An emancipatory and youth-oriented understanding of education is a key foundation for voluntary services. Voluntary services, with their legally regulated framework, represent a specific setting for non-formal education, which is differentiated from other fields of non-formal education, such as youth work⁵. The concept of education is used ambiguously in pedagogic discourse. The European discourse on ‘lifelong learning’ led to discussions in Germany on the differentiation between formal education, informal learning and non-formal education (Rauschenbach et al. 2004). Educational research on learning processes indicates that learning takes place everywhere and cannot be reduced to one place.

Non-formal education refers to forms of organised education, recreational activities and enabling opportunity structures, which are usually voluntary. In contrast to informal learning, however, it requires the presence of educators, or can at least be regarded as a pedagogically framed setting in the broadest sense. Locations of non-formal education offer areas with various levels of the organisation where learning is intended. However, educators neither provide a curriculum nor learning assessments. They generally do not issue certificates. Educational processes conducted here certainly include acquiring competencies but cannot be reduced to this process alone. In this sense, non-formal education can be regarded as subject-oriented education (Scherr 2002, p. 94), based on the experiences, needs and interests of the target group. This implies a traditionally participatory methodology that starts with those addressed and strives for self-determination, social co-responsibility and social engagement. This thus



leads to a political educational standard of non-formal education that aims towards developing judgement, reflection and agency within social and societal relationships. Among the prerequisites of expanding young people's agency and coping strategies are recognising young people's diversity, individualism and resistance.

As part of a democratic and socio-political mandate, the fields of action of non-formal education regard themselves as contributors to promoting young people's critical awareness and shaping of politics and society. The basic principles of voluntariness, openness and participation, as well as the focus on everyday experiences, needs and interests, shape the design of the non-formal educational setting. The strength of non-formal educational locations thus lies in their ability to adapt to the spectrum of life issues. Leisure time and purpose-free communication, fun and socialising are thus obvious components of a reflected non-formal education concept. A constructive mixture is formed from everyday experiences, informal learning, thematic activities, experiences in a group, personal experiences and individual challenges in coping with everyday life. (see Thimmel 2017: 226)

Central principles of non-formal education can thus be described as subject-orientation and participation. The following section describes the resulting perspectives and conceptual points of reference with regards to voluntary services.

EXCURSUS: SUBJECT ORIENTATION AND PARTICIPATION AS CENTRAL PRINCIPLES OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL WORK IN VOLUNTARY SERVICES⁶

According to the basic concept of subject orientation, volunteers are not regarded as objects to be instructed or trained, but rather as the subjects of educational work. Recognition of volunteers' maturity and autonomy is essential. Subject orientation is combined with the overriding goal of enabling volunteers to develop self-esteem, self-confidence and self-determination in their behaviour and thought. This includes attempting to establish symmetrical spaces of communication despite existing hierarchies and power asymmetries. At the same time, a protective and boundary-setting role is also necessary, for example, to ensure labour market neutrality and the volunteers' rights towards their assigned locations. Subject orientation in the context of understanding emancipation in education does not exclude conveying

knowledge but also not restricted to it either. Beyond educational services in the form of seminars, individual counselling and support supplemented educational work in the voluntary services by helping people learn coping strategies. In this sense, a dual perspective is adopted to meet different expectations as well as the differentiated educational practices volunteers face. The approach of subject orientation offers the opportunity to combine education and coping strategies.

Participation, in the sense of collaboration and co-determination, can be seen as a prerequisite for acquiring social and individual skills through involvement in voluntary services. Voluntary services encourage participation by taking volunteers' commitment seriously as a socially important contribution. Participation also includes taking the volunteers' needs and interests into consideration about what they are assigned in the projects. This, for example, also includes the possibility of co-determining educational topics and participating in seminars. At the same time, limitations in participation must be examined critically. The heterogeneity of the volunteer group, the methodological skills of the staff and the existing or non-existing resources are key factors here. From a participatory concept of education, heterogeneity should be seen as an educational opportunity, not as a limit. The fundamental readiness for negotiation in conflicts, as well as understanding conflicts and resistance as the opportunity for negotiation and participation is fundamental for participatory educational work. To understand this perception we should ask how the scope for shared responsibility and self-determination can be enabled and further expanded, while at the same time recognising and taking into account the fact that volunteers have different ways of gaining experiences and potential and ways of participating.

Non-formal education in voluntary services is closely connected with the aspect of orientation. This aspect aims to support the young people in coping with requirements and expectations in their everyday lives. In comparison, education cannot be limited to "daily coping with life, but (includes) the active design and creation of autonomous life practice" (Scherr 2002: 96, Original quote in German). The attempt to (re)focus on subject orientation and participation as basic working principles of educational work in voluntary services seeks to enable processes of self-education that differ from the logic of economisation and functionalisation. This, however, does not mean that personal and vocational orientation, as well as acquiring competencies, should not also be part of non-formal education in voluntary services. However, we should not try to understand non-formal education as a provider of certain areas of competence, which were supposedly not conveyed beforehand. Rather, non-formal education must be conceived as an education that focuses on volunteers as subjects. Rather than coercing education, education should be understood as an activity sustained by the active initiative of its empowered subjects. These processes can be encouraged and facilitated, but not forced. The goal of education according to the principle of subject orientation is, therefore, the promotion of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-determination (see Scherr 1997:50-70).

SUBJECT OF STUDY

The study served to acquire knowledge on access and barriers for young people and organisations in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps and show how disadvantage is addressed within the “Europe for All” network. This is the focus of analysis:

- | access to new local (youth work) organisations to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps and
- | young people’s access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps

During the duration of the project, the procedure of the study was adapted continuously to the process of the overall project and coordinated with the project management. The individual project components are described below.

PROJECT ELEMENTS AND RESEARCH APPROACH

In terms of methods, the study was based on the qualitative criteria and methods of social research. The following project elements and research methods were used in the project:

ACCOMPANYING GROUP MEETINGS: At the start of the project, an accompanying group was set up for the project coordination of the Youth Academy Walberberg (JAW) and the TH Köln – University of Applied Sciences (TH Köln) to share ideas continuously and closely. These 10 meetings discussed the project process to ensure its quality and reach the objectives of the individual project activities and the general project. Activities conducted with the project leaders of the JAW were evaluated. This subject matter was subsequently reflected upon using the research results. Results from these group meetings influenced future project plans and generated new ideas, thus continuously ensuring steady quality improvement and goal achievement.

LITERATURE RESEARCH: This project included literature research conducted on European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps and international voluntary services related to young people with fewer opportunities. The results of the review were included in a presentation, while selected results were prepared for inclusion in the Intellectual Output. Particular attention was paid to the topic of disadvantage and circumstances of exclusion.

EXPERT INTERVIEWS: We conducted and analysed ten expert interviews from the participant organisations in the project. Two interviews were conducted in each local network: one interview with an organisation working with young people with fewer opportunities, and one with an organisation with experience implementing the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. We also interviewed the project leader of the network “Europe for All” to focus on the project genesis and possible future perspectives for the network at the end of the project. Using the expert interviews, we researched the subjective interpretive and practical knowledge of the educational professionals. These qualita-

tive interviews focused on learning what motivates professionals in relation to their professional practice. An interview guide was created, which placed emphasis on understanding disadvantage, barriers and participation opportunities in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps, and the conditions of success for local and international networking. The interviews were conducted anonymously, either by telephone or personally. Results of the interviews were then put in written form and later analysed following Meuser and Nagel (1991). The TH Köln - University of Applied Sciences disseminated the results of the interviews into the process to later discuss with the project participants.

GROUP DISCUSSION: A group discussion with 8 European Solidarity Corps participants from a short-term volunteering team was also held. This discussion allowed the participants to give their opinions and describe their influence and interests. The results also provide evidence on how short-term group education programmes can play an important role.

INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT: The general results of the programme evaluation are disseminated through this Intellectual Output, which will be made available to the professional community and the public. The TH Köln - University of Applied Sciences is responsible for describing and substantiating the research, as well as creating transparency regarding the research methods used. Furthermore, the research results are presented and reflected upon. The project leaders of the JAW co-designed the Intellectual Output. Both the project leaders of the JAW and representatives of the local networks collaborated in preparing the project’s Intellectual Output.

PRESENTATIONS: The researcher continuously introduced new concepts, know-how and the intermediate conclusions of the study into the process of the project within the context of various presentations, web conferences and short presentations during meetings. These presentations not only served to provide scientific results but also created the basis for the mutual interpretation of the results, encouraging further readings and inviting various interpretations to further reflect this topic.

¹ The following researchers delivered important contributions to the academic study of the “Europe for all” project. Zijad Naddaf made important content contributions. Maike Maslejak, Viktoria Wierschem, and Luisa Klöckner supported the research process and data analysis. I would also like to thank Patricia Pawlyk and Karl Urban for their translation of the German text and helping to edit the English version of this publication.

² Academic study of the project “Europe for All” was carried out by the research group Non-formal Education of the TH Köln – University of Applied Sciences under the direction of Prof. Dr. Andreas Thimmel (currently Jean Monnet Chair on Youth Work and Non-formal Education in Europe). The research group is a part of the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, and the Institute for Children, Youth, Family and Adults (KJFE) at the TH Köln – University of Applied Sciences. Research is carried out in many areas of non-formal education. The non-formal education research group carries out applied research, evaluation, and expert consulting for political actors and educational organisations.

³ The EVS’s intercultural opening was one of a total of three sub-projects of the youth policy initiative “JiVe - Youth Work International - Experiencing Diversity” on the intercultural opening of international youth work in Germany, conducted between 2007 and 2010.

⁴ The following section provides an edited and abridged version of selected sections of the previously published article Bonus, Vogt & Schäfer (2019).

⁵ The following remarks refer to certain basic assumptions on non-formal education and youth work from the perspective of the debate in Germany. Any future analytical framework will need to be expanded according to various structures and understandings of voluntary work, youth work and non-formal education in other European countries. In the “Europe for All” project, however, this perspective has proved fruitful, and thus provided a starting point for discussions and comparisons. Therefore, we include it here.

⁶ The following section is based on the article Bonus, Vogt und Schäfer (2019: 17f.) and has been modified slightly.

¹ The statements and the experiences of the interviewees partly refer to the previous programme European Voluntary Service (EVS). Since experts did not use the terms European Voluntary Service (EVS) and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) precisely in the interviews, we use the term “European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps,” if necessary. If we want to refer to the previous programme “European Voluntary Service (EVS)” we indicate it. If we only want to refer to the new programme “European Solidarity Corps” we will use this term solely.

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ACCESS AND BARRIERS IN THE EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE/ EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

FROM THE VOLUNTEERS' PERSPECTIVE

The following analysis focuses on the volunteers' perspective on approaches and barriers in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. A particular focus is placed on the volunteers' approaches and their motivation to volunteer. This will provide information about access barriers within the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Particular attention will be paid to the format of volunteering teams. Development needs will be identified. The article concludes with design recommendations for the European Solidarity Corps, given from the volunteer's perspective. We have no pretensions to illustrate completely the possible barriers from the volunteers' perspective. In this sense, the article provides illustrative findings. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that volunteers in this study already had access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Those who did not participate are not considered in the study. Nevertheless, certain important topics may be useful as an initial basis for further discussions and reflection.

The context of the Strategic Partnership, "Europe for All", mainly focused on the presence of so-called disadvantaged young people. Certain selection and exclusion mechanisms within the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps have led to an uneven participant structure. Rather than emphasise any possible disadvantages experienced by individuals, this article dedicates itself to young people as a collectivity. The following results can be viewed as relevant for young people. This does not mean that volunteers do not experience disadvantages, but rather that this should not be attributed to them externally. The degree to

which young people related to experiencing disadvantage was left to them.

A qualitative evaluation study on the intercultural opening of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) in the context of the practical development project "JiVE Youth Work International-Experiencing Diversity" (2008-2010) already mentions access barriers (Chenhata 2015).

Barriers to access for young people with fewer opportunities are also described in the mixed methods evaluation "Study on the Impact of Transnational Volunteering through the European Voluntary Service" (European Commission 2017). From a German perspective, the quantitative and qualitative "Study on Access to International Youth Exchanges"/"Zugangsstudie zum internationalen Jugendaustausch" (Becker/Thimmel 2019, original title in German) should also be mentioned. Not only does this study provide a reconstruction of participants' experiences, but it also includes data on the perspective of those who did not participate.

The findings gained in the context of "Europe for All" show parallels to the studies mentioned. Results from the group discussion with the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps volunteers raise awareness of the relevant factors out of the young people's perspective. A total of 8 young people and young adults from three different countries participated in the group discussion. All of them were involved in a short-term volunteering team. This discussion was voluntary and conducted during the participants' voluntary service.

ACCESS TO THE EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE/EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

Young people's and young adults' first contact with the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps occurred in the form of personal contact by people in their existing social environment. In most cases, this happened within the context of already existing voluntary activities in youth and community centres in their home country or the role as participants at local organisations. The youth workers in these organisations offered the first personal contact and information about the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps to the young people. In other instances, friends and acquaintances that attended or worked in youth work organisations first introduced them to the idea of the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. There is no evidence indicating that young people considered taking part in the European Solidarity Corps by reading the information in flyers or the internet. Meeting with the young people directly, whether it is through their work or local organisations, seems to play an important role in introducing them to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Previous voluntary activities or the participation in activities of local organisations create participation opportunities for young people. This kind of experience with voluntary work and other activities of youth work ease the willingness and the decision to participate in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. This underlines the relevance of a socio-spatial and lifeworld-directed orientation and the creation of appropriate opportunity



structures. Educators and staff of local organisations also play a key role, acting as interface and facilitator between the young people and the programme.

Young people criticised the difficulty of attaining information about the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps projects without initial personal contact. The participants know about information material on the websites of the European Commission, but they are not typically used by young people. The young people prefer more youth-oriented promotion at, for example, social networks to inform themselves. Young people who have already participated in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps know how to obtain information on other international youth projects. This can be interpreted as a sign that access into the field of international youth work can be especially challenging. However, once young people have become familiar with these programmes, they can orient themselves easier within the field.

The point in time when young people choose to consider the idea of going abroad and participation in voluntary services plays an important role with regards to programme access. Many of the young people are in their last year in high school, are about, to begin with, further studies or have already started their studies. Few young people work full-time. This indicates that especially the transition from school to university or full-time work offers the possibility for overseas experience or participation in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. It shows the importance of freedom that enables young people to arrange their time autonomously. The current life situation and future life plans are relevant factors for the willingness to take part in voluntary service. The European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps seems to offer an intermediate period for young people. For young people working full-time, the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps seems to be an alternative or an addition to their occupation.

The occupational and educational situation of young people can also present financial barriers to programme participation. Participating in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps is free of charge. However, young people would have to stop what they were doing temporarily to participate in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. This would mean they would probably have to temporarily forfeit their salary or holidays during this time. According to the young people, this poses a problem, especially in low-income countries. Some encounter unforeseen expenses. A youth may have to help cover the cost

of airfare or pay in advance because it exceeds the organisation's funds. Only a few young people can afford this. When asked if increasing spending money would incentivise participation in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps, one volunteer comments:

“It makes it more accessible for everyone if you did get a bit. Because some people wouldn't be able to go, because like me. Majority of works in (Country T) don't give you holiday pay. So I'm finally leaving and going on holiday, I'm missing out. Especially, one week probably would have been good. But two weeks that's half a month. So I'm missing out a lot of money.”

Volunteer, volunteering team

At the same time, participants are aware that the work is voluntary and thus do not expect any payment. However, they expect more pocket money, and at the least, no additional costs. This would allow the volunteers to afford to participate in recreational activities and include those who would otherwise be unable to afford it. Financial aspects are one of the volunteers' important decision factors. They also express some insecurity, such as regarding the loss of income. Although they are quite aware that volunteering will not produce financial income, volunteers should not face financial uncertainties and restrictions while participating in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. It is important to them that all volunteers can participate in the same way, which includes leisure activities.

The young people described the application process as generally low-threshold and free from red-tape. They were only required to show interest and to register by giving their contact information. Studies on the European Voluntary Service, however, showed that young people found the application and preparation process arduous and time-consuming (Chetata 2015: 232). This finding does, however, only refer to the long-term volunteer service. The group discussion does not reveal why there were different perceptions. We can only assume that the responsible organisations supported applicants during the preparatory phase, so it would not be too challenging for young people. This result can be read as a sign that a youth-pedagogical approach and support break down barriers to entry. It is also possible that volunteering teams generally have a lower threshold of entry.



“When you participate in some kind of project, you go there, you can help, you can do something useful but also to learn something new. (...) You achieve some skills and also if you're good at school or university it has nothing to do with your social skills or your personality or your intelligence.”

Volunteer, volunteering team

Few see any prerequisites in participating in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. From a personal perspective, young people name an open and honest attitude as the main requirement. Personality and social skills are important for participating in the programme. Skills acquired in school, however, do not play a major role and are considered irrelevant for participation. While knowledge gained at school can be useful, projects need skills that are not taught at school. For example, young people name social competencies or manual skills, which can also be acquired during the projects. They all agree that there is no need for formal certifications to become involved in voluntary projects. Rather, they emphasise combining a meaningful activity with learning and development opportunities. This is what the volunteers say:

“I think, that academia doesn't mean, that you should be able to participate or not. Because some people are not good with grades and stuff. (...) You just come here to learn about yourself and learn about other people. So grades don't matter.”
 Volunteer, volunteering team

Language skills are not a major prerequisite in participating in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps either. The participants describe that despite the various levels of language proficiency, they can communicate with each other and that many activities do not focus primarily on language-based communication. Any fears or doubts young people have about their language skills prove to be unfounded. In the end, young people even appreciate the opportunity to improve their language skills during their stay abroad. Participating together with peers from their own countries is helpful, allowing them to learn translation skills. Despite language barriers or perhaps because of them, they can develop alternative communication skills. These findings are consistent with those in the access study on international youth exchanges:

“Particularly those from underrepresented social backgrounds believe that they can better deal with language barriers because non-linguistic communication methods were successful. Thus they gathered positive experience communicating in the foreign language.”
 Thimmel 2019: 185

In addition, the study shows that young people themselves do address the topic of any possible language barriers less than adults in school or family members outside the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Young people seem to make a distinction between the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps and formal school activities. They consider the voluntary activities as an alternative learning path; that learning comes from interaction with other peers and conducting projects. There are no formal prerequisites for this. Instead, they emphasise the positive effects of self-direction and self-learning in the sense of non-formal education.

MOTIVATION

The following section will focus on participants' motivation and expectations. These topics will yield evidence of possible access points and barriers. The desire to volunteer and improve social skills is what mostly motivates young people to participate in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Aside from this, they mention other educational interests as strengthening their self-esteem.

As one participant explains:

“the whole point of this experience is to empower you and to empower what you are doing.”

Volunteer, volunteering team

At first glance, young people’s motivations are at the personal and individual levels; however, they also extend to other levels. Volunteers’ readiness to give back is expressed through their desire to volunteer and support others. Helping others is a central theme. It can be said that participants are willing and ready to take on social responsibility.

Participation is also associated with the desire for personal and professional orientation. Young people are also motivated by the opportunities to acquire professional and technical skills required for work and study. By participating in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps, many see the opportunity to improve their language skills. As one participant states:

“I wanted to improve my skills in social work. Because I wanted to work with children and here I have the opportunity to work with them. And also I wanted to improve my English and German.”

Volunteer, volunteering team

Also, the volunteers would like to be able to take their newly acquired skills back to their home countries. This primarily concerns young people who already work in human service professions, such as working with children and adolescents or community work. Volunteers also expressed their reason for participating in the programme was to learn more about other cultures.

“I want to do youth work or community development. So for me, I love doing this. So, I thought to myself, I could go and become a better youth worker or I could learn more skills to take back to my community. That I could learn at the place or here. I could learn more about other cultures.”

Volunteer, volunteering team

The volunteers associate the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps with different personal, social and professional development opportunities. They name a variety of interests and emphases why they participate. Generally, the programme seems to be an opportunity for development and education. Helping people appears to be a major motivating factor, which can be interpreted as volunteers’ interest in assuming social responsibility. On one hand, this can indicate a certain level of paternalism. On the other hand, it provides the potential to understand volunteer services as a venue for political education.

THE RELEVANCE OF PROJECTS AND FORMATS

The actual projects play a subordinate role when it comes to deciding to participate in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. The participants are motivated

and willing more generally to volunteer. For example, the information given about the project was very different. Some young people decided to volunteer even though they did not know what they were going to do. In some cases, the lack of information caused insecurities, especially in combination with a lack of previous experiences in voluntary work. Some young people were not sure whether they were suited for the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. One participant said:

“I have never done this before. Because I wasn’t sure if I will be able to be useful here. I didn’t even know, what is it about, exactly.”

Volunteer, volunteering team

The young people are willing to deal with insecurities. However, they become aware that the concept of volunteering is not self-explanatory and requires mediation and self-experience. The European Solidarity Corps needs to enhance its profile as a learning and development opportunity. Openness to a diverse range of participants with unique interests is paramount to this undertaking.

When it comes to designing projects, volunteers need to receive clearly defined assignments. Participants desire a reasonable balance between project activities and free time. Participants are aware of the importance of the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps projects and are prepared for and motivated to carry them out. However, they emphasise the importance of sufficient breaks, as this feature is not offered in other similar programmes. This has led some young people to associate volunteering with hard work. In some cases, this can leave young people feeling stressed and isolated because they do not spend enough time with the group.

One thing all study participants have in common is the attitude towards the format: a volunteering team. This format simplified their decision to participate. The group is perceived as a supportive space. Participants from the same countries meet in these groups to form a sort of “safety net” (Volunteer), which facilitates contact among peers. Volunteers end up enjoying their voluntary project more. Interest in the project and motivation are seen as central requirements for a good atmosphere. The young people already become acquainted with other participants in their own countries during preparation courses, where they discuss group rules and identify personal boundaries. The volunteers believe that this group format even offers a great way for shy people to get involved. They assume that if they had started the initial volunteer work away from home, friends and family, they would feel more isolated in individual activities, a reason why fewer young people participate. The group discussion revealed that, at that time, most participants could not imagine participating in individual activities; at least a “two-person team” would be required. Only one participant stated that because he had gained enough skills in former group activities, he had the strength to work in activities on his own.

“I think, now, that I’ve done a few trips, I’d be more confident to go on my own.” Volunteer, volunteering team

We can thus deduce, that volunteering teams are perceived as a low-threshold type of service, providing easier access to volunteer abroad. This format can also serve as a “gateway” to other programmes abroad, facilitating introducing young people to longer-term volunteer services or individual activities. Networking and mutual references to different voluntary services play a crucial role (i.e. the idea from the “mobility puzzle” in Thimmel/Schäfer 2017).

Challenges are also described when it comes to group settings. Challenges go from facing completely different cultures and opinions to dealing with challenges in everyday life, such as different expectations of cleanliness. The European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps offers a change of context that allows young people to experience themselves in new situations. Group experiences challenge young people to deal with other people and to find new rules of everyday life and to address or solve these differences (see Chehata 2015: 229).

DESIRE TO TRANSFER EXPERIENCES

The themes named by participants indicate possible connections, which can result after completion of the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. They express the wish to continue using the skills acquired during the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps in the fields of youth work or social work, for future studies or existing careers, in their own countries. However, material indicating this was only found among participants who have already been active in the human services field. These participants have already achieved solid standing and have the opportunity to utilise what they have learned. This, in turn, raises the question of how to strengthen this transition and identify and utilise the desire to volunteer for further development.

SUMMARY OF THE NEED FOR CHANGE FROM THE VOLUNTEERS’ PERSPECTIVE

Analysis of the collected material has resulted in perspectives and development ideas for the design of the European Solidarity Corps.

EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE/EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS AS A LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

The volunteers’ statements highlight the importance of local organisations and opportunity structures. This also includes the roles local educators play. With this background, young people regard to access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as mostly uncomplicated. The young people’ current life situation and future planning influenced their decision. The voluntary activities appear to be an

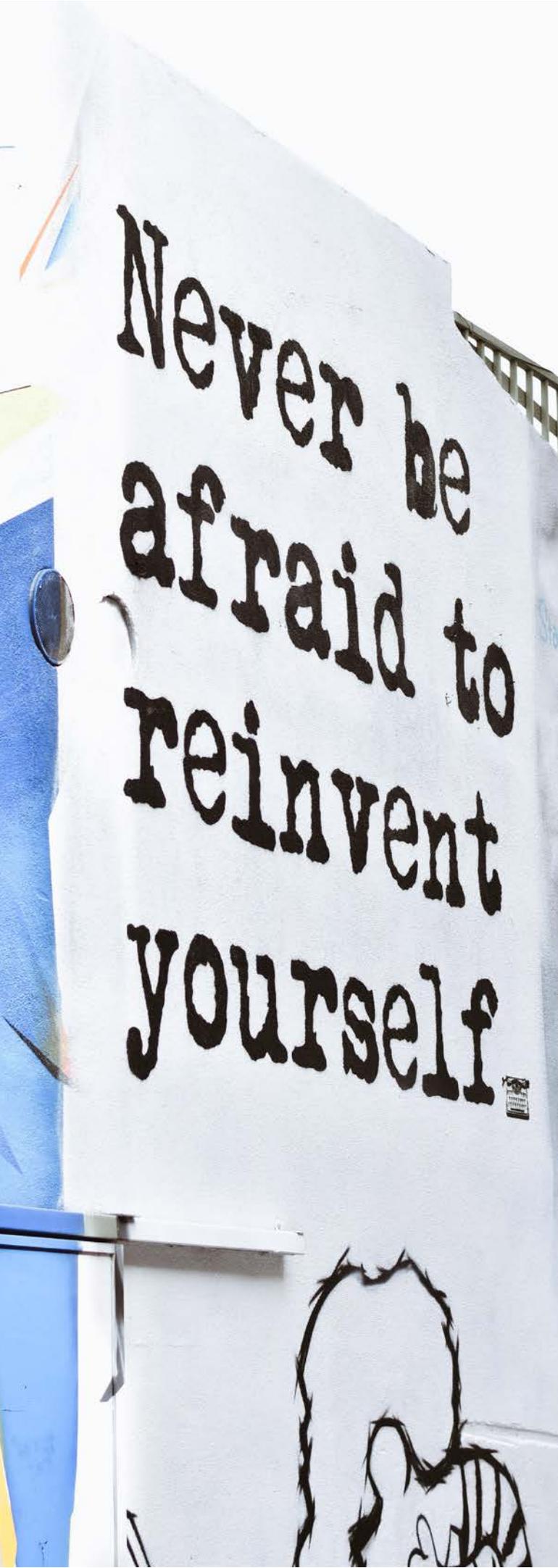
intermediate step between school and work or/and alternative learning paths towards the formal education system. Considering the increasing compression of school and vocational education, the issues of young people’s freedom and scope for action in this passage are key. Young people do not see the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as a “gap-filler”. They recognise the educational relevance of the programme. The educational themes range from general personality development to acquiring specific social, professional and technical competencies.

The volunteers’ statements generally indicate that they see learning opportunities for themselves in the community experience, the interactive work and in the concrete action. The volunteers believe balancing, leisure time, fun, camaraderie and activity is important in the project. Teaching or learning of knowledge did not play a role in educational motivation. The different educational themes are connected with the word “help”. Helping others is a central motivating factor. This raises the issue of how this willingness for social commitment, assuming responsibility and social learning can also be understood as a starting point for political education and participation.

From the perspective of volunteers, the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps offers learning and development opportunities and provides scope for different interests. Volunteering should be promoted stronger as learning opportunity in the sense of non-formal education, without limiting its potential participants’ variety of motivations. The more general the expectations, the less scope remains for individual interests and freedoms remain.

HETEROGENEITY OF PARTICIPANTS, ORGANISATIONS, FORMATS AND LOCATIONS

Volunteers would like to make this experience available to all young people and to facilitate access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. More young people should have the option to volunteer. Respondents critically examined the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps participant structure. Especially young people from socio-culturally disadvantaged neighbourhoods, those with limited financial resources and young people with disabilities, should be encouraged to participate, according to the participant discussion. The volunteers stated this with regard to learning and development opportunities offered by the voluntary activities. Young people consider it helpful in achieving greater heterogeneity in the participation structure to address young people from different organisations. The respondents say that they all week sent by similar organisations and that they perceive themselves as a homogeneous group. In addition, the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps should be informed about where young people spend their time, i.e. not only in youth facilities. Informational events in schools might be considered as a supplementary forum to reach young people. Young people consider it more convincing when addressed by people their age. In this case, participants state that sharing their own



experience was of major significance. They also see sharing experiences with peers as a particularly authentic form of approach. This highlights former participants' key role in attracting potential participants. Additionally, it is also recommended to inform young people, particularly those in socio-culturally disadvantaged districts, about the possibilities of the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps.

A further aspect that was considered is hiding the age span. Not only young people are named as part of the target group, but also older people. According to the young people, someone's age should not hinder them from participating in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Participants could benefit from other participants' experiences and knowledge.

On the programme level, participants also discussed the locations where the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps projects are conducted. Long travelling distances from the participant's place of origin to the project location, depending on the country, is perceived as a hurdle. Some, for example, wanted to expand the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps programme more to Eastern Europe to volunteer closer to their home countries.

As to the question of access, the young people critically examined the possibilities and limitations of the programme. This shows how essential participants' direct participation is to programme design as well as the voluntary service itself. This direct participation strengthens young people's role as advocates for programme improvement. There does not seem to be any lack of commitment. Looking at the experts' and young people's statements in the surveys conducted, there are numerous overlaps, which are presented in the summary.

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ACCESS AND BARRIERS IN THE EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE/ EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ORGANISATIONS

The following article focuses on the description and analysis of access and barriers from the perspective of participating organisations. Using data collected from expert interviews with educators, we localise the central access barriers and areas of improvement within the programmes European Voluntary Service (EVS)/European Solidarity Corps (ESC). This concerns the voluntary services within the framework of the European Solidarity Corps. We will describe and analyse the access of new local organisations¹ to the European funding system and young people's access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. In analysing access barriers in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps, we were most interested in ideas and perspectives the experts had about young people and how they describe the programmes. The background for this approach is the assumption that "access and barriers do not exist per se; rather they are constructed through language (speaking about) and practice (meditation and production with other people and institutions)" (Naddaf 2019: 150). We were able to determine five ways of addressing the issue: With reference to access for new local organisations, two key perspectives were identified: (a) European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as an opportunity for development and (b) European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as a supplementary high-threshold programme. Concerning the access of "young people with fewer opportunities", three approaches were identified: (c) strategic construction of disadvantages, (d) disadvantage as a socio-structural problem and (e) risks of individualising structural problems.

We consider these different ways of addressing the subject as a heuristic design and systematic description of contexts. However, each thematisation does not correspond entirely with empirical reality. Instead, these ways of thematisation intersect and overlap each other. The aim is to reduce information by structuring and ordering the extensive data collected, while at the same time producing new knowledge. These individual issues thus form an interpretation guide to describe and analyse access barriers and enable the description of distinctive characteristics. The volunteers' perspective is not represented in the following results.

ACCESS FOR NEW LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

The Strategic Partnership "Europe for All" aimed at giving new local organisations access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. The barriers and access points were revealed in this process.

First, these barriers revealed themselves in understanding the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as a development opportunity for organisations in the sense of further development and internationalisation. Secondly, the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps appeared as a supplementary, high-threshold programme. From this perspective, the focus is on the structural barriers of the funding system and the limited financial and human resources at the local level.

EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE/EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

There are various reasons why organisations implement the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. As demonstrated in previous studies, the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps services organisations the opportunity to expand and internationalise their range of services (cf. Thimmel/Chahata 2015). In this respect, we can consider the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps a development opportunity for organisations, under the condition that the programme can be connected with already existing objectives and services.

"For us, it's a big opportunity, too, because our goals are to fight discrimination and empower the youths. And we recognise that in this kind of activities, we can open ourselves to a lot of possibilities. We can work not just in our small youth centre."

Interviewee, local partner

The strong local ties of some local organisations can be extended by the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. In the context of organisations that have already acquired experience in international youth exchange, one regards the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as a supplement to and expansion of the existing short-term international programmes. Young people's interest in international programmes is what motivates the organisations to offer the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. At the same time, the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps services organisations the opportunity to innovatively pursue their objectives in terms of content and concept. This cooperation with international partners is regarded as an asset and opportunity to continue professionally developing their work. The interaction between the network approach and cooperation particularly fostered this aspect in the project.



The European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps sometimes becomes part of a specific multi-layered service system organisations offer. However, how much organisations can utilise and sustain this development potential also depends on their human and financial resources. One can see this in the context of the perspective **“European Voluntary European Solidarity Corps as a supplementary high-threshold service“**.

Regarding programme design, some organisations viewed the effects of implementing the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as questionable, especially with respect to their understanding of voluntary services. One critical aspect is the emphasis of the solidarity concept. For some interviewees, this implies a shift of emphasis towards humanitarian and charitable aid. However, several experts perceived the European Voluntary Services’ open approach to interaction and education becoming less important. According to one expert, this is a crucial development opportunity for young people and an important strength of the former programme.

“But I think in anything European Solidarity Corps is changing the way, (...) I don’t think it’s going to be able to provide young people, who faced adversity, as much benefit because how one views volunteering is completely changing.”

Interviewee, international partner

This raises the general question of how future European Solidarity Corps volunteer activities will be understood and structured. This seems also relevant to how organisations and young people can connect with the programme.

EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE/EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS AS A SUPPLEMENTARY HIGH-THRESHOLD PROGRAMME

Each respondent described the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps as a high threshold. This particularly applies to accreditation and initial application. The application process is difficult for inexperienced organisations to manage. The workload is perceived as unpredictable. In the

Strategic Partnership “Europe for All”, particularly organisations with limited financial and personnel resources described access to the European funding system as challenging. Necessary preparations, such as becoming acquainted with formal conditions, accreditation and the initial application, are associated with organisational, administrative and financial burdens. As a consequence, they regard the application process as additional work above and beyond specialists’ daily tasks.

“Because I take care of all the volunteers my time is very limited. And it’s the same with all other full-time members of staff. (...) So any form of Erasmus work would be something in addition to their already full-time work.”

Interviewee, local partner

Cooperation with experienced partners allowed new organisations to be systematically introduced to the funding system and its formal conditions. The support and advice given by experienced partners went far beyond simply providing information. Local partners received intensive assistance through workshops and coaching sessions to deal with the workload. The major problem local organisations face is limited financial and human resources.

“You know, (...) local organisations do not necessarily have the capacity and the resources to sit down and apply for European projects so young people can go abroad. They also don’t have the time to exchange knowledge and do projects.”

Interviewee, international partner

Besides, there is a chance that programme applications may be denied. Both experienced and inexperienced organisations felt insecure about the long waiting period between application submission and approval. Increased financial insecurity was expressed when applying for individual support or extra costs. The organisations often do not know beforehand if they will be granted funding, e.g. for necessary personnel costs. In one case, because a request for more personnel for a group of young people with physical and intellectual disabilities was not approved, the project had to be cancelled during the planning phase. The national agen-

cy responsible did not give a differentiated feedback for the denial. This led to uncertainty and confusion regarding the funding conditions. Personal contact and support through national agencies are viewed as key to achieving transparency and reducing uncertainty. Entrance into the funding system means financial insecurity for some organisations. This affects the organisations' priorities and can be described as a barrier to access when dealing with the high standards and obligations of the funding system. This is because European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps requires international partners to communicate and consult with each other, organise housing, provide a permanent contact person and monitor the project.

Furthermore, intensive preparation of participants, for example in language courses, support in travel organisation, etc. are viewed as necessary. Compared to local activities, they regard the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as complicated due to extensive organisational and administrative requirements.

“So that’s why the organisations also say, Well when it becomes so complicated, we focus our energy and time on local activities”

Interviewee, international partner

Organisations regard the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as an extra burden. Keeping their limited sources in mind, these organisations have to consider where they can invest their time. Thus, the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps also competes with local activities. Particularly the smaller organisations find it difficult to take full responsibility for hosting long-term volunteers, organising their activities and supporting them over a longer period.

“When we think about the hosting, we didn’t feel so sure, because of the logistics. It’s too much for us to host about three or four long-term volunteers. Because, for us to host like three or four volunteers long-term, it’s too much.”

Interviewee, local partner

Conducting the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps requires consistency which, according to the experts, is difficult for smaller organisations to achieve without assistance. The question must be posed as to how consistency can be achieved despite limited resources. The central role of networks and cooperation for access to the funding system is demonstrated clearly in the “Europe for All” project. This provides opportunities for participation. The experienced partner organisation provides the missing structures, and if necessary professional support. This also requires coordination and negotiation of participating organisations, as well as time, space, and flexibility. When organisational capacities are limited, the increased demands associated with these activities can become a burden.

Aside from the demanding requirements of the programme, there are also external barriers to entry. These include time-consuming visa processing as well as applying for identification documents and passports. Looking for (barrier-free) accommodation in the housing market continues to be a barrier, as does a general shortage of affordable housing. In this regard, the organisations sometimes face unexpectedly higher costs, which far surpass the funding requested. Moreover, the standard rates of funding for living expenses are not equivalent to the actual cost of living in some cities and regions. The question should be posed as to how the funding options can be adapted to minimise the risk for organisations. In individual cases, even better funding cannot compensate for the lack of (barrier-free) housing and housing options. If there are no adequate housing options near participating organisations, the housing market becomes a major exclusion factor.

“YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES”

In addition to providing access for new organisations, the Strategic Partnership “Europe for All” aimed to enable access for so-called disadvantaged young people. Regarding the thematisation of the target group “young people with fewer opportunities,” the expert interviews reveal three perspectives: (c) Strategic construction of disadvantage, (d) disadvantage as a structural problem and (e) risk of individualising structural problems. These reconstructions are presented here separately, although there is some overlap between statements.

STRATEGIC CONSTRUCTION OF DISCRIMINATION

The central topic of the expert interviews is the requirement of the funding programme to identify disadvantaged target groups, thereby categorising young people.

“At the moment, when I apply for Erasmus+ or ESC, (...) I must not only start by describing the young person but I must begin by describing a particular target group. I also have to describe under what criteria the volunteer is disadvantaged”.

Interviewee, international partner

The respondents showed a wide range of opinion regarding the strategic focus of the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps programme in supporting a particular group (“young people with fewer opportunities”).

According to the organisations, the term “young people with fewer opportunities” often does not match the young people’s self-image. For this reason, the experts criticise the necessity of categorising young people in their applications to receive funding. This criticism stems from the perspective of youth pedagogy. However, this does not relativise the disadvantaging circumstances and life situations such as poverty, marginalisation, discrimination or racism young people confront. At the same time, the interviews reveal that reference to disadvantage has not just integrated into programme lan-



“The only problem is, there’s a vast range of disadvantages. The more I describe, the more I exclude those people I’m targeting. I cannot design a service that fits the volunteer I happen to meet. I should have a particular volunteer who I can design service of support for.”

Interviewee, international partner

guage and funding practice (strategic level). Organisations and experts refer to it implicitly and explicitly on the level of youth education through their language and practices. The requirement to describe young people in the most precise way possible contradicts the practices of non-formal education and limits the principles of openness and participation. New barriers and exclusionary factors are produced through these administrative processes, thereby limiting the capacity for educators to act freely.

The orientation towards young people and their interests and possibilities is limited due to the strategic deficit orientation. In contrast, one interview partner creates an alternative strategy, believing that projects and applications should be tailored to specific volunteers, their interests and need for support.

The interview partner views an orientation close to the lived reality of young people to be most beneficial, as opposed to prefabricated services and formats. In practice, there is a need for more customised and flexible funding options, e.g. to react flexibly to the needs of volunteers.

“Then this whole possibility of extra funding of needs. We cannot increase these funds. If your project gets approved and you can’t change the project after you have realised that your target group has changed from what you had previously thought or assessed. That’s red tape.”

Interviewee, international partner

Also, the interview revealed using the attribution “young people with fewer opportunities” requires a high degree of reflection to avoid creating lines of difference in education. The organisations are well aware of the intersectionalities between structural and individual disadvantage. They are working on ensuring that the terminology is appropriately implemented.

The educational professionals aspire to a deconstructive approach. In addressing so-called disadvantaged young people, an interviewee describes this approach, referring

to a conversation with a volunteer with a physical disability. The question here is whether distinctions such as “disability” or “without school-leaving certificate” are needed in the context of public relations work, e.g. flyers. The expert concludes that:

“So that’s why you have to call it that way but not assess and classify it that way. That was the point. And that often happens when we’re honest that’s what we often do.”

Interviewee, international partner

The interviewee problematises this issue self-critically and reflectively, noting that using such terms leads to (sub)conscious valuation, categorisation and predefinition. Nevertheless, it may be necessary to differentiate accordingly to provide accessibility. The interviews and discussions in the network demonstrate that administrative processes should distance themselves more clearly from educational practice.

In the Strategic Partnership “Europe for All” this separation between the administrative construction of disadvantage and its shift to everyday language and conceptual approaches was challenging. This also can be seen in the discussion of what are perceived as individual barriers (see section “Risk of individualising structural problems”).

DISADVANTAGE AS A SOCIO-STRUCTURAL PROBLEM

The experts state that, in addition to the barriers at the funding system level, socio-structural issues form a core access barrier and cause the uneven participant structure in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps.

A central reason for this is that young people and their families have a lower social and educational status. The interviewees point out to the relevance of the structural exclusion of groups of people, e.g. through emerging segregated districts, growing social inequality and high youth unemployment in some European countries. Experience of exclusion, racism and discrimination play a crucial role here. Young people who would like to spend long periods abroad need a certain amount of self-esteem and self-confidence.

MY VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE

WHERE?



TARGET GROUP?



TOPICS/ACTIVITIES?



HOW LONG?



This cannot be taken for granted. Limited geographic mobility in some urban marginalised districts and rural areas creates more access barriers to European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Lack of experience of mobility is described as an obstacle in this context:

“Not all, but most can't go on holiday and they can't afford it. It was seen as a luxury, it was seen as something they can't identify themselves with.” Interviewee, international partner

From the organisations' perspective, young people also associate participating in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps with financial insecurities. Young people and families who receive social security benefits or unemployment compensation cannot be sure whether they will still be entitled to these benefits during the service or after they finish the service. They face potential financial uncertainty if they need to reapply for financial aid. Besides, they do not know beforehand whether they will receive financial support if they have additional funding needs (e.g. assistance, clothing, sign language interpreter, wheelchair ramps). Participants face additional preparation costs, such as applying for new identification documents.

Young people have difficulty estimating the actual expenses. Nevertheless, the organisations must be able to offer the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps free of charge and any additional costs for participants. The organisation can either guarantee this by acquiring additional financial resources, or by helping participants to save their funds.

RISKS OF INDIVIDUALISING STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

Regarding the issue of access, the organisations also address the relation among the organisations, projects and volunteers. In the descriptions and explanations, the experts named supposedly individual hurdles and self-exclusions of young people. This reasoning partly covers the view to exclusionary institutional structures. This can be described as the risk of individualising structural problems.

MOTIVATION AND OPPORTUNITIES

When selecting the volunteers' organisations consider the qualities and skills young people need to participate in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. The experts interviewed name unspecific expectations and requirements. These include motivation, tolerance, openness, self-esteem and confidence. The European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps is associated with insecurities for young people with little travel experience. They may be motivated and interested, but they require support by educators on the ground. They describe their involvement in other international short-term formats and local volunteer activities as a strong incentive. As a result, young people are already familiar with the general idea of non-formal education and volunteering. We conclude that a stronger conceptual link between different voluntary services and international youth work can provide new ways for young people to access these programmes. The European Solidarity Corps should, therefore, raise its profile as a voluntary service and learning service to demonstrate its relationship with these areas. It also reveals that young peoples' motivation and interest is linked to creating opportunities for engagement and participation.

Access to socio-spatial and life-related services, such as local youth work, opens ways for participating. These services enable young people to experience self-efficacy and promote their self-esteem and self-confidence. These characteristics are also mentioned as important requirements for European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. This is why experts need to assess using different formats and methods of youth work.

“So a lot of the work that we do is trying to build them up over time. So over months or years trying to work towards the European projects trying to work towards EVS/ESC using in different formats of youth work and methodologies that we use in terms of our diverse youth work.”

Interviewee, international partner

The question of access is not only about motivation, but rather of prior possibilities of participation. If young people have access to such opportunities and have already had some experience, they can easily get involved with the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Invoking young people's lack of motivation or readiness leads to covering up structural barriers (e.g. unequal access to youth work opportunities, social inequality in the education system).

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS AND NEEDS

Specific requirements relating to the volunteers' projects and activities were also described. Interview partners mentioned language skills as an important prerequisite. They assume that young people with few language skills cannot deal with foreign languages. Given this requirement, language training is frequently an obligatory part of preparation. Both professionals and volunteers are concerned about this. On the other hand, a lack of language skills does not seem to play as important a role as previously thought in implementing volunteer activities. When volunteers travel in pairs or groups, they support each other, share positive experiences communicating in a foreign language or using other forms of communication. The question must be posed as to how these projects can be conceived to enable alternative forms of communication (e.g. music, dance, art, and digital media). Young people's lack of language and communication opportunities does not create an access barrier. Rather, the predominance of certain forms of communication, as well as the emphasis on language as a formal prerequisite for project work, constitutes a barrier to access. There is a risk that educators predetermine young people's suitability for the programme, thereby depriving them of their voice.

With regards to language and communication, there is also concern that a young person's disability may cause some language difficulties. Here, too, preliminary fears prove to be less significant for activities in the project. In one particular case, they could adapt the project work to the volunteer's interests and abilities through mutual coordination and planning. Despite language difficulties, they created participation opportunities using a participative working method and respect for the young person's ability to assess him- or herself.

From an educational viewpoint, looking for alternative language and communication options is certainly an important issue. The network relied on various participants' expertise and tested new methods. Communicating public relations work in simple language, offering language training and using digital media (e.g. Blended Learning) can create opportunities for young people to participate. At the same time, it is also necessary to focus on general non-formal education principles such as participation, transparency, process and participant focus, and the voluntary nature of these processes. This also includes approaching peer-learning as an example in the context of non-formal education. These principles enable orientation towards young people's different participation abilities and prerequisites rather than the requirements of different programmes and formats. A perspective that is close to the lived reality of young people with fewer opportunities is already embedded in these general principles of non-formal youth work and education. These concepts include the diversity of life situations and lived realities experienced by youths, as well as possible experiences of discrimination and exclusion. There is no need for a specific term. In this perspective, plurality is the norm and is not perceived as an additional expenditure. Instead,



it is a question of further developing existing concepts to make them sensitive to differences. Some experts feel insecure about this and limited in their professional skills when they deal with young people who need special care and assistance because of difficult living conditions and physical, psychological or mental illnesses. Nevertheless, they see the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as an opportunity to provide these young people with experiences of empowerment. However, some of the educators do not see themselves providing these young people with the educational support they need. They aim to make the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps an attractive tool for these specialised organisations.

KEY ROLE IN PERSONAL CONTACTS AND NETWORKS

Result of the interviews show three basic ways for young people to access projects: The first way can be described as direct access, i.e. that young person applies directly to projects advertised. Secondly, organisations can submit applications for a specific young person. In these cases, organisations already know about young people through previous projects and services. The organisation acts as an intermediary between the programme and the young person. Thirdly, organisations actively look for potential volunteers, especially if the organisations themselves do not have contact with young people with fewer opportunities. This way involves other institutions, organisations and networks as a gateway to the young person. In the Strategic Partnership “Europe for All”, the last two access options were represented. The organisations recognise the need for personal contact, creating long-term cooperation and networks, the importance of peer groups, the experts’ and mentors’ personal commitment intensive educational support for access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps and coordinating between organisations, projects and volunteers. Concerning the question of matching, they mention that online services and the lack of quality of the databases are a problem. These sometimes provided vague and incorrect information. Also, they found this instrument complicated. Some experts claim that this tool is less suitable to address volunteers and select projects.

The important role of intermediaries (educators, multipliers, peer groups etc.) indicates the high threshold to programme entry. There is a need to mediate between the programme and the young people. The organisations recognise the importance of former participants and personal contacts in providing and relaying information as well as mediation. Cooperation within the network facilitates looking for and placing volunteers as well as matching them to organisations and projects. Within the framework of the Strategic Partnership “Europe for All”, the local partners assume such a role as intermediaries.

“And we are progressing with local networks within Europe for All. So we’re building local networks with other young people, youth groups and communities so they can take part in EVS/ESC. And that seems to be successful that is working for us. Because it allows organisations to let young people rely on each other rather than on one organisation that does everything.”

Interviewee, international partner

The network thus combines various organisations’ skills and resources and creates synergies. This provides access to new organisations and young people. Experts also can confirm that access barriers are not necessarily caused by a lack of information or a mediation problem. Rather the socio-structural barriers and structural barriers described above in youth policy of funding and organisation constitute an obstacle.

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

The European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps demands significant initiative from young people when preparing and planning their stay abroad. For this reason, young people with fewer opportunities need intensive assistance and support. This need usually arises in the course of the voluntary service and as a result of the challenges, the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps creates. However, experts also noted that the educational work and support decreased in importance due to the time intensity of preparing for the programme. When combined with high professional expectations to allow self-organisation and participation, the organisational requirements create obstacles. This phenomenon of the dominance of administrative

concerns over educational ones coincides with the findings of the study on access (cf. Naddaf 2019, Thimmel 2019). The experts' involvement in organisational and bureaucratic contexts culminates in "additional needs speech", which refers to the organisational and planning level and leaves little room for educational and conceptual issues.

"This whole supporting the volunteers and preparing the volunteers is relatively time-consuming and we want to test new formats or ideas, especially as far as peer learning is concerned, and then design workshops to allow this, (...)."

Interviewee, international partner

LONG- AND SHORT-TERM PROJECTS

The distinction between long- and short-term voluntary services is also significant when dealing with access. The participants' experiences prove the importance of group educational formats. The project shows young people's sincere interest in short-term voluntary services and volunteering teams. At the same time, the organisations compare the time and effort spent on organising short-term voluntary services and volunteering teams to those of long-term voluntary services.

"The project has shown that many people want to do short-term voluntary service, not long-term voluntary service. You have to do everything even in short-term voluntary service, when a young person, who has never been abroad wanting to go to Scotland for two weeks: Book flights, get insurance, create a list, and find out how I can get to the airport. Who will pick me up? To coordinate all this, (...) if you just do it for a short time (...) so let's not say three long-term volunteers, but 6 or 8 short-term volunteers, then you multiply the time because you're doing it with 8 participants."

Interviewee, international partner

There was no compensation for successfully reallocating the funding from a long-term voluntary service to a short-term voluntary service within the framework of the project, although this was possible. The organisation's rate long-term and individual voluntary service as demanding. With regards to the activities in the projects, some host organisations regard short-term formats as less effective. On the other hand, the interviewees believe that the development opportunities for organisations and volunteers in long-term voluntary service have expanded.

This results in an ambivalent picture. The range of different European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps activities offered enables a stronger orientation towards young people's interests and is assessed positively. However, organisations have difficulty coping with the amount of work involved in short-term formats. Ways of providing stronger incentives for the organisations and rewarding their efforts more appropriately must be found. The goal should be to balance and link formats. Organisations currently associate short-term formats with additional expenses.

SUMMARY OF ORGANISATIONS' PERSPECTIVES

This study not only reveals access barriers but also possibilities to improve access. The following section summarises the experts' perspectives about possible needs for change.

European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps between development opportunity and high threshold

Organisations have different perceptions of the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps as a development opportunity. The organisations see opportunities for development in terms of content and concept, e.g. expanding their range of services, increasing their international profile and developing their goals innovatively. This means that the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps must be able to follow the organisations' objectives and priorities. At the same time, they associate the introduction of the European Solidarity Corps with uncertainty. With stronger references to solidarity and the changed conceptual orientation of the projects, the interviewees are concerned this will mean the treatment of social problems will be reduced to mere assistance. They do not reject references to solidarity fundamentally. However, the experts point out the risk that volunteer services will be instrumentalised for social and labour market purposes. From a youth education and policy perspective, young people and their interests should always remain in focus.

The educational significance of the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps in terms of the recognising non-formal education should be emphasised, rather than reducing it solely to the assistance format or formal educational aspects (e.g. acquiring skills).

Furthermore, experts emphasise the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps high threshold process in their statements. This particularly relates to the accreditation and application procedure. Implementing the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps is associated with strong organisational, administrative and financial insecurities and burdens for the organisations. The project relied on the proven interaction between networking and cooperation. This created opportunities for participation. The network's project funding enabled local organisations to utilise additional advisory and support services. Also, the project participants' strong personal commitment ensured the success of the cooperation approach. The experts would like the processes initiated here to be continued and developed further. The question should be posed as to how continuity can be achieved despite limited resources.

Small, financially weak organisations with minimal staff, are particularly at a disadvantage during the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps procedures. European funding programmes cannot compensate for the limited resources and lack of structural support for youth work at a local level. The programme only provides project funding,

partly regarded as an additional service. This means the issues of access and the financial resources of youth work and other local participants are linked. Experts' ideas range from additional human resources for the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps projects to developing a youth policy strategy to strengthen the recognition of youth work. The high programme threshold also demonstrates a certain level of distance between applicants and national agencies. The organisations unanimously express more need for support and more transparency and communication, particularly in selecting applications.

“YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES” BETWEEN STRATEGIC CONSTRUCTION, SOCIO-STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE AND INDIVIDUALISATION OF STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

In the course of creating accessible opportunities for young people, the experts critically examine the term “young people with fewer opportunities.” Three different perspectives on the target group and access barriers will be defined.

First, we can define the term “young people with fewer opportunities” as a strategic construction. This target group is evaluated in different ways. The possibility of requesting additional funding requirements is viewed positively. The interviewed experts, however, are concerned about the lack of flexibility of the funding options. Also, they consider existing funding rates too low. Although the lump sums for inclusion lead in the right direction, they are seen as symbolic funding. From this perspective, obstacles in the funding system and the funding logic become visible. At the same time, there is a need a stronger distinction between strategic and administrative processes on the one hand and educational and operative practice on the other. We advocate for careful management of financial resources if we are to avoid administratively restricting the special features of these educational settings.

Second, there is a need to regard disadvantage as a socio-structural problem. This extends the first perspective, which focused on hurdles in the funding system. Social inequalities and structural exclusion are at the centre (e.g. poverty, educational inequality, marginalised districts and youth unemployment). Experiences of exclusion, racism and discrimination as possible access barriers are the main themes in this section. From this perspective, the question of access is closely linked to the social and political conditions under which children and young people grow up. With this, they see the target group construction as an instrument to compensate for possible structural exclusion and to enable alternative experiences (e.g. self-efficacy and participation). At the same time, educational practice shows that discrimination can have many different structural causes and that this attribution does not have to relate to young people's self-perception.

Third, the empirical data shows the risks of individualising structural problems. This perspective contradicts the previ-

ous perspectives, which emphasise structural problems. This is most evident when discussing additional needs. In the context of the funding logic, the experts do not regard differences and different support needs as normal, but as “additional effort and additional demand”. The programme and the politicians place contrast requirements on educational professionals and organisations. They expect that the corresponding target groups to become more involved. However, the prerequisites for this to occur have not been created.

The interviews show that the central barriers exist at the level of the funding system and in the lack of resources at the local level. The aspirations of the “Europe for All” network went beyond the educational level. Access for organisations and young people were made possible through cooperation and networks with local partners. The project shows that the link between international youth work and local youth work has potential. This potential exists in particular in breaking down the special status of the so-called disadvantaged young people. There are valuable opportunities for connection at the conceptual level. Given the barriers to youth policy and structures, we need action to stabilise processes that have already begun.

The interviewed experts strive for and wish to use the network more as an opportunity for joint lobbying work and developing measures at the political level. “Interference” can thus be formulated as a central strategy for future networking. Organisations should also use Intellectual output for this purpose. To ensure the long-term security of local actors, the development of a youth policy strategy seems indispensable from the perspective of other research and practical projects (cf. Becker/Thimmel 2019).

¹ Within the Strategic Partnership, these organisations were also referred to as local partners. These organisations are characterised by their proximity to the target group “young people with fewer opportunities” and a strong local perspective. In the project language, international partners were defined as organisations that have been active in the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps for a longer period of time.

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Давай най-доброото от себе си

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Make memories
спомени

Have fun

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AN ADVENTUROUS JOURNEY-

A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE ON INCLUSION AND HOW IT CAN WORK!

"Firstly, I was extremely nervous to be a participant, as I had never done anything like this in my life. I was worried that no one would be able to communicate and that we wouldn't get along. I was also scared that the European Solidarity Corps was not a proper thing and we would end up in some place that was not what it said it would be"

Aiesha Marr, ex-volunteer

These are feelings of a young person before she participated in her first mobility project with Achieve More Scotland, as part of the Strategic Partnership "Europe for All". The volunteering experience had a meaningful impact on Aiesha as she would describe it to be an "experience that changed me as a person". As the main goal of "Europe for All" is to reach young people with fewer opportunities across the four partner countries, to participate in international mobility projects and who would benefit the most out of it, this article will look at the background of volunteer participation and inclusion with case-studies from young persons who participated in volunteering activities within the network of "Europe for All".

In December 2014 – as written in article two-, the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture released a report on 'Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy'. The document highlighted the targeting of organisations working with young persons with fewer opportunities within the framework of the European Union's programmes for some years. As early as 2007 and 2013, the EU has funded mobility projects through the Youth in Action Programme which tackled social inclusion. The 2014 Strategy aimed to achieve greater impact in targeting young persons with fewer opportunities and to ensure that Erasmus+ responded positively to diversity in the field of Youth (Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy, 2014).

Another big aspiration of the strategy is to equip youth workers and youth work professionals with basic competences to manage and work with diversity in all forms. Each of these aims will contribute to a positive impact on a young person with fewer opportunities across the EU. The summer camp in 2018 held in Germany and the volunteering team held in the same place in 2019 both give an insight to how inspiring such short term international mobility experiences can be for young persons who usually do not have access to international mobility measures:

In the summer of 2018, ten young people from Achieve More Scotland participated in a two-week summer camp in Germany. The theme of the camp was around migration and working with young persons from a migrant background. The

summer camp activities included various workshops on music, dance, film and media as well as sports. Young people explored the issues of migration, living in Europe, gender issues, and leadership. In addition to all the learning and meaningful contents of the seminar, the young people got to visit the local town and the city of Cologne as part of their international camp experience. The mixture of learning and leisure time meant that young persons did not miss out on enjoying themselves during the summer months. For some of the participants, it was the first time being away from Glasgow and being in a group with other young people. The concept of "Europe for All" is to engage young persons in international youth exchanges on a bilateral or multilateral level before they participate in an international volunteering activity within the network of the youth exchange.

This proved to be very successful: the first experience made within the project gave the young people a common ground to be encouraged to participate in volunteering activities afterwards. The quote from Aiesha Marr shows that most of the youths who do not come from backgrounds where international mobility experiences are widespread do have fears about being able to not cope with the communication in another language or with loneliness/not feeling well throughout the measure.

The local preparation meeting with the whole national group in their home countries gave these young people space and the opportunity to talk about their fears and their hopes and to find solutions on how they could support themselves. The well-known accompanying person from each country gave these youths the safety they needed and prevented them from cancelling the project before it started or from feeling uncomfortable.

The reflection sessions throughout the camp in the national groups also helped to cope with stressful moments as everyone could talk in their first or second language and were supported by the other participants and the team. Some of the youths who participated in the summer camp in 2018 were motivated to do a volunteering team in 2019 in Germany. It shows that the obstacle of bringing young persons to overcome the first step into international youth work is the biggest

challenge. The next example of volunteering activity in Glasgow proves that the team concept also works in the field of volunteering activities quite well – regardless of the support the youth's needs:

In July 2019, Achieve More hosted a young person and her assistant from Germany for two weeks. The young person volunteered at the annual summer camp which Achieve More runs every year. The camp focuses on tackling holiday hunger across the city of Glasgow by giving the children and young persons aged 5-18 space and support to enjoy a range of sports. The organisation also provides transport, food and venue hire which cuts out all obstacles to participation for the young people. As part of her volunteering experience, Toni reflected on her experience by writing a short blog for our website.

“My name's Toni and I have had the honour of supporting this great organisation as part of my short-term volunteering service spanning two weeks in July 2019. As soon as I arrived in Glasgow after an extensive 15-hour journey, I received a very warm welcome from Ahmed, who'd sorted out my ways of transportation like a champ! The following Monday allowed me to catch a glimpse of the ongoing summer camp, leaving me a bit flabbergasted at the sheer amount of young persons and volunteers who were participating as well. That astonishment didn't last too long, however, as I took initiative and plunged right in- greeting kids and future co-workers left and right. I spent my days cheering on kids, deflecting wayward footballs and making sure that everyone had a great time. I got to know some of the kids and their backstories over lunch breaks and was thoroughly amazed by their limitless energy and unbreakable enthusiasm. I'm no football scout myself but many of these kids have undeniable talent most Scottish football clubs would be lucky to foster. No matter the situation, the staff and kids were respectful and friendly, making the fact that I'm a wheelchair user a non-issue. This is certainly something that Germany as a whole needs to get better at. Volunteering gave me some unique insights into the lives of young Scottish people and allowed me to reflect on the way that it is done back home.

I divided up my time between volunteering for Achieve More and the Reidvale Community Centre, a hub only a 15-minute bus ride away from the city centre of Glasgow. There I was put in charge of bolstering their social media profile, providing CC for existing videos as well as editing some of them to be published at a later date. When I wasn't busy creating content, I used my time to help out the youths downstairs, acting as a referee to several improvised pool and archery competitions. I can assure you, dear reader, that I did my utmost best to ensure that none of them got harmed. A big thank you to Josh and his team for providing me with an unforgettable experience. The second week allowed for me to interact more with other international volunteers and thanks to Luna, those moments are now forever caught on pictures, some of which you'll see attached to this post. Although all of us were from different parts of Europe and (in some cases) the globe, we got on really well. Part of it, at least from my perspective, was that we had the common goal of making life just a little bit better for the young persons we interacted with.

But the time volunteering did not just change other people – most of all it changed me, too. Those two weeks were the first truly independent ones I'd experienced so far. At first, it seemed daunting but braving them on my own allowed me to be more courageous and assured me that I could tackle everything I wanted. For those yet undecided – foreign or not – I say: go for it. It'll change you and your way of living“ (Achieve More Scotland, Website Blog).





This blog entry of Toni shows that it is not necessarily the length of time the volunteers' activity lasts, it is important how challenging an activity is and how deep the impact is on the volunteer. Especially when young persons do not have had access to international mobility measures, personal and social growth can be enormous compared to young persons who are used to international mobility measures.

When young people have certain obstacles to overcome to participate in international mobility measures, they gain numerous personal and social competences, the sense of self-worth and the feeling of playing an active part in society increases to a great extent. The quote from Tony also shows that the amount of growth and self-development is clearly related to the pedagogical and personal support a young person gets throughout the stay. If the staff supports the young person to overcome obstacles the increase of competences is enormous. Especially the experience that being a wheelchair-user did not play a role at all was a very strengthening experience for Tony not having a focus on her disability at all.

In the same period, during mid-July 2019, 6 young persons from Achieve More were taking part in their first-ever volunteering team in Germany. This activity followed on the success of the 2018 camp and this year the volunteering team was based on working with the local community, elderly, young persons and being more sustainable. The group of volunteers was made up of young persons from Italy, Bulgaria, Germany and Scotland and participated in activities ranging from team building, working in the local community by undertaking tasks such as gardening and helping the communities' elderly people. A significant aspect of this initiative was working with young persons from the local community and offering a range of fun and engaging activities based on skills previously learned through the Achieve More Volunteer Development Programme.

One of the young persons who went from Achieve More was Aiesha Marr. Aiesha volunteered at Achieve More's a local partner Reidvale Youth Club. In reflecting on her experience Aiesha said:

“When I arrived, I was so nervous, but the German leaders who were already there were fantastic. The house was nice and there was so much space for activities. It made me feel like a child at summer school. My nervousness disappeared when we all were introduced to one another. We decided to play football and we all soon quickly bonded. After this, we participated in team bonding exercises by other leaders. This was a great way of getting us to bond and help us quickly work together. We then got asked about our fears etc. which helped us all realise we had similar fears. Everything on the first day was well planned and thought out. Sometimes these types of workshops are overdone and do not work – especially as I do these workshops weekly.

The quote from Aiesha shows how important it is to have enough space to reflect the emotional distress of being abroad within a safe pedagogical setting. Aiesha experienced that having fears when abroad usually occurs for every youngster and can create bonding between participants when everyone can talk about them. Also, a structured setting helps youths to overcome fears, to feel invited to point out the weaknesses of the program and to articulate uncomfortable moments. All in all, a well-balanced pedagogical setting helps young persons to feel safe within the unknown experience. The next quote indicates how deeply impressed Aiesha with being in contact with elderly people as a target group she did not have many contacts within Glasgow:

We were introduced to our projects at Klostergarten the options were, working in the kindergarden, working with the elderly, working in the garden making a sculpture and making furniture. I chose to work with the elderly, as I

met the elderly, they did not speak English. The next day the leader for this project suggested we could come up with ideas and do something different. This was fantastic as I had thought about making flags/decorations for the garden. The leader got the materials and we started to do this project. However, people in my group were not participating well and just standing around as they felt awkward. I feel perhaps some team bonding exercises with the elderly would have made other people more comfortable. I decided to ensure the elderly were the ones doing this -which was so fun. They really enjoyed this exercise and even though no one spoke English I could pick up the needs of the elderly. The next day we did pedicures/manicures which my entire group enjoyed doing. The elderly loved it! It was really fun and we all left feeling good about this. I got friendly with an elderly woman and I would go to her room to see her. I would just chat with her and one of the workers, I really loved that. I will always remember that woman."

Aiesha then went on to describe some of the challenges she's faced during the camp. "Another issue was because people were from different countries, of course, people have different values (which I understand). It can be really difficult to hear people be so sexist especially the girls. There were discussions around the idea that "women deserve certain things" or "women should look after their man and cook for him and care for him." This was the girls saying this, so it was difficult for me to be around this as I am trying to be understanding but I have different morals. This is the purpose of these projects so we can learn and understand others, but I defiantly learned patience."

Aiesha then describes the different ways she believed young persons could be engaged with mobility projects like the one she had experienced. "I think a great idea would be to have someone who has already been to go around student unions, student bars, universities, colleges, schools, youth clubs' social places. Then just speak to people about it -have a stall type thing. Hype it up because it is good. Making sure it is a young person who is doing this as people want to relate to others. Then set up a meeting and answer questions etc. Get a well know YouTube/social media famous person to do a video on the project. Go to geographical communities with more poverty so that it includes people who may not have an opportunity like this (including people with disabilities)."

Thus, being part of youth work initiatives like the "Europe for All" project, allows young persons with fewer opportunities to learn new skills and challenge themselves in new ways. For example, Aiesha believes that her volunteering experience taught her many skills; patience, understanding cultures and traditions, being more open, being more trusting, communication skills, engaging with others outside her comfort zone, listening skills, dancing skills, self-awareness, sharing personal experience and feelings, thinking on your feet, creativity, learning a new language and gender awareness. Therefore, her benefit from one mobility experience is abundant and will have a great impact on her life. As the importance of personal development gained through mobility projects cannot be emphasised enough.

Inclusion mobility projects ensure young people are valued, respected allowed to thrive. National and international policies have been developed over time to further protection for all young persons and guarantee safeguarding when participating in youth work projects. The work of the EU Commission has also affirmed the protection of young persons on mobility projects through the passing of policies for Member State and all Erasmus+ programme applicants. Overall, "Europe for All" aims to be more inclusive and foster the participation of young people with fewer opportunities. In doing so, over many months of the project, a range of young people have been given the opportunity to take in volunteering experience's that would not have been easily accessible to them.

In doing so, communities both national and international will benefit from the experiences of having European volunteers and gain a further understanding of the lasting impact of mobility projects.

JELENA AURACHER AND FRANZISKA KOCH | BEZEV ESSEN/GERMANY

PROJECT PRESENTATION: “CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING”

There are many opportunities for international volunteering. People of all ages can volunteer for either a short- or long-term service in almost every country worldwide. Voluntary services, work camps, internships, youth exchanges or senior expert assignments are just a few of many opportunities for international voluntary services, which are often state-funded.

In recent years, there has also been an increase in the number of possibilities for people with impairments/disabilities to go abroad. Equal to other people, they gain valuable personal and professional experience. In Germany, this process was among others accompanied by the commitment of the organisation “Behinderung und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit” (Disability and Development Cooperation) (bezev). For almost ten years, bezev has been a contact point for questions, sensitisation, counselling, training and networking on the subject of inclusion of people with impairments/disabilities in the field of voluntary services and international involvement. Since 2008, bezev has also been sending volunteers with and without disabilities abroad as part of the German voluntary service *weltwärts*.

bezev’s offers are aimed towards (potential) volunteers, i.e. people with impairments/disabilities, organisations of various formats of international voluntary services at home and abroad, counselling centres, disabled people’s organisations, as well as the programmes themselves. The work began as part of a “*weltwärts*” pilot project. “*Weltwärts*” is a German development policy long-term voluntary service that takes place in countries of the Global South. Meanwhile, a “Centre of Excellence for Inclusive Volunteering” has emerged to identify obstacles and barriers faced by people with impairments and disabilities when considering participating in many different institutions of foreign involvement. The centre looks to reducing these obstacles and barriers in the long term.

HOW CAN THE ASPIRATION OF INCLUSION IN WORK BE TRANSFERRED TO THE FIELD OF PUBLIC RELATIONS?

The first barrier people with impairments/disabilities usually face when going abroad is to learn that it is possible for them to volunteer at all. Throughout their lives, people with impairments/disabilities often experience that even in offers pretending to be “open to all”, accessibility is not taken into account and participation is thereby prevented. In addition, they often do not have any personal role models, for exam-

ple, other people with disabilities who had already volunteered abroad. Furthermore, the potential volunteers themselves or their families are worried that a voluntary service could not be an option due to barriers in the host countries.

On the other hand, there are already several organisations working inclusively, or are in the process to open up to inclusive work. These organisations often face the problem that they do not receive applications or enquiries from people with impairments, partly because of the barriers mentioned above. So, on the one hand there is an information gap of potential volunteers; on the other hand, there is a knowledge gap of organisations on how to address people with impairments in a targeted way. Inclusive work therefore needs a targeted approach to people with disabilities in order to solve this dilemma. Not only mental barriers must be reduced but also technical barriers in the area of information and communication channels are relevant.

This article seeks to provide handy tips on how barrier-free public relations can be successful.

BARRIER-FREE PUBLIC RELATIONS

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) makes the right to accessible information and communication (Article 9) binding. This gives people with disabilities a right to accessible information. As part of their inclusion and diversity strategies, The Erasmus+ programme Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps approach the special needs of young people with fewer opportunities, including, among others, those with impairments/disabilities. These programmes claim to be inclusive and ask their participating organisations to approach disadvantaged groups actively and break down barriers (Erasmus + Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps).

Förster (1991) defines public relations as fostering and promoting the relationship of an organisation to various dialogue groups. This means that “good public relations work effectively transports the objectives, interests, activities and behaviours of an organisation, i.e. in a way that is appropriate for the target group, eye-catching and barrier-free, into different dialogue groups.”

Accessibility primarily strives to enable people with impairments/disabilities to participate in all areas of life, but offers some advantages in other aspects as well. Barrier-free

public relations work means expanding its reach. It improves an organisation's image and can be understood as a sustainable investment in organisational structures.

REQUIREMENTS AND ACCESSIBILITY

What do these legal and definitional framework conditions mean in practice? In order to truly get the target group "people with impairment/disability" involved in public relations work, we must understand that this target group is a heterogeneous group with a wide variety of accessibility requirements. There is not the one type of accessible public relations that suits everyone. Therefore, we need to review all public relations work on accessibility according to the different needs and types of impairments/disabilities. Previously defined standards and DIN-German Industry Standards for accessibility requirements can serve as a benchmark. Barrier-free public relations, in addition to orientation towards accessibility standards, requires various appropriate provisions, i.e. adapt contents, formats and locations to meet the requirement of different audiences with their different needs in order to reach them equally well and effectively.

ADAPTING CONTENTS, FORMATS AND LOCATIONS

With regard to the content of our public relations work, the following is important: If we wish to work inclusively, we should communicate this accordingly. Many people with disabilities feel that they are excluded from the services if they are not explicitly informed that they are open to them. This is due to the fact that, as already mentioned at the beginning, they have often experienced for years that they are not being considered in certain areas of life. Explicit references to accessibility, as well as contact people, who offer further barrier-free information on the subject of inclusion in the respective offer, are therefore a recipe for success in reaching people with impairments/disabilities.

Especially if a variety of target groups shall be reached, it is important to adapt the information individually where needed. In individual cases, the communication of an "inclusive offer" can be perceived as a "specific offer for people with impairments/disabilities". This can lead to an unwanted image shift that can be avoided by explaining what "inclusion" means in the concrete offer, for example, that it is open to a variety of people. In addition to people with impairments/disabilities, other desired target groups of inclusion can be named. If there is some support for the promotion or other adjustment of the offer for these target groups, such as the assumption of additional costs in connection with an impairment/disability, this should also be clearly communicated.

The **formats**, or instruments of public relations, are divided into three categories: written, electronic and personal. Only if the formats are adapted "barrier-free", people with various needs receive the necessary information.

Written tools in public relations include press releases, flyers, brochures, magazines, posters and letters. For print docu-



ments, it can be helpful to offer Braille, large print or digital versions for people with visual impairments. Written public relations should also always be offered in a language easy to read. This enables not only people with learning difficulties to understand the content of public relations work without help. It also addresses other target groups, such as people with a migration background, deaf people or people who are not familiar with the subject area.

Electronic public relations tools include websites, images and videos, digital newsletters and the various social media platforms. For the barrier-free design of digital products, such as websites, it is important that navigation, all links and form fields can be operated by keyboard, since people with visual impairments often operate the computer without a mouse.

Since screen reader programmes for people with visual impairments present the content purely through text, it is important that the content of the website is understandable without CSS, JavaScript and images. Pictures or videos often contain relevant graphic and/or acoustic information that cannot be perceived by people with visual or hearing impairments. In order to make graphic content in videos accessible, an audio description is necessary, since it is not possible for screen reader programmes to interpret an image or video. For electronic photos and graphics, it is necessary to store alternative texts in addition to subtitling. In order to make acoustic information accessible to deaf people in videos, a descriptive subtitling usually makes sense. Of course, the information can also be displayed by a person who translates it into sign language.

With the help of a checklist, your own internet presence can be checked against the four formulated success principles: "perceptible", "operable", "comprehensible" and "robust", and then adapted if necessary. An external audit of the website (and other public relations products) for the needs

of persons with disabilities is offered by national disabled people's organisations or institutes in various countries.

Personal public relations work mainly takes place at events, information stands, press conferences or lectures. If it is known that deaf people are in the target group of the event, sign language interpreters are to be engaged. If a personal exchange takes place in buildings, it must be ensured that, for example, high-contrast marking of entrances, wide and step-free doors/entrances, lifts and accessible sanitary facilities are available. Asking the venue whether it is barrier-free and possibly inspecting it, is recommended. Otherwise it may happen that on the day of the event a person may be standing in front of barriers that prevent participation.

With regard to places of public relations work, the aim is to find out where people with disabilities obtain information. In order to reach specific target groups, it can be very useful to follow a "two-track" approach. The regular places, which are already used in public relations work, should continue to be served. In addition, networks of relevant institutions and individuals that are relevant for reaching specific target groups should be created.

Disabled people's organisations, inclusive or specific educational institutions, as well as other places where e.g. persons with disabilities learn, live or work, can be important keys to the new/specific target group. Places can be accessed both online and offline. For example, posts in internet forums for deaf people can be helpful for target group effective public relations work. The same applies to information events at schools for persons with disabilities. bezev has had very good experiences working with former volunteers who themselves have a disability, as they can address the target group authentically.



CONCLUSION

The topic of inclusion and accessible public relations may initially seem impossible and overwhelming. However, positive experiences with youths and young adults with various impairments have proven the following: Anyone can participate. Step by step. It is difficult to implement the above tips all at once, but it can be helpful, for example, to carefully read the wording on one's own public relations materials and to consider whether persons with disabilities feel addressed. Or even better: to consult persons with disabilities whether they feel addressed. By involving them in the production of the materials, a major goal of inclusive work is already achieved. "Nothing about us, without us" is an essential principle of the disabled people's organisations worldwide. Including everyone, also persons with disabilities, in our own work is lived inclusion.

Note:

You can get further information on accessibility in terms of locations, content and public relations formats as well as a collection of other useful tips on inclusion and public relations formats in the publication of bezev (2017) "Jetzt einfach machen" ("Just Do It Now!") (Available as DVD with materials in English, Spanish, French and German)

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INVOLVEMENT OF DIFFERENT TARGET GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

PROJECT BACKGROUND

One of the main aims of the project "Europe for All" is to explore the conditions for tailor-made European Voluntary Service/ European Solidarity Corps projects to ensure a successful voluntary service for young people with fewer opportunities. To involve these participants, the partners jointly implemented various types of volunteering projects in the course of "Europe for All" to gain experience with various approaches. In this article, two different ways of including the target group of participants with fewer opportunities are examined by comparing project activities of two different types: 1) projects in which the participants consisted solely of young people with fewer opportunities and 2) projects in which participants were mixed, i.e. involving at the same time young people with fewer opportunities and others not being part of this particular target group.

The article intends to share the experiences collected with these two approaches and, thereby, to provide guidance and recommendations for youth workers and other organisations to launch similar projects.

For this purpose, two specific projects will be examined here as cases in which either one of the mentioned approaches was used. Both of them were short-term European Solidarity Corps volunteering team projects:

1. The volunteering team project "Building Up to Sustainable Performance in communities" took place in Bornheim, Germany, and involved participants from all the four partner countries. It targeted solely young people with fewer opportunities who are integrated too little into our societies. By participating in this activity, the young people had the chance to experience voluntary work in a multinational group with other peers. This way they were encouraged to consider thinking about individual short-term participation or a long-term voluntary service afterwards. The joint voluntary work was done in an intergenerational community centre and was involving work with elderly residents and young children as well as gardening activities. The project intended to increase the recognition of young people with fewer opportunities by drawing on their contribution to the improvement of cross-generational understanding and communal life.

2. The project "Volunteering: a step up in your life" took place in Ruse, Bulgaria. It was dedicated to the realisation of the Ruse Carnival. In this case, only a certain part of the participants could be defined as "having fewer opportunities". The volunteers were in charge of organising meetings with local youngsters and promoting the idea of volunteering; participating in a promotion campaign about the Carnival as well as in street workshops with local people (e.g. painting faces, creating carnival masks). Through the support and the promotion of activities for young people in the local community, the volunteers gained new skills in the field of art, culture and youth work. Additionally, they improved their abilities to work in a team to make decisions and they gained new competencies needed for their future personal and professional life.

PREPARATION PHASE

The preparation stage of the activities included active communication between the project partners where details of the activities were planned carefully and the possible participation of both target groups was discussed. It is important to agree on the main characteristics of the activities to be performed by the volunteers in the hosting organisations, so that the learning dimension can always be present and guaranteed for all participants, without discriminating against one or another target group. The volunteering activity in Germany was characterised by a strong and well-developed "safe environment" for the young participants where accompanying persons and reinforced mentorship and support were prepared before the activities and available during the entire implementation phase. The activities to be carried out by the volunteers were carefully chosen and

planned. An Advance Planning Visit (APV) was organised to ensure that all logistics and organisational matters, as well as the programme, were fully corresponding to the needs of the young people with fewer opportunities taking part in the activity. It included the preparation of the accompanying persons and actively involved them in developing the programme and approaches of the volunteering project. The meeting was also used to create a good basis for effective and supportive teamwork. Different methodologies of working with each other and working with the young persons were discussed, as well as possible challenges and individual needs of the volunteers and the accompanying team.

In the case of the volunteering project in Bulgaria, the activities were implemented with the participation of young people with and without fewer opportunities. No APV was carried out, so all the participants came together at the very start of the volunteering project. Furthermore, there were no additional accompanying persons for the participants from each country, but during the project, several local mentors were foreseen for extra support to the young people with fewer opportunities. This volunteering project was thus an occasion to monitor the inclusion of both target groups within one project and to analyse the resulting inclusion process and the interaction between the participants.

During the preparation phases for both types of projects, the participating organisations implemented the following activities:

1. PROMOTION OF THE VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY AMONG THE TARGET GROUPS

Some well-known and efficient channels were used to promote the opportunity among young people on a general level:

- | **contact with former participants in other activities provided by the organisations**
- | **invitation to the young people to share the opportunity with their friends and peers, e.g. in school or sports clubs**
- | **distribution of flyers to promote the idea and hand the information to their friends**
- | **promotion on webpages of the organisations as well as their social media accounts**

In addition to these general measures, it seemed to be necessary to plan and carry out specific measures to attract particularly young people with fewer opportunities. To do this, the participating organisations:

- | **contacted youth clubs in their area and asked them to promote the opportunity and to specifically talk to youngsters with fewer opportunities amongst their visi-**

tors and target groups. Some partners invited the potential participants to the youth clubs and/or their offices and presented the opportunity. This method was drawn from past experiences which showed that having a personal contact in advance of a project makes it easier for young people to get in touch with the sending organisation in case they consider to become a volunteer. Sometimes this is necessary to encourage young people to consider the opportunity to volunteer at all.

- | **approached youth social workers and school social workers whom they knew from former cooperation and asked them to advertise the projects to young people in their surroundings who could benefit from participating in the activity.**
- | **Visited evening schools and other support structures attended by youngsters who face difficulties with their educational careers, e.g. with finishing high school.**
- | **Organised meetings with the local administration and with social service providers to reach out to young citizens facing socio-economic disadvantages.**

2. SELECTION OF THE VOLUNTEERS

The usual procedure included the collection of CVs and letters of motivation from the applicants. Alternatively, they were requested to fill in a specific application form asking for personal data and their motivation for taking part in the activity.

The approach for the selection of young people with fewer opportunities was different from the one used in similar projects not focusing on this target group. Some of the sending partners preferred to meet the applicants for an interview. This was done because it seemed often easier for them to talk about their motivation and their aims than to write them down. Additionally, the advantage of an interview is that the interviewer can ask questions if they feel something wasn't answered completely or if they get the impression, that the candidate might have forgotten or misunderstood something. This helps the candidates to present themselves in the best way possible - and also in a more realistic way than through a letter of motivation. In some cases, Skype interviews with the hosting organisation were conducted. If needed, social or youth workers from the sending organisations were also present during the interviews to support the young person (e.g. on an emotional level or with translations).

3. PREPARATION BEFORE THE DEPARTURE

The two different types of volunteering activities required different approaches to the preparation of the participants. Thus, the preparation of the mixed group followed a different pattern than one of the participants with fewer opportunities.

For the preparation of the volunteers not affected by fewer



opportunities, standard measures could be used: live or online meetings with the staff of the sending organisation; in some cases, brief one-day pre-departure preparation pieces of training were offered. All these aimed at giving general information to the volunteers about the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps programme and its philosophy as well as about the specific project, the planned activities and programme as well as practical aspects.

The young participants with fewer opportunities were additionally offered specific preparation initiatives and activities, especially those taking part in the case of the volunteering activity in Germany. These included preparation meetings with the accompanying person focusing specifically on the needs, potential questions and worries of the volunteers. In some cases, the preparation took place in one-to-one settings, through phone or Skype calls (e.g. to talk about expectations, possibilities, tasks, fears, strengths; help with administrative matters, such as the registration with the European Solidarity Corps).

Where applicable, youth social workers were also included in the preparation as well as the parents of the participants. In some cases, the preparation was also supported by a school social worker. In general, the pre-departure training has been longer than the one usually organised for young people without fewer opportunities. More time was invested in encouraging the volunteers to reflect on their motivation, expectations and fears and to assist them for example with administrative tasks. This showed to be very useful and effective.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

The two types of projects differed in the way of implementing the volunteering activities, both revealing useful approaches for working with the target groups.

1. ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE VOLUNTEERS

In the case of the volunteering team in Germany, which was targeting only participants with fewer opportunities, the activities were specifically chosen based on the individual needs of each volunteer in the group. Each volunteer was very closely monitored and supported by the accompanying persons and could select by him/herself a specific task to be involved in. Working as a mentor/accompanying person during such a project is always a challenging task, which is why it is important to discuss this in advance, to build up a good team and for the team to know that they can rely on each other. Also, to guarantee high-quality work, the team needs to know that they can get support from the full-time staff if needed as a backup. As mentioned, the APV was used to build up a basis for this. Ongoing contact between the accompanying persons, the team leader and the full-time staff member in the time between the APV and the actual

start of the voluntary service showed to be very important for the preparation of the implementation phase. Online platforms, such as Trello were used for that. Also, Skype calls were experienced to be helpful.

The exchange of pedagogical points of view, individual expertise and methods went on during the project. An important factor for a successful work by the pedagogical team was providing enough time for regular daily team-meetings. These meetings allowed the accompanying persons to monitor the processes, plan and adjust the programme continuously, but also to reflect and discuss challenges and unforeseen aspects. The accompanying persons knew that they could always contact a staff member of the hosting organisation in case of emergency, day and night. To ensure that the volunteers could always reach the accompanying persons, a mobile phone was provided by the host organisation. The accompanying persons took shifts so that one of them was always available 24/7 to ensure the psychosocial wellbeing of the volunteers.

Every day, the young people met with their accompanying persons to discuss the experiences, to reflect on them and to get additional information. This activity was carried out in small groups to give everyone the chance to get involved actively. The experience shows that it is important for young people to get some time to exchange and reflect in the language they know best from their home country. Since many of the young persons did not speak the language of their current resident country as native speakers, sometimes the accompanying persons switched to “groups of languages”. In addition to reacting to the needs of the volunteers, in this way a strong peer approach was included. The young persons supported each other in their mother tongues. Some of them took on the responsibility of translating what the accompanying person told the youngsters or vice versa. Though this was not necessary for communication in general, it allowed the youngsters to express their thoughts and experiences more thoroughly and freely and to discuss more intensely in their native tongues. This approach added to their learning experience on a personal and social level.

During the volunteering activity in Bulgaria, which was characterised by a mixed group of participants (with and without fewer opportunities), the proposed activities were the same for all participants – always taking their personal preferences and individual needs into consideration. The mentor support was less reinforced and tailor-made than in the volunteering project in Germany and no accompanying persons were involved. Small groups of three volunteers were assigned to one individual local mentor. The mentorship and the evaluation activities were carried out in small groups. As an additional measure, the young participants with fewer opportunities were monitored and supported in a way which allowed them to be autonomous but at the same time follow their learning process. To ensure the assistance for these participants, the sending organisations were in constant contact with them and with the hosting organisation. In case of need, individual mentoring or support sessions were organised with

some participants. The peer-to-peer learning experiences were possible thanks to the mixing and cooperation between the two target groups during the activities and during their free time which ensured an efficient inclusion.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Evaluation activities were carried out after both types of projects. In both cases, a written evaluation was requested from the volunteers in the form of the standard European Solidarity Corps Mobility Tool individual assessment questionnaire. It seemed though that it was not easy for most volunteers to fill it in, showing that additional support for this step might be necessary, especially for the participants with fewer opportunities. In addition to that, questionnaires composed by the participating organisations aiming at assessing specific aspects of the project were used.

The project held in Germany applied additional activities and instruments for assessment: Evaluation at the end of the voluntary service with the accompanying persons (face to face, questions had been prepared, a report was prepared). Written feedback (with guiding questions) from the accompanying persons was received which included their perspective about the participants’ point of view, too. In this case, participants were also asked to give their feedback at the end of the project, in the circle of all participants, as well as within their small daily groups, both in written as well as spoken or using other interactive methods.

Overall, individual meetings with participants with fewer opportunities showed to be a good instrument of collecting realistic and specific feedback about their experiences and whether they felt their needs to be considered well or if they were missing something.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF BOTH PROJECT TYPES

Based on the experiences made, the consortium concludes that the participation of young people with fewer opportunities generally should not be considered to be a problem. It simply means that all these groups have their specific needs and their participation in European volunteering projects would be impossible without special measures and additional support by the organisations offering the projects. For all the organisations participating in the Strategic Partnership, involving young people with fewer opportunities in the European Solidarity Corps is seen as an instrument to reach long-term goals and complementing the work already done with them at a local level. In everyday-work, young persons should not be labelled as young people with fewer opportunities. The experiences made in the two presented cases confirm the attitude of seeing and treating this specific target group simply as young people like all other young people. They are individuals who have their individual needs and their strengths. Also, they are capable of taking on responsibility and should be given space to make their own choices. Based on this pedagogical approach, the accompanying persons, mentors and supervisors chose their actions for

inclusion, motivation and troubleshooting, where necessary. It was important for their individual development to treat the young people simply as young individuals and see how to work best with them, instead of continuing a repeating stigmatisation pattern, which at least some of them have to face regularly in every-day life. To be able to work with this approach, it is, of course, necessary to have pedagogically highly qualified personnel, who can use their knowledge and experience regarding the specific needs and topics that are relevant to the target group. They need to be very flexible in their work and choice of methods. Building up a trustful relationship with young people is an important basis for the work in general and even more crucial when it comes to international activities. This is why, in the case of the project in Germany, it was so valuable that the young people met their accompanying persons in advance. Also, it proved to be very helpful to work in a diverse team. This enabled the accompanying persons to support each other and to learn from each other's different backgrounds but it also allowed them to offer a diversity of contact persons from whom the participants could select individually their favourite or suitable mentor for their needs.

Taking into consideration the volunteering activity in Bulgaria it was confirmed that it is efficient when the project activities are the same for both - participants with and without fewer opportunities. In this way, they can feel equal and cooperate successfully with each other, which is helping the disadvantaged young persons to socialise better, become more autonomous and create new friendships with other young people. The international partners conclude from their experiences that it is important to propose mixed activities and projects, in which both target groups meet, learn from each other, have a positive experience and accept each other regardless of their differences, thus practising inclusion in international volunteering. These mixed projects furthermore also present a suitable approach for youth organisations which do not have the resources to work with all target groups on a separate level or which only target young people with fewer opportunities, but still want to make their work more inclusive. However, in such cases where all of the participants need a constantly high level of support by accompanying persons during the entire project implementation, mixing both target groups might not be so efficient. A project where only young people with fewer opportunities meet and work together could be the right first step in international activities for young persons facing serious obstacles to become autonomous or to overcome challenges related to their disadvantage.

There is no doubt that when working on a project in which only young people with fewer opportunities taking part, this requires more resources: more time, more qualified staff, rich experience of the organisation and its team is working with this specific target group and suitable facilities - all of which is often connected to higher financial expenses.

BENEFITS FOR THE ACTORS INVOLVED IN PROJECTS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

The experience of the partners shows that the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in the two presented types of European Solidarity Corps projects brings benefits to all participants. But, in particular, for young people with fewer opportunities, some specific benefits can be observed, such as:

- | They improve their social skills and feel being part of society
- | They gain or improve soft skills and become more independent
- | They positively increase their motivation and self-esteem

The organisations sending and hosting participants with fewer opportunities also declare benefits from these types of projects:

- | The collection of experience in working with specific target groups and learning new approaches, methods and instruments for youth work.
- | The promotion and development of approaches, methods and tools for peer-to-peer learning by involving young people with and young people without fewer opportunities.
- | The promotion of volunteering in local communities as an instrument to support these communities and at the same time as an instrument for the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities into these local communities.



THE POTENTIAL OF PEER LEARNING AND BLENDED LEARNING FOR YOUTH WORK AND VOLUNTEERING

This article focuses on the potential and effectiveness of practical methods of Peer Learning and Blended Learning used to engage with volunteers, young people and especially the target group of young people with fewer opportunities.

For this purpose, the approach taken by "Young Movers Youth Bank" (YoMo), a Glasgow based charity is explored on the one hand. On the other hand, experiences collected through the Strategic Partnership "Europe for All" will be examined. In this context, the terms "teaching" and "learning" are understood differently from their meaning used in a school context. The authors refer to these terms in their broader sense which includes everyday learning or experience, also known as non-formal learning processes. The underlying concepts point out that learning does not have to be structured as a top-down transmission of expert knowledge, but is based on interaction, participation and reciprocity.

The outcome of such a process is not necessarily always completely predictable, which, allows unanticipated learning processes to take place.

CONCEPTUALISING PEER LEARNING

Peer Learning is defined as a learning process that takes place when a group of people, who share some sort of common ground, comes together. They could, for example, be of the same age or in equal life situation, position or status. It is characterised by a combination of learning from and with each other. The method can be applied to working with different groups, consisting of young people, adults or

professionals. Peer Learning makes use of a combination of methods allowing people to exchange experiences or knowledge and teach each other. Moreover, Peer Learning is not a one-way process, so that even professionals acting as peer educators also benefit from this method of knowledge sharing.

When working with young people, for example, those who share their knowledge – usually youth workers or other professionals – at the same time also learn how to improve their skills in transmitting their messages in a participatory and targeted way and, as a result, gain insights into the lifeworld of young people. To ensure that Peer Learning is effective, the similarities in the participants' backgrounds have to be strong enough to produce a shared understanding of the topics. At the same time, the existing differences create productive "irritation", which leads to learning processes.

Peer Learning is based on voluntary participation. It is learner-centred and process-oriented, which means that it is not strictly focused on specific outcomes. Instead, the process is dynamic and flexible. This allows flexibility on the part of the educator and in doing so, the outcomes become more dynamic and open. Therefore, Peer Learning is a method that allows gaining new insights and skills, broadening the range of cognitive structures and developing innovative ideas and approaches. Furthermore, Peer Learning includes a strong component of self-reflection. This additional dimension to the method entails that young people can learn from their experiences. This, in turn, enables them to develop self-awareness. Already back in 1995, researchers

from the University of Ulster identified 10 different models of Peer Learning (Griffiths, Housten and Lazenbatt 1995), even though the Peer Learning concept seems to become more and more popular recently. These range from seminars, private study groups, counselling, peer assessment schemes, collaborative projects, workplace mentoring to buddy systems in schools.

PEER LEARNING ON EUROPEAN LEVEL

Within the European Union's framework of the EU Youth Strategy, Peer Learning is an instrument for exchange and enhancement of European cooperation in the youth field. The aim is to bring together expertise from a variety of backgrounds and create new ideas and projects by combining different perceptions. The European Union's Work Plan for Youth (2016-2018) describes how organisations should use Peer Learning in a more structured way. On the one hand, it is important for the development of all European youth policies and strategies, while on the other hand, national and local social work approaches benefit from the international exchange. Moreover, with a globalised world, all viable solutions for national social challenges will have to consider the international context.

The renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) proposes Peer Learning ("mutual learning") as a core instrument of youth policy. Peer Learning is a central instrument for the "Open Method Coordination", which is used for structured exchange between different actors in the field of youth and to identify and learn from good practices in Member



States. The focus of Peer Learning can be on individual, political or structural learning aspects. The method can either be used for the work with young people, learning from each other in (international) youth work settings (e.g. youth exchanges) or among professionals. They can be from the same field of work (such as youth workers learning from other youth workers alike) or from different professional backgrounds, but, in their work, still all referring to the same objectives or target group (e.g. youth) in one or the other way. The benefit of Peer Learning activities on a European level is that young people, as well as professionals, can learn from each other on a very broad, international scale.

CONCEPTUALISING BLENDED LEARNING

Blended Learning is a combination of digital learning and common forms of teaching or informal learning. It consists of a combination of events that are on one hand attended in person and on the other hand media-supported learning (e.g. a face-to-face meeting/lecture combined with online tutorials). "Media supported learning" or "Digital Learning" are learning processes that take place with the help of technology, i.e. computers, tablets, smartphones (e.g. for Google, YouTube-Tutorials, Apps, etc.). Strictly speaking, even a PowerPoint-presentation has to be considered as digital learning.

Digital and Blended Learning methods are known to be a useful way to tie in with the lifeworld of young people, to awakening their fascination and to motivate them.

Nevertheless, when it comes to working with young people with fewer opportunities, the approach of Blend-

ed Learning is not too popular within the European framework. Within the Strategic Partnership "Europe for All" Blended Learning was seen to have several advantages as a means of targeting youth with special needs. Thus, it seemed reasonable to include these kinds of methods into the specific approach of the project work. Not only are the young people familiar with and attracted to the main characteristics of Blended Learning, but also Blended Learning offers special means of including young people with fewer opportunities. This is whether they are affected by social impairments or physical disabilities, for example. These approaches are summed up under the term "augmented and alternative communication". Several easy-to-use digital tools provide concrete instruments for implementing inclusive youth work. Specific digital apps, for example, enable new ways of communicating with people with speech impairments or offer maps for wheelchair users.

Other Blended Learning methods offer plenty of opportunities to include particularly young people with fewer opportunities in (individual and) Peer Learning contexts and can thus contribute to promoting inclusion on a general level. Moreover, Blended Learning can provide the opportunity to identify and learn from good practices in European Member States. Local organisations, for example, can approach concrete issues by engaging and learning from other initiatives run by other member states, which allows them to draw on a broad range of knowledge and experience. One way to facilitate this type of learning and sharing of good practice is through online seminars, where people can use digital media skills to exchange their ideas and possible solutions with each other.

PEER LEARNING PUT INTO PRACTICE: A USEFUL TOOL FOR YOUTH WORK

There are many advantages to using Peer Learning methods for young people and the staff who work with them. In a school setting, Peer Learning can be used as a tool of engagement which turns a student into an active learner, rather than a passive one. By applying the same methods in youth work, young people taking part in Peer Learning activities will learn leadership skills, increase their confidence, gain personal insight in self-reflection and discovery, discuss challenges and new issues, learn to give and receive constructive feedback, evaluating their learning and learn how to be sensitive to their peers' feelings. This array of soft skills will undeniably help any young person's personal development. For organisations and youth work staff, Peer Learning can improve the involvement of the target group in activities, improve the accuracy of fit of the offered activities and projects and contribute to conflict management within the target group.

One way organisations can encourage Peer Learning is known as 'peer assessment', where young people get to mark each other's work. While it can seem daunting at first, research highlights that numerous young people can benefit from this. As long as it is monitored closely by professional staff members, young people can encourage each other to achieve their individual best. Peer assessment can be created by the formation of a small group of young people. As a non-governmental organisation working with young people, Achieve More Scotland delivers Youth Achievement Awards to young people who are taking part in the Volunteer Programme. As part of their volunteering, young people are

put into groups and peer-assess each other on their learning. This activity allows them to self-reflect while also giving them an accredited award from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Ensuring the young people adhere to and understand the boundaries of the set marking frameworks, individuals or groups of young people of similar ability are carefully paired and anonymous marking schemes created.

YoMo Youth Bank is a local partner of Achieve More Scotland for the “Europe for All” project. As a Charity, YoMo is providing services that empower young people that live across the North East and North West of Glasgow. Their vision is for young people to shape their future by shaping their community. Their mission is to enable young people to empower themselves by promoting human rights, active citizenship, volunteering and lifelong learning activities. This is done by bringing youth empowerment and a human rights perspective to the achievement of social and economic objectives. They regularly break new ground in the field of lifelong learning and youth engagement. They also champion and promote the interests of young people and their right to be involved in decision-making processes that impact their lives.

For YoMo, Peer Learning supports the staff to keep with the ethos of being a youth-led organisation. Peer education ensures that participants are taking an active role within their learning instead of being passive recipients of the information. This role ensures community benefit, as peer educators can give feedback on community issues and gaps they feel are apparent. This also allows young people to be active citizens within their community. As peer educators, they are strengthening the capacity of the organisation. Young people volunteering for the organisation support the delivery of workshops and sessions for fellow peers and new volunteer recruits.

The charity has organised a range of programmes over the years which implements Peer Learning at its core. The “Peer Research Programme” involved the young people taking the full lead

in planning and delivery of consultation with the full community on youth health service. The “Health Ambassadors” project meant that young people were trained in NHS health messages, with them developing, delivering and evaluating training for other young people. Projects like “Anti-bullying Peer Educators”, “Money for Life” or “First Aid Peer Learning” allow for topical based peer education, where young people decide upon the choice of topics and are trained to deliver these to their peers.

As part of the partnership with Achieve More, YoMo received the opportunity to send one of their peer educators to a volunteering team project taking place in Bornheim, Germany in 2019. In addition to this, one of their development workers was allowed to become the accompanying person for the young participants during their time in Germany. In describing her experience of peer learning during the team volunteering, the development worker Pauline Wilson highlighted that **“Everyone was asked to conduct a workshop on something they felt skilled in; this included multiple sports activities, cultural learning programmes and hobbies. They then devised a full workshop to teach the rest of the group. This model worked great as the initial workshop was something the young person was passionate about, which gave them the confidence to teach. We then looked at the skills they used to do this. As a next step, this was used to look at transferable skills in terms of peer education. This model can be used for international volunteering.”**

As Peer Learning is a big part of YoMo and Pauline Wilson’s work, the importance of Peer Learning is well-known to them. Pauline Wilson believes that to ensure young people are effective peer educators, organisations have to realise the following: **“Training for staff to learn the importance of peer education, involved youth leadership within policy and practice. Allow young people to choose their topics, support in the development of young people initially.”**

BLENDING LEARNING PUT INTO PRACTICE: AN APPROACH FOR EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING

In the project “Europe for All”, Blended Learning was integrated intentionally on several occasions. One example was during the multiplier’s workshop “Reflect and Act” in August 2019 which intended to support young former volunteers with fewer opportunities in acting as multipliers for future volunteers from the same target group. The workshop supplemented conventional and more formal learning methods (e.g. presentations, interactive and group methods) with digital learning methods (i.e. using tablets and mobile phones) to get the participants involved and induce Peer Learning. At the same time, an additional dimension of Peer Learning which lies in inducing self-reflection processes also played a crucial role. This was used to encourage the former volunteers to reflect on their own experiences and personal insights first, before deciding on important knowledge and ways of transferring them to other young people. Moreover, they were encouraged to package their messages into creative digital methods suitable for their peers. This resulted in a high motivation amongst all of the participants to identify with and fulfil their role as a multiplier and engaging very actively in the workshop. Many creative ideas were developed on how to reach young peer groups who might have never before been in touch with volunteering or international exchange. The multipliers-to-be created informal presentations, blogs or vlogs and thought of completely new ways of inspiring other young people to take part in mobility projects. Most of the selected approaches of informing, disseminating and advocating for the topic had not been thought of by the involved organisations and were not expected by the workshop coordinators. Thus, the combination of Blended Learning with Peer Learning even resulted in an increased positive synergy effect.

Blended learning was also used in the above-mentioned volunteering team project. During the two weeks, young Europeans from different countries



Promoting through the modern social Media

worked and learned together at a community centre in Germany. They assisted senior citizens, worked with kindergarten children and supported gardening and maintenance tasks. In addition to their practical experiences with generational and intercultural dialogue and getting to know sustainable and communal ways of life, they were offered elements of digital learning. This was done through a session using the method of Virtual Reality (VR) to learn more about sustainable ways of living and collect experience about sustainability projects worldwide. This part of the programme was very popular with the participants and was later rated as one of the best aspects of the project. The success story behind was certainly linked to the idea of combining a rather formal learning objective around the topic of sustainability with unusual means which are associated with free-time and leisure activities by the target group.

Within the project “Europe for All” a general way through which specifically digital methods are continuously included in learning processes is the use of video production. All volunteers are asked to produce short movie clips throughout their voluntary service to document, reflect and present their experiences and their work. These video clips will then be published on the project website and are both intended to make the volunteer’s voices public, and, at the same time, to promote the project’s aim of involving more young people with fewer opportunities into European youth exchange and volunteering programmes.

CLEAR ADVANTAGES OF PEER LEARNING AND BLENDED LEARNING

Our experience shows that Peer Learning and Blended Learning methods are useful ways to bring together both, the digital world that today’s young people live in and interesting topics and issues that fascinate or motivate them. The methods and variations of peer learning can add additional dimensions and valuable aspects to learning processes. Both can finally help to increase and promote aspects of inclusive youth work.

The advantages of Peer Learning and Blended Learning outweigh any preservation an organisation might have. But, at the same time, applying such methods needs careful and considered planning by organisations and youth workers to find effective ways of integrating them into their work so that they can be a support to reach set objectives.

When included in strategic and methodological concepts and managed well to fit into learning approaches right from the beginning, Peer Learning and Blended Learning have the potential to benefit young people, organisations and the wider community.

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A DIGITAL NETWORK FOR ORGANISATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS

YOUTH WORK IN A DIGITAL WORLD

“More advertisement on social media, perhaps a video showing short clips of what you would do but also showing the social aspects of volunteering”

Aiesha Marr, ex volunteer

In a forever changing world, could old-fashion youth work practices become outdated in a forever changing digital world? This is one of the many questions I have pondered for the past few years. As the years go by, technology has become a big part of the average person’s life. We use our phones, iPads, computers and other electronic devices now more than ever to connect and the rest of the world. On the one hand, youth work in the United Kingdom has traditionally been a person-based approach. Young people in Scotland are conventionally accustomed to youth work based in youth clubs and centres where you learn through one-to-one on a variety of methods and topics. This is generally done with peers and youth worker staff within a safe environment.

While several different definitions of youth work can be found in various texts and literature, our definition comes from the European Union, which defines it as those aged from 15-29 years old. Youth participation is a globally protected right under the United Nations (UN) and under the Convention of the Child (UNCRC), which was established in 1959 and ratified by the UN in 1989. Under articles, 12-15 children and young people have the right to voice their opinions, engage in protests and participate in organisations. Therefore, young people are protected under the UNCRC as vulnerable members of society. They are having the same rights as everyone else in contributing and acting as catalysts of change for society.

On the other hand, digital youth work cannot be solely defined but takes many different forms in connection with traditional youth work. The main aim of digital youth work is to use digital media and technology platforms to support the practices and approaches of traditional youth work. Digital youth work can still happen face to face as well as within online environments or even a mixture of the two. Digital media can act as the basis of an activity, a tool or content of youth work. Thus, digital youth work is also underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as conventional youth work.

Youth workers in recent years have used games, social media, email, photography and film-making to engage with young people in new issues and through different learning methods. These tools have allowed the sector to develop in a time where technology is essential to our everyday lives. Digital youth work can make youth work services more accessible and reliable. There are different advantages to using digital youth work approaches for both, young people and youth workers. For young people, taking part in digital youth work can be engaging, empowering and gives them an active part in a digital society. It can also develop their skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math’s (STEAM) as well as digital literacy. Further development can be seen through confidence in digital platforms and the ability to take control of their digital identity. Moreover, there are many possible outcomes for youth work organisations and particularly youth work services which can be achieved by making digital youth work more accessible. The chance to reach out and work with young people who don’t have access to local services because of geographical barriers will give an organisation new communities to work with.

EUROPEAN EXCHANGE THROUGH DIGITAL MEANS

As a partner on the “Europe for All” project, Achieve More Scotland is a Glasgow based charity that delivers programmes of youth work activity to young people from areas of high social deprivation. Included amongst these is their diversionary programme. Diversionary activities take the form of sports, physical activity, and group-work, volunteering, employability and personal development sessions. The charity is currently working across 48 communities in Glasgow on five evenings per week. All of these communities fall within the 5-10% most deprived communities in Scotland, according to the Social Index of Multiple Deprivation (2016). The original aim of Achieve More Scotland was to reduce gang-related violence, anti-social behaviour and crime amongst young people from different communities across the North East (NE) and West (NW) of Glasgow and to engage them in positive activities. These programmes have been highly successful in supporting significant reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour in NE and NW Glasgow and in engaging young people in community life, as well as making positive lifestyle choices. Police Scotland confirms that our work prevents at least one murder every year occurring in the areas of Glasgow in which we operate (2017).

As an international coordinating partner on the “Europe for All” project, the charity has been working on sending and hosting young people from Glasgow and other partner coun-



tries. Through the process of working with young people in the target group, Achieve More has realised the need to support young people on digital platforms as an additional tool of engagement. Recently, two young people from the charity were sent to Germany to take part in a Multiplier's Workshop. This workshop with the title "Reflect and Act" took part in late August 2019 with the long-term goal of increasing the number of young people with fewer opportunities in European voluntary activities by using a peer network of youngsters. During the workshop, the young people got to know each other and strengthen their communication skills, reflect on their voluntary service and work out ideas on how to act as a multiplier themselves. They gathered knowledge and the skills making them capable multipliers. They discussed concrete scenarios and methods of being a multiplier and about how to share their expertise and views with other young people from Scotland, Italy, Bulgaria and Germany. Digital tools and devices played an important role in their considerations.

Furthermore, the young people thought about the idea of a youth network, to support future volunteer participants of the project. By creating a network the young people would help each other and other young people from the partner countries in taking up new mobility projects. The aim was to become active multipliers and motivate other young people in similar situations who are facing comparable challenges to take part in a European Voluntary Activity. The participants also discussed how the youth network will look like, what the content could be and the tasks to be done to achieve those goals. They also focused on how to engage other young people within the network and how to organise the communication and the management of the network. The workshop lasted three days and the young people felt that they had gained some valuable insight which they were ready to take back to their countries and implement within their communities.

From a professional point of view, on the one hand, it is important to note that similar networks already exist and will support young people with mobility projects – such as in particular the Europeers network. These networks help all young people and offer a wide range of projects and activities. On the other hand, these networks do not specifically target young people with fewer opportunities on which the "Europe for All" project is focusing. Working with this target group requires precision methods of engagement. To achieve their goal of working with such young people, the young people used their experiences and decided to create a youth-network within all participating countries.

LASTING EFFECTS OF EUROPEAN EXCHANGES - LASTING EFFECTS OF EUROPEAN YOUTH MOBILITIES

After coming back to Scotland, the young people from Glasgow got together to follow-up and reflect on their time and experience in Germany. Feeling invigorated and motivated by what they had learned abroad, they decided to get in contact with Achieve More to implement their new ideas. As a result, Achieve More is working with them to set up a local group of young people who will create a digital network for future volunteers. The first meeting involved young people sharing their ideas for how mobility projects can be promoted to other young people.

"Start a vlog by an ex participant, so next time you do this project and put them on YouTube so people can follow it and watch. Ask people who have already participated to ask around and get people they know to sign up e.g. people in the community"
Aiesha Marr, ex-volunteer

During the second meeting, the young people then began to brainstorm. They started looking at the ways they could promote their idea to other young people within their communities. They thought about using platforms like Facebook Pages, Snapchat and Instagram to reach a wide network of young people. As free platforms, they can provide the potential to reach thousands of young people by initially engaging a handful. A Facebook comment on one post by one young person can be seen on the news feed by over 300 other people. Thus, social networking sites would allow their message to spread quickly. The young people are now recruiting other ex-volunteers to join their network within the city and aim to support all the future participants from Glasgow through social media. They are initially aiming to make short videos of their volunteering stories to encourage other people to follow in their footsteps.

YOUTH WORK - GET DIGITAL!

The Youth Work and Social Network report (NYA, 2008) set out four simple steps for any organisation to go digital and engage with young people on digital platforms. Firstly, surveying your community is important, as it will allow any organisation to find out what young people are interested in. There is no point in creating or targeting a specific social media platform if the young people you want to engage with are on another platform. However, it's important to mention that there are some regulations and policies to consider within the youth work sector, so being aware of these when choosing an engagement platform is very important. Second, being aware of the strategy in which you will use digital media is also very important. As technology can be used for promotion, face-to-face or as a tool for online outreach, it is crucial to figure out what methods work best for your organisation at an early stage and ensure those methods are put to practice. Moreover, online safety is of great importance when working with digital media and especially when that work involves young people. Therefore, thinking about the possible issues which could arise as a result of your work can ensure that young people are safeguarded against any potential dangers. Lastly, having basic training in a range of social media competences will improve an organisation's ability to deliver projects with digital media methods. However, there is no need to be an expert in the field of digital media to be able to deliver good projects. Learning at the same pace as your young people can be good and could lead to interesting discussions such as digital literacy.

The digital world is here and forever growing at a remarkable rate. Youth work and organisations working with young people have been traditionally focused on face-to-face learning. However, young people are now heavily involved in social media platforms and engaging with each other in new ways which could have not been foreseen years beforehand. Even though youth work practices seem to be catching up with modern technology, organisations will have to create provisions and policies to ensure they are supporting their young people through new methods and on new platforms. There is now a key opportunity for the sector to add a new dimension into youth work and soon everyone will see all youth work as work engaged with the digital age.



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PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PERSONS IN A TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

INTRODUCTION: TWO THEORETICAL MODELS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

There are different models of youth participation. Two of them are the most appropriate in illustrating the ways of involving young persons in the "Europe for All" project activities, specifically young people with fewer opportunities:

- | **Robert Hart's ladder of participation**
- | **De Backer and Jan's triangle of participation.**

ROBERT HART developed a model to classify different levels of participation. He created a ladder according to the degree of young people's involvement and adult accompaniment. The image of a ladder aims to suggest that you can climb it, towards more and more youth participation. There are eight steps of participation in Robert Hart's ladder. The first three are "manipulation", "decoration" and "tokenism". They do not actively involve young persons.

The other five steps (rungs of the ladder) gradually aim to fully integrate young persons into the decision-making process and get them more involved. These five steps are:

- | **Step (rung) 4:** "Assigned and informed": adults initiate and manage the projects; young persons have a specific role therein and are informed about how and why they are being involved
- | **Step (rung) 5:** "Consulted and informed": adults initiate the projects but young persons are informed about how their contributions will be used and about the results of the adults' decisions
- | **Step (rung) 6:** "Adult-led – decisions shared with young persons": adults initiate the projects. Young people take part in decision-making
- | **Step (rung) 7:** "Young persons-led and directed": adults only serve as mentors; young people initiate and manage the projects
- | **Step (rung) 8:** "Young person-led – decisions shared with adults": adults initiate the projects. Young people and adults partake in the decision-making process. Here young people have control of the project while at the same time, can learn from the adults' experiences and expertise

The Robert Hart's model is very useful in analysing the steps of young person's participation reached within the "Europe for All" project activities and also defining some objectives for future projects while keeping in mind that these projects would focus on enabling young persons to climb the "rungs of the ladder".

THE DE BACKER AND JANS "TRIANGLE OF PARTICIPATION" is another model of youth participation, very useful to direct youth work. This triangle suggests that young persons will be actively engaged in activities (or projects) which form a combination of Challenge, Capacity and Connection. This means that the youth workers should ensure that the certain activity (or the project) "challenges" the young persons, that it stays within their "capacities" and allows them to "connect" with others to do things together.

This second model will also be useful in analysing the "Europe for All" activities involving young persons and in understanding how to propose future projects that would allow combining the three Cs: Challenge, Capacity and Connection.

FROM TARGET GROUP TO PROJECT PARTICIPANT AND PROJECT COUNSELLORS: HOW YOUNG PERSONS BECAME INVOLVED IN THE "EUROPE FOR ALL" PROJECT ACTIVITIES

In each one of the transnational meetings during the whole "Europe for All" project, local and international youths - most with fewer opportunities – became involved in specific activities as part of the transnational meeting programmes. For each one of these activities, young persons had to prepare the activities and then conduct them for and/or with the international professional staff.

During the transnational meeting organised in Glasgow in November 2018, young people with fewer opportunities who had been involved in one or two European volunteering projects were asked to present their experience and give their opinion on the activities.

In the days preceding the transnational meeting, they prepared their presentations using brief texts and pictures. During the meeting, each had the opportunity to present his/her experience to little groups of transnational and local partner organisation's staff members, answering questions



and personally expressing the added value of the transnational exchanges they experienced during the volunteering period.

During the transnational meeting organised in Pavia, in May 2019, there have been two different slots in which various young persons have been actively involved.

The transnational meeting programme was divided into two sub-programmes on the first day, one for the partner organisation's staff members, the other for young people, involving future volunteers (Italians and from the partner countries) in brainstorming about expectations and motivations for participating in a short-term European volunteering project. Afterwards, the future volunteers were invited to present their brainstorming results to the staff member group.

On the second day, the transnational meeting participants were invited to visit a local youth centre managed by Associazione Babele Onlus, part of the Italian local network.

Instead of explaining how they work with their young persons and how they make them aware of the opportunities offered by the European programmes, the youth workers organised a common brainstorming involving professionals and youth on the topic of "How to make Erasmus+ programmes/the European Solidarity Corps more inclusive". It was a concrete illustration of the participation modalities they use and of their efficiency.

The "Europe for All" network also allowed many young people with fewer opportunities to be involved as beneficiaries, taking part in European volunteering projects managed by the partner organisations and their local networks.

Some young persons had a more active role in the project, being involved in the activities and discussions during the staff meetings, as part of the network of professionals.

Two objectives were pursued with the involvement of target group representatives into the project management meetings:

assign a "counsellor" role to young people, to include their point of view in the project staff reflexions and decisions, and ensure that you adhere to the target group's needs as closely as possible

use the educational approach of youth participation, empowering these young persons by giving them the possibility to have an active role in this specific project, allowing them to gain skills and the desire to – perhaps – set up future projects themselves.

Antonia D., from Germany, Bruno P. from Italy, Byliana M., from Bulgaria, James M. from Scotland and Jwan S. from Germany were the "Europe for All" project "young counsellors", accompanying the project development and giving an important added value to the project results.

A specific questionnaire was conducted to understand how they lived this experience, what they thought about their role during the project and how they think they could be involved after the project.

The partner organisation's coordinators were also asked about their opinion concerning the role of this "young counsellors" and their contribution to the project activities and results.

THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PERSONS IN A TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS: THE YOUNG PERSON'S POINT OF VIEW OF THE ON THEIR ROLE OF YOUNG COUNSELLORS

The questionnaire used to collect the “young counsellor’s” point of view consisted of four parts:

- | **young persons were asked to present themselves**
- | **they had to describe, if applicable, their personal mobility experiences and, if any, the specific difficulties they had to face**
- | **the third part was dedicated to their experience as “young counsellor”, taking part in the project staff activities during the “Europe for All” transnational meetings**
- | **finally, they had to explain how they should proceed with collaborating with the “Europe for All” project network**

THE “YOUNG COUNSELLORS” PROFILES

The profiles of the “young counsellors” were different. This diversity was important because it allowed having a diversity of points of views and feelings.

ANTONIA, THE GERMAN YOUNG COUNSELLOR, is 19 years old. She defines herself as “a volunteer from Germany with disabilities”. She has recently finished her secondary education and she is about to start her university studies to pursue a teaching degree. She has different experiences in volunteering.

In 2015, she acted as a youth leader to supervise projects initiated by a local church. From 2016 until 2018, she was involved as a volunteer, teaching German language, culture and customs to refugees who had recently arrived.

BRUNO, THE ITALIAN YOUNG COUNSELLOR, is 21 years old with a migration background. He was born in Santo Domingo and arrived in Italy five years ago. Although he lived the first years of his life in Santo Domingo, he feels more Italian, particularly because he has an Italian father.

When he arrived in Italy, he was a bit lost but was supported by Associazione Babele Onlus, both for cultural and educational integration. He is a high school student and hopes to get his diploma in July 2020. Because of his family situation, he has to combine studies with occasional jobs.

BILYANA, THE BULGARIAN YOUNG COUNSELLOR, is a 22-year-old university student, member of the university council and youth worker in the Youth Centre of Ruse. She has participated in many youth exchanges and two training courses. She was a mentor for volunteers in two long-term and two short-term volunteering projects held in Ruse.

JAMES, THE SCOTTISH YOUNG COUNSELLOR, is 26 years old. He has been involved with Achieve More Scotland for the last nine years. He is currently the Volunteer’s Coordinator of the organisation, having previously been a participant, volunteer, sessional worker, part-time worker before becoming full time in July 2019. His current role involves working with young people aged 15-25 offering them the opportunity to become volunteers at Achieve More Scotland.

THE “YOUNG COUNSELLORS” PERSONAL MOBILITY EXPERIENCES

EACH “EUROPE FOR ALL” YOUNG COUNSELLOR HAS PERSONAL MOBILITY EXPERIENCES.

Antonia took part in a short-term volunteering service in Glasgow, in July 2019. During her time there, she was able to meet the local community, aid in several community activities as well as help to improve the accessibility of such projects.

From 2015, Bruno has participated in five Erasmus+ youth exchanges with Associazione Babele Onlus, as part of an Italian group composed of young people with fewer opportunities supported by the association.

In 2019, during the summer, Bruno took part in a five-week volunteering project, together with another Italian volunteer, in A Coruna in Spain.

Bilyana has participated in many Erasmus+ youth exchanges. She considers these experiences abroad as a way of learning and exploring new countries, cultures and gain knowledge:

“You are more open-minded, it teaches you how to solve problems. It also shows how to think out of the box because as you meet more people you realize how different they are.”

James was involved in two short term European volunteering experiences. In 2016 he spent two weeks in the south of France volunteering with some local organisations. He helped restore community gardens, cleaned local parks and facilities and got involved in local community events.

In 2018 he spent one month in Madrid where he worked with kids aged 6-14, mainly sports and youth work activities.

THE YOUNG COUNSELLORS WERE ALSO ASKED TO DESCRIBE ANY SPECIFIC DIFFICULTY THEY HAD TO FACE BEFORE OR DURING THEIR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

Through her participation in the short-term EVS project, **ANTONIA** also worked to prepare volunteers physical disabilities for future participation. Rather than just speaking and concentrating on solving her difficulties, she actively tried to understand how to facilitate access to such projects for other young persons.

BRUNO expressed some specific difficulties regarding his first participation in international exchanges because he felt that he could not speak English well enough. It was very important for him to have the possibility to gain this experience with a group of peers getting the support of the youth workers of Associazione Babele Onlus. Without it, he would not have felt capable of going abroad.

His experience as a European volunteer was quite different from his experience in youth exchanges. He appreciated it because he had more independence and because he was part of the staff of the hosting association.

He is now planning to take part in a long-term volunteering project. After each project, he describes his participation as more active than in the previous one. Also, with time and experience, he felt more and more involved in the different project steps.

JAMES also had difficulties in overcoming language barriers. He could find common ground with the other young persons by participating in common sports activities. He also started to feel homesick towards the end of the trips, especially in Madrid. Despite these difficulties, however, he feels ready to go abroad again and become more involved. **“I would challenge myself more and undoubtingly feel more confident and willing to get involved.”**

THE “YOUNG COUNSELLORS” PERSONAL EXPERIENCE DURING THE “EUROPE FOR ALL” TRANSNATIONAL MEETINGS

REPRESENTATIVES OF YOUNG PERSONS

Concerning their participation in the “Europe for All” transnational meetings, all the “young counsellors” expressed their satisfaction to have been chosen as young persons’ representatives.

This is how Antonia describes why she decided to accept participating in the transnational meeting in Pavia: **“As a disabled volunteer, I had a unique perspective when it came to improving the accessibility of volunteering programmes, especially the selection of possible hosting cities and the duties for future volunteers”**

BRUNO characterises himself as representative of all the young persons supported by Babele Onlus: **“A big responsibility but I tried to do my best”**.

JAMES describes himself as a representative of a specific community: **“I represent young people from some of the most deprived and poverty affected areas of Glasgow.”**

BILYANA, who took part in the kick-off meeting in Germany and the transnational meeting in Pavia, considers both meetings **“very well structured and organised”**. In the meeting in Germany, she perceived herself in a passive role, also because of the amount of technical information exchanged during that conference. In the meeting in Pavia, besides participating in the discussions and decisions, she had the opportunity to lead an activity between young persons, ex- and future volunteers in three different projects.



All of the young persons were a bit anxious before the meetings but they very quickly felt part of the group.

ENABLE TO GIVE THE TARGET GROUPS POINT OF VIEWS

ANTONIA thinks that, through her participation in the transnational meeting, she has been able to ensure that the host organisations knew that hosting volunteers with disabilities might come the need to get extra support and costs. She was particularly proud of **“the conveyance that disabled volunteers have just as much to offer if not more as other volunteers, in the terms of insight and compassion when dealing with people who experience specific difficulties”**. She thinks that her contribution was important because she knows that persons with disabilities are severely underrepresented in almost all areas of life, volunteering included.

BRUNO thinks that it is very important to ask for the young person's opinion when organisations propose activities and projects for them and when professionals make decisions on how to develop young persons' participation. He does not think that he can express all young persons' opinions but he knows that the other youth supported by Babele Onlus had the same fears he had when they took part in their first transnational youth exchange. He knows that they all decided to take part in the exchange only because they shared this experience with their friends and their educators and that they would not have participated in it alone.

Bruno also thinks that he can contribute his testimony on how important it was for him to begin with a short-term volunteering project before deciding to take part in a long-term one.

BILYANA thinks that her participation as representative of young persons was important “because this is the way you can get the real and important information about the young persons, their opinion and needs”. It was also important for her to have the opportunity to see the project process from the other side and to learn, even if only a bit, the administrative aspects of a European project and evaluation topics.

From what he has experienced in France or Spain, **JAMES** thinks that **“volunteering is targeted towards people who are from highly educated backgrounds or have families who can support them and who don't come from an underprivileged background. Almost all the volunteers I have met have been to University and can speak several languages and aren't coming from areas of poverty. I understand this is not the case for everybody, but it is very concerning.”** This is the main reason why he thinks that his contribution to the “Europe for All” project was very important.

THE POSSIBLE “YOUNG COUNSELLOR'S” INVOLVEMENT AFTER THE “EUROPE FOR ALL” PROJECT

All the “young counsellors” hope to have the possibility to continue collaborating with the “Europe for All” project partner organisations at the end of the project.

The collaboration first appears when they become active **ambassadors of mobility for their peers**, take part and organise information activities themselves.

They also are supporters of the creating of a **transnational youth network** and they are very enthusiastic about staying virtually connected with other young persons. All “young counsellors” hope to be able to initiate new activities and projects together.

THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PERSONS IN A TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS: THE PARTNER ORGANISATIONS COORDINATOR'S POINT OF VIEW

A second questionnaire was used to collect the partner organisations coordinator's point of view, asking them to:

- | **express their opinion concerning the participation of the young counsellors in the transnational discussions, activities and decisions,**
- | **specify if they think it was somehow difficult to manage and how to**
- | **identify specific added values gained through the involvement of young people.**

CONVINCED OF THE NECESSITY TO ENGAGE YOUNG PERSONS IN THE TRANSNATIONAL DISCUSSIONS, ACTIVITIES AND DECISIONS

Each of the local “Europe for All” project coordinators is convinced that the best way to work for young persons is to work with them, enabling them to have an active role in the activities designed for them and, when possible and including them in the project design.

They all think that sharing ideas with some young persons, representing the project target groups, discussing with them and listening to their points of view, is the only way to ensure that the planned activities are indeed a realistic answer to their actual needs.

All coordinators think that it was important to ensure the young persons' participation of different profiles, representing the diversity of the “Europe for All” project target group. This diversity was ensured not only thanks to the young counsellors' different profiles but also thanks to activities with local young persons organised in each country (meeting with young ex-volunteers in Glasgow and Ruse; meeting with young persons in a local youth centre in Pavia).

SOME DIFFICULTIES THE PARTNER ORGANISATIONS HAD TO FACE

The local coordinators underline some difficulties concerning the participation of young persons to the transnational meetings:

- | **Only two participants per organisation received financial support for each project meeting. However, two staff members were needed for some meetings to be able to ensure high-quality implementation at a local level. For this reason, one could not always include young persons from all the partner countries.**
- | **Some young people were not particularly interested in attending some of the administrative and technical discussions. Sometimes, an alternative programme was developed for young people, which took place parallel to those discussions, although this was not always possible.**

THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PERSONS: AN ADDED VALUE FOR THE “EUROPE FOR ALL” PROJECT

The local coordinators believe that the participation of young people representing the project target groups in the transnational meetings is an added value at different levels:

- | **The young participants themselves** felt that they were recognised as representatives of a group of young persons. They could also express their specific opinions and needs. Because of this, they felt that they were treated seriously. By participating in transnational project activities, they had an opportunity to expand their social and intercultural competences, to gain self-confidence and to reflect on how to continue contributing the transnational partnership;
- | **The professionals and the partner organisations** had the opportunity to gain awareness of the specific needs of some target groups and of the necessity to adapt their approaches and working practices to expand the participation of young people with fewer opportunities in their projects. They also had to adapt the programmes of the transnational meetings to organise it, not only from a professional perspective but also from a more practical one. Making exchanges during the meeting understandable for the youth participating in it.

SOME USEFUL LINKS CONCERNING PARTICIPATORY METHODS

- | **Participation of the youth as a challenge “360° Participation. Youth Handbook” by John Grace and Pauline Grace (2017) https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/f3ef4c_cb09e020f28145449b0ea711886a1486.pdf**
- | **<https://www.participatorymethods.org/resources/>**





CONCLUSION

Returning to the theoretical models, it can be said that the activities that were involved during the “Europe for All” transnational meetings with no doubt combined the 3 C’s of the De Backer and Jans triangle of participation.

For young people, these activities revealed valid experiences of active participation within the implementation of a European project. They not only were simple beneficiaries as they were during their previous experiences with European projects but became counsellors, whose opinions were considered not less important than the professionals’ opinions.

As the 3C’S triangle shows, the young persons certainly faced some “Challenges”. They had to depend on all their competences and they were supported by their peers and professionals, making use of existing connections as well as creating new connections that will last after the end of the project.

During the entire project, the professionals always strove for young persons’ total involvement and active participation, particularly for those who the “Europe for All” project was designed for.

With reference to the Robert Hart ladder of participation, the project activities can be classified in the following rungs:

- | **rung 4 (“young persons assigned and informed”): the presentation of the former volunteer’s experiences in Glasgow and the two activities involving young persons in Pavia (meeting among future volunteers and brainstorming with young persons in the youth centre)**
- | **rung 5 (“young persons consulted and informed”): the contributions of the participating young persons during the professional meetings**
- | **rung 6 (“Adult-led – decisions shared with young persons”): the decision to create a youth network after the end of the project**

The creation of a Youth Network is considered valid support to create future projects and activities combining the 3 Cs of the De Backer and Jans “triangle of participation” (Challenge, Capacity and Connection) and enabling young persons to reach the highest rungs of the Robert Hart ladder.

This youth network will certainly have a role in promoting volunteering experiences, which the project partner organisations and their local networks will offer through the European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Programme. However, the young people who will be part of this youth network will also have the possibility to use two other European programmes to develop their projects and to experiment, project after project. The idea is more and more active participation, with less and less directive youth workers support. These two programmes are Erasmus+ youth exchanges and the European Solidarity Corps’ Solidarity projects.

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PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL PARTNERS IN THE EUROPEAN NETWORK

One of the main objectives of the "Europe for All" Strategic Partnership project is that the project partners and newcomer organisations (located in the regions of the international project partners) working with the target group of young people with fewer opportunities, increase the number of European Solidarity Corps accredited organisations. Thus, the number of European Solidarity Corps activities of young people with fewer opportunities rise, networks for further cooperation are being created and synergies can be used.

Therefore, within the framework of the "Europe for All" project, each partner organisation has been working on the following specific objectives:

- | Explore conditions for tailor-made Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps projects that ensure a successful European Voluntary Activity for young people with fewer opportunities.
- | Offer training measures for the regional organisations which want to get involved as hosting or supporting organisation. The long-term goal is to enable those organisations to apply for and carry out European Solidarity Corps projects of high quality themselves, especially for young people with fewer opportunities.
- | The regional conditions for international mobility measures are supposed to be improved by establishing cooperation with regional politicians who are working in the field of youth policy.
- | Disseminating project results to other organisations and stakeholders working in the field of international voluntary services (or considering to do so).

In principle, during the first Kick-off Meeting in Germany in June 2018, the four international partner organisations decided to implement a range of activities to reach the objectives described above and agreed upon a timeline. Considering the specific backgrounds and local realities of the organisations, each project partner had the option to choose activities which best fitted their particular situation. An exchange of best practices regularly took place to exchange knowledge and apply policy transfers.

This article aims to report and describe activities carried out during the two years of the Strategic Partnership, their outcomes and some conclusions and recommendations useful for other organisations working in the mobility field with youngsters with fewer opportunities, policymakers and all those who work on the improvement of the European Programme.



A SUMMARY OF THE ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS TO INCREASE EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE/EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES IN THEIR LOCAL AND REGIONAL NETWORKS

The description of the activities carried out by the international partners is divided into four categories.

1 | Information and promotion

2 | Training

3 | Support and accompaniment

4 | Dissemination

1 | INFORMATION AND PROMOTION ACTIVITIES

During the four Transnational Meetings organised in Germany, Bornheim (June 2018), Scotland, Glasgow (November 2019), Italy, Pavia (May 2019) and Bulgaria, Ruse (November 2019), exchanges took place between project partners and invited representatives of (potential) local partner organisations. These transnational visits between delegates enabled the partners to discuss concrete practical questions, obstacles and opportunities. Visits by the project partners to the local newcomer organisations surely contributed to a better understanding of the local reality, considering it for possible future collaborations.

Staff members of the Youth Academy Walderberg in Germany, visited the site of local organisations. This allowed them to start building up relationships with potential volunteers and (potential) partner organisations, as well as (follow-up) phone calls with those organisations. During an annual fair, which took place at the Technical University of Cologne in November 2018, local organisations introduced themselves to the students as future employers. The Youth Academy Walderberg introduced the “Europe for All” pro-

ject there, as well as during their spring fair. In May 2019, the Jugendakademie was present as an experienced representative at an introductory event of the National Agency with the project. The meeting approached organisations that had just recently started working with the European Solidarity Corps.

In Autumn 2018, Inspiration Association and Associazione Porta Nuova Europa organised several group information sessions in Bulgaria and Italy, where potential local partner organisations participated to get to know the European Solidarity Corps programme and the criteria and procedures to participate in it.

In Scotland, staff members of Achieve More Scotland conducted meetings on an individual basis. **This has ensured that all the local partners worked to a pace suitable for them and felt that they could ask specific questions about the process which was relevant for their organisation.**

During the whole period of the project, presentations of the European Solidarity Corps programme and the “Europe for All” project took place in local schools in each country. The presentations approached pupils and students from different schools, youth centres and NGOs as well as teachers and school social/youth workers.

Several meetings with local politicians took place in each country to inform them about the project and the wish to involve more organisations in the European Solidarity Corps programme. The meetings aimed to create awareness of the challenges local networks are dealing with.

2 | TRAINING ACTIVITIES

The newcomer organisations which showed interest in getting more acquainted with the European Solidarity Corps programme were offered the possibility to gain more insight and skills to deal with specific aspects related to project management. Pieces of training created and proposed were approached to staff, coordinators and (future) mentors.

Training approached (future) mentors:

Within the “Europe for All” project, several Skype calls have been organised between the international partners on project topics like Blended learning and Peer learning. In these calls (future) mentors of volunteers with fewer opportunities joined as well. These discussions contributed to a major awareness about opportunities and challenges in the projects.

In April 2019, (future) mentors participated in the Transnational Mid Term Workshop, organised within the Strategic EVS at the Jugendakademie in Germany.

(Future) Mentors have been offered the possibility to job shadow during pre-departure and monitoring activities of actual European Solidarity Corps projects of the international partners.

Besides this, mentors from the participating partner countries shared experiences and supported each other during volunteering team project held in Germany in summer 2019.

Training for project coordinators:

In all four partner countries, several Quality Label Workshops have been organised with the persons responsible for the topic within the interested newcomer local organisations. These very practical workshops were finalised to support the organisations step by step with the preparation of the application for the Quality Label, starting with the registration on the ECAS System.

Other supporting activities were offered during the process of applying for the Quality Label, for example advising via email or on the phone, as well as support before and during the accreditation visit (and call) from the national agencies. To better present the philosophy and the practical implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme, some partners presented their actual European Solidarity Corps

projects to the newcomers and organised meetings with the current volunteers. These activities provided a clearer understanding of the roles and the rights and responsibilities of all the actors involved in European Solidarity Corps volunteering projects.

3 | ACCOMPANIMENT IN PROJECT WRITING AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION:

In all countries, the project partners offered support to the local organisations during the preparation of applications for European Solidarity Corps volunteering projects. Each international partner organisation can draw on staff members who have experience in preparing and executing project applications within the Erasmus+ programme. Each newcomer organisations received individual consultations for additional support.

Effort and time have been invested in reflecting together on objectives, possible activities and discussions on how to tackle potential problems to be dealt with while involving youngsters with fewer opportunities.

As far as the project implementation is concerned, in Italy for example, staff members of the newly accredited host organisation Babele Onlus participated in the development of pre-departure activities approached to youths with fewer opportunities. A youth worker of Babele Onlus reported: **“An interesting synergy has been built between the experience of Porta Nuova Europa in preparing European volunteers before departure and our specific experience of daily support of youngsters with fewer opportunities”.**

So far, the newly accredited organisations have shaped their ideas for future European Solidarity Corps applications and started new partnerships with organisations, as well within the project as outside of it.



4 | DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES:

The newcomer organisations who showed interest in getting involved in the European Solidarity Corps Programme did receive support in promoting the programme among their target groups. Within the “Europe for All” project, a specific “Easy language” Flyer has been created and translated in the four languages of the project (English, German, Italian and Bulgarian).

Regular publishing of articles and posts on Social Media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and on the website www.europeforall.net of the project were made, regarding the workshops approached to local NGO's, the concrete Europe for All volunteering opportunities, the announcement of local events organised within the Transnational Meetings and other initiatives, results and products related to the project.

The use of social media within the project gave very positive results and was effective in informing the local community. However, **to approach youths with fewer opportunities, the most effective communication channel is the spoken language: Word of mouth. Therefore, the most efficient communication strategy to involve youngsters who have difficulties deciding on doing an experience abroad is peer education.**

Taking this knowledge into consideration, the flyers were used very effectively as a reference. The young people could take these flyers with them after the meetings. Therefore, they could keep the project in mind and had the contact details at hand. Knowing how important peer groups and peer approaches are, the organisations encouraged the young people to hand flyers out to their friends and relatives of their age.

The flyers also proved to come in handy to communicate with parents and legal guardians, as well as the first link to potential new sending and hosting organisations. To support the dissemination activities given the importance of Peer Learning, and international multiplier workshop for young people with fewer opportunities was carried out in August 2019. Youths of the target group, who already got involved with volunteering activities, were trained in taking the first steps to become a multiplier. They bring much expertise with them, which they can use to motivate and aid their peers in their own, authentic way.

LOCAL NETWORKS INVOLVED IN THE “EUROPE FOR ALL” PROJECT

In each of the partner countries, the international partners worked on strengthening and creating new synergies at the local level within the already existing network and/or succeeded in involving new organisations. As a result, we can describe a large variety of organisations which were involved in, or simply learned about, the supporting and hosting opportunities of the European Solidarity Corps programme.

GLASGOW:

The local network in Glasgow, initiated by the Scottish partner Achieve More Scotland, consists of organisations which work with young people aged 5 to 24. These are predominantly community-based organisations and interact with young people daily. The local partner's work is based on using youth work methods to engage with their youths and get them involved in their sessions.

There are also youth clubs where young people attend drop-in sessions and participate in specific topic-based workshops. While the other organisations create topic-based programmes to approach and work with specific groups of youngsters, for example, young offenders, early school drop-outs and LGBTQ.

RUSE:

In Bulgaria, the local network created by Association Inspiration consists of NGOs like Caritas, Youth Red Cross, Equilibrium, Development of Social Capital NGO and the National Centre for youth information and international youth mobility. They work mainly with young people with social, economic and health problems or come from rural areas. They mostly perform daily centre activities and social support to increase the motivation of the young people who neither study nor work (NEET). The network also includes cultural and sports organisations which dedicate their work to young people with health problems, offering cultural and sports events on healthy lifestyle promotion. Public organisations and schools in the network support young school dropouts and youths coping with economic and social difficulties and cultural differences.

PAVIA:

The Italian partner, Associazione Porta Nuova Europa, collaborated with the associated partner, CSV Pavia (Centre for Volunteering Services), which supported the “Europe for All” activities by promoting the project- and concrete volunteering opportunities. Thanks to their strong and capillary network, local NGO's and voluntary organisations have received information on the European Solidarity Corps.

Babele Onlus is one of the organisations that became more active in the European Solidarity Corps programme as well, thanks to the “Europe for All” project. The organisation acquired the Quality Label for hosting youths with fewer opportunities and applied for a new European Solidarity Corps project. They work mainly with youths with migration background and those who are facing social and economic difficulties, facing problems at school, organising after school programmes, holiday and summer camps, supporting mostly families with financial problems. The staff was also active during different “Europe for All” transnational events.

To reach youths in schools who generally face difficulties due to economic and social obstacles, Vocational Education and Training (VET) centres mainly involved themselves in the promotional activities. Teachers and students have been actively involved during the third Transnational Meeting in Pavia

Two other involved organisations are working with disabled children and youths. They participated in the information and training sessions organised within the “Europe for All” project. They work directly with children in the San Matteo Hospital and organise supporting activities in a horse-riding school, using horse therapy. Both are very much interested in hosting European volunteers.

COLOGNE AND BONN:

The Youth Academy Walderberg succeeded in including four new organisations in the European Solidarity Corps, supporting them in the process to apply for the Quality Label and accompanying them to host their first European volunteers.

Transfer e.V. is a non-profit association located in Cologne, an independent child and youth services provider. The organisation offers consulting, training and networking services for professionals and organisations working with young persons, mainly in the field of international youth work, health promotion, inclusion and diversity education as well as active citizenship. These activities contribute to the reflection and further development of pedagogical work as well as to the improvement of structures and framework conditions for the benefit of children and adolescents. For future volunteers, transfer e.V. offers an interesting, structural perspective on the field of youth work.

The Katholische Jugendagentur Bonn gGmbH (KJA) is a provider of youth welfare in four regions of Northrhine-Westphalia. The organisation works with young people from various backgrounds, e.g. by offering leisure time activities in youth clubs. The KJA's work is based on open youth work, a method which follows five principles: openness, voluntary, participation, living and social space orientation and gender equality.

The GFO Klostergarten combines facilities of support for children, youth and the elderly. In the GFO Klostergarten, there is a kindergarten in the building of the old monastery, a mother-child-house, a group for unaccompanied, underage refugees and a community living project.

Furthermore, the Youth Academy Walbeberg works with schools, NGOs and other partners an especially important link to the target group of youths with fewer opportunities and therefore crucial part of the local network.

CRITERIA AND MOTIVATION OF THE LOCAL NEWCOMER ORGANISATIONS

The overall aim of the “Europe for All” project is to describe conditions under which it is possible to get youths with fewer opportunities involved in European volunteering activities and to describe tailor-made instruments for the preparation, hosting/sending activities and the follow-up. Therefore, it has been important that the local newcomer organisations agree on the relevance and meaningfulness of international mobility measures for young people with fewer opportunities.

It was important to ensure a good understanding of the philosophy of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programme by each organisation as well as to request the implementation of an internal analysis of the strengths and needs in each potential new partner organisation. Hence, it was possible to assess the aptitude of new organisations and guarantee a high-quality standard in European mobility projects.

Youth Academy Walberberg: **“One criterium for taking part in the local network was that all partners should settle in one region and be close to one another. Former projects with the target group of youths with fewer opportunities showed that regional networks and alliances are extremely helpful in tackling certain problems and can be very motivating and helpful for an exchange”.**

All newcomer organisations are supposed to have already worked with young people with fewer opportunities in one or the other way and therefore have some experience and expertise with it. It was also important that they have some kind of experience with (or at least show interest in) non-formal education and that they work with a participatory approach (towards the youths) and maybe even with Peer Learning.

On practical and organisational matters, the new organisations needed to have human resources (staff members) to be able to engage in the project. Also, experience in project management and, if possible, experience with the implementation of national voluntary services or interns were taken into consideration.

MOTIVATION:

Each local organisation expressed different motives to get involved in European mobility projects. The most important ones are summarised here

Internationalisation is one of the main motives of the local organisations involved in the “Europe for All” Strategic Partnership. This regards the work with the target group as well as the staff. The aim is to become involved in European projects and initiatives, strengthen and broaden the team diversity and include international perspectives in their work.

For the local organisations which support sending of young persons, it is important to offer them new perspectives, to



give them the chance for experiences which they could not make without the “Europe for All” (or comparable) projects and the Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps Programme. They aim to gain young people motivation, strengthen their self-esteem and their self-belief so that the youths engage actively and constructively how they want to shape their lives. Finding ideas and inspiration for future professional development is also a motive for organisations to participate.

Organisations which work with youths with migration background see the opportunity for the target group to better identify themselves with Europe and European Citizenship by becoming more involved in the European programmes. At the same time, it is important to them to allow young people of the target group to get to know exciting fields of work and solidarity in the sense of cross-border cooperation and promotion of civic engagement.

DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY THE NEWCOMER ORGANISATIONS

During the two years of the Strategic Partnership, various difficulties showed up in different phases of the involvement of local organisations. They’ve been explored by a questionnaire distributed among the partners and are outlined in the following.

APPLICATION FOR QUALITY LABEL

The local organisations which participated in the information and training sessions organised by the partner organisations expressed the following doubts and reasons for not applying for the Quality Label:

- 1 | Lack of time to dedicate to project writing, project administration and mentoring activities. Especially in the local networks of Italy and Bulgaria, staff members say “our organisations are small, already struggling with time management to fulfil our daily core activities. We are afraid (and conscious) that we will not be able to cope with the necessary extra hours needed to implement a good quality project”.
- 2 | Little dimension of organisations. Another difficulty expressed by small-sized organisations is the difficulty to host a volunteer full time (5 days a week, 6/7 hours a day). In different cases staff members, themselves volunteers, have other jobs and are not capable of devoting so much time to their projects.
- 3 | Lack of language skills. All four countries face this concern. Employees may not feel secure enough to host a young volunteer with fewer opportunities. He may need extra support, which may pose language problems when the youth needs emotional and psychological support during challenging times. Volunteers themselves express a similar worry.

- 4 | Lack of financial capability. The need to anticipate certain costs (rent, travelling, food and pocket money, 20% of the project costs), represent a reason for several organisations to decide not to participate. These organisations often do not receive structural funding for their daily activities and, therefore, cannot cover these costs.
- 5 | High costs for and lack of accommodation possibilities showed to be a challenge in all of the partner countries. Accommodation in big cities requires higher spending compared to small towns, especially in the case of only one long term volunteer. The problem becomes even more serious when short-term activities are hosted, which requires finding a group of international volunteers short-term accommodation. We experienced hotels or hostels raising their prices. Additionally, the option of accommodation in hostels is often not available in small towns.
- 6 | The choice between local and international youth work. Staff of local organisations sometimes seems to feel that they have to decide between local and international youth work. Since the local youth work activities better tend to the youth’s immediate needs than the international ones, local activities get higher priority.

PROJECT PLANNING AND WRITING

It is not always easy to identify some youths with fewer opportunities before the beginning of a project. Not only do we need to critically discuss labelling young people as those “with fewer opportunities” providing the young people with adequate support is also important, however, it could also cause inequality. All young persons, either with or without opportunities need some kind of specific support. Those who do fit in the formal definition according to the Erasmus+ / European Solidarity Corps programme

*(source: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusion-strategy/>)

do not always need extra help, experience shows that those who do not fit in this definition sometimes need much more extra support during the project implementation.

A specific example, mentioned by a sending organisation: **“More and more youths today use tranquilisers. However, they do not always express this need during the selection and preparation phase of the project, due to embarrassment and feelings of uneasiness. The youths do seem at ease before departure, but problems often occur afterwards, when they have to cope with the difficulties and challenges of a new situation”.**

The time needed to support youths with fewer opportunities during the project implementation is difficult to be calculated beforehand.



PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the direct work with young people with fewer opportunities, the newly accredited organisations reported that the youths who are facing economic and social obstacles are often not able to participate in long-term Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps projects (that take more than two months), because they are needed at home for financial or practical reasons. Some of them reported: **“They will lose the unemployment subsidy and it’s too complicated to stop it and apply again for it on their return in their sending country”**.

In some cases, staff members are not qualified enough to recognize the needs and / or difficulties of the volunteers in time. The organisations who deal with youths with migration background stated that their participation often raises administrative obstacles (e.g. refugee status still granted by the hosting country).

The organisations who deal with youths with a disability reported that the participation of these volunteers is difficult due to a lack of the respective infrastructure (architectonical barriers) in the offices of the organisations or in the town where the activities are implemented.

POSITIVE RESULTS

HIGH QUALITY

In general, the preparations (planning and design of volunteering activities, application for accreditation, practical preparations) took a lot of time – even more than the international organisations expected, despite a detailed assessment conducted beforehand. Nonetheless, the international partners consider this is a good sign because thorough preparations and conceptual considerations are ultimately important prerequisites for a successful, high-quality voluntary service as well as successful and lasting social change. Both are important parts of the project’s aims.

MULTIPLIERS

New volunteering activities were implemented during the project. Many of the participating youths who took part in these activities still keep contact with the host organisations and with each other. They are also very interested in the idea of becoming multipliers for other young persons, as they faced similar challenges and difficulties themselves. This shows that the voluntary services made a lasting impression on the young people and host organisations and became a significant part of their lives and their experiences.

We are positive that some of the young people with fewer opportunities who did a short-term voluntary service within the “Europe for All” project will consider another voluntary service, maybe even a long-term voluntary service. We’ll have to see about the future. So far, we have received positive feedback.

SYNERGIES AT A LOCAL LEVEL

We could observe great synergies between our local partners from different organisations during the workshop for tutors and mentors. The exchange of organisational matters, as well as pedagogical matters, went very well. Some of the partners showed interest in getting in touch actively with other organisations which work with the Erasmus+ / European Solidarity Corps programme, for example for mutual support as well as to bring European volunteers from different organisations together.

THE ADDED VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The good cooperation with the international partners was a crucial contribution to the implementation of new European Solidarity Corps projects. It enabled easy communication, quick consultations, quick solutions, mutual support and tailor-made designs of voluntary services, based on the needs of the target group as well as the needs of specific individuals. Thanks to the close contact between the international partners and their local partners, a continuous, wide-spread and high-quality support for the volunteers can be ensured – which is also something the young people notice positively.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

TAILOR-MADE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS PROJECTS

The “Europe For All” project enabled the project partners to reflect on the possibility of creating tailor-made European Solidarity Corps projects that ensure a successful European volunteering activity for young people with fewer opportunities. As the Partnership could understand and confirm, in Erasmus+ / European Solidarity Corps projects which involve youths with fewer opportunities, it is fundamental to be able to count on a structural partnership, based on trust and common knowledge of the ins and outs of the partner organisation(s).

A “tailor-made project” is a concept which should be interpreted as personalised, focusing on the personal needs of participants known already during the project design. On the other hand, flexibility is an important keyword; since there is always the chance that specific needs emerge after the beginning of the voluntary service. It is important to consider that young people and their needs can't just be defined as “with” or “without fewer opportunities”. Those labels don't necessarily depict the actual needs of young people as mentioned, vary a lot due to the diversity of the target group.

To further improve the quality of future European Solidarity Corps projects, the experiences of the implementation of the Strategic Partnership are summed up as recommendations. Those can be used as an orientation for new organisations and projects, but they also show a political dimension which, in the view of the partners, has to be taken into account regarding the future programme development.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The network recommends creating the possibility for organisations to request additional funding from the national agency in case they identify extra support needs during the implementation of a volunteering project. This allows mentors and support workers from both, supporting and hosting organisations, the flexibility to react adequately to the development of a project. They need to be able to report specific difficulties of the volunteer while working with them abroad and to respond adequately with the right professionals and adequate working time needed for the support. In this way, the additional funding will cover the unexpected expenses related to the specific support for a specific participant. This would be an effective measure for the inclusion of volunteers with fewer opportunities.

TRAINING AND SUPPORTING MEASURES FOR THE NEWCOMER ORGANISATIONS

The international project partners were able to create and offer a different kind of supporting activities during the “Europe For All” project.

Although sharing existing knowhow between international and local partners has been a big advantage, it must be recognised that administrative and bureaucratic tasks remain a

significant obstacle. It has been clear that most organisations need extra administrative support and that mutual reflection on common objectives during these training sessions is really useful. Besides, the procedures and waiting time of some national agencies for Quality Labels are long. This causes delays in the plans of the organisations to start working within the European Solidarity Corps.

RECOMMENDATION 2

More organisation support should be financed within the programme to help organisations to plan better and become more independent. This would fulfil the long-term goal to enable organisations to carry out European Solidarity Corps projects for young people with fewer opportunities of high quality themselves.

ESTABLISHING COOPERATION WITH REGIONAL POLITICIANS

All partners implemented specific measures to involve those responsible for youth policy at the local level in the participating countries, sharing the challenges they face when working with young people with fewer opportunities and implementing international mobility's.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Logistical support and cooperation from the side of the local politicians and representatives of the local and administrations responsible for the youth policies are fundamental and need to be extended. More synergy is needed between the Erasmus+ / European Solidarity Corps Programme developers and national administrations to reduce bureaucratic obstacles for both, organisations as well as young people with fewer opportunities. This is important, for example, for those youths who face unemployment, not to lose subsidies after returning from international mobility projects.

DISSEMINATION

The most effective communication channel to approach young people with fewer opportunities is the spoken language when authentic models use language young people can identify with. Therefore, peer-to-peer education is the most efficient communication strategy to involve youths underrepresented in European motilities.

RECOMMENDATION 4

We can confirm that creating opportunities (events, online instruments and peer networks) enabling potential, new and former volunteers to keeping in touch and supporting each other before, during and after their experience, results more effective and successful. If the specifics of those youth networks are decided on and managed by the youngsters themselves (instead of being proposed by organisations and agencies), they are even more effective because they take the expertise of the young people fully into account.

CONCLUSION

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In this conclusion, the central findings on barriers to access and perspectives on increasing access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps will be summarised. Five main themes have been identified that we hope will inspire further discussion.

ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR STRUCTURAL PARTICIPATION

It has been shown that young people are generally very interested in international formats and European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. The issue of access to the programme for young people should be approached as a social-structural problem rather than an individual one. Organisations suffer from insufficient financing and structural support, which is often required to realise increased access to programmes. Acquiring access to the European funding system poses a major challenge and creates uncertainty, especially for organisations with limited resources and application experience. The required organisational, administrative and financial requirements represent a structural barrier. In contrast, the Strategic Partnership “Europe for All” provided access for young people and especially for new local organisations. The project’s success depended particularly on the high level of personal commitment of those involved. Strong identification with the project’s concept and above-average idealism were necessary to deal with the high workload. It became increasingly evident in the project that European project funding cannot resolve the insecure financial situations in which many local (youth work) organisations find themselves.

Our research has also shown that giving organisations with previous European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps experience access to new target groups requires financially relevant changes at an organisational level. Existing incentives, such as individual support, were assessed as being insufficient and inflexible. Fundamental requirements like inclusively designed websites, further training for educators, increased networking and construction (e.g. elevators, wheelchair ramps) cannot be adequately financed by the existing funding instruments. Flexible management of financial resources is considered necessary to be able to react to changing needs and changes in participants.

With regard to young people’s involvement through adequate funding, we conclude that there is a particular need for additional specialised staff to support organisations in preliminary accreditation and application. The high cost of living in some European countries and lack of affordable housing should also be taken into account.

One of the central conclusion shows that potential participants must be able to rely on financial aid promised by the programme (e.g. visa costs, personal assistance guarantees, spending money for leisure activities). Sustainable acceptance of projects at the European level can only succeed if youth work organisations receive adequate funding at the local and municipal level to enable them to participate in European funding procedures.

(DE)CONSTRUCTION OF “YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES“

The strategic highlighting of the target group “young people with fewer opportunities,” is an attempt to create opportunities for young people who have not yet had access to the European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. However, this special status risks individualising structural problems. This is, for example, the case when coping strategies are more oriented towards the target groups than structural barriers.

The Strategic Partnership “Europe for All” shows that the tension between construction and deconstruction cannot be completely resolved. Thus, total refusal to identify specific groups, for example in public relations work, does not make sense. Otherwise, certain groups with histories of exclusion may feel passed over. However, this “affirmative action” strategy can only be understood as a temporally and spatially dependent measure. The processes of administratively justified selection of certain target groups should be more strongly differentiated from educational and operative practice. A deconstructive and reflective attitude towards specific target groups may be important, but it is not enough on its own.

Considering the narrowly defined target group and the resulting individualisation of structural problems, there is a need to make funding more flexible by offering flat rates and budgets without strong requirements to certain target groups and formats. Careful management of financial resources that moves beyond orientation towards specific target groups to focus on structural barriers is needed.

TRANSPARENCY, ACTIVE SUPPORT AND LOBBY

There are major differences among the various national agencies concerning processing applications. This leads to confusion and insecurity among the organisations from the participating European countries. The organisations expect more transparency and better communication, especially if their applications are rejected. The staff of the national agencies have an important supporting role in developing and supervising projects. Agencies in some countries do not always provide active support. Thus, actions of the national agencies prevent, perhaps even limit, some inclusion strategies followed by the organisations. Committed applicant organisations are confused and frustrated by these administrative actions.

NETWORKS OF LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL SERVICES AND ACTORS

By networking different local and international services, the Strategic Partnership “Europe for All” has shown that it can create opportunities for young people’s participation. Opportunities for participation and voluntary activities at the local level of districts and in local communities form a core link for young persons’ access to the international voluntary service format such as European Voluntary Service/European Solidarity Corps. Establishing networks and cooperation among local and international partners can open doors to low-threshold access on an international and European level. However, acquiring, advising and supporting local cooperation and network partners needs time

and effort. Due to the complexity of the programme, the European Solidarity Corps currently only serves as a supplemental programme. To contribute to reducing access barriers, youth work should include internationality as a component at the local level. From the participants' perspective, we should ask how the European political actors can continue to support exchange, consultation and networking between local and international civil society actors. The success of the network "Europe for All" is due to the interaction among international networking, local cooperation and local networks.

The operative functions of networking (e.g. consultation on methods and concepts) are shown in our study to be highly beneficial. Also, international cooperation in youth policy and strategy development has great developmental potential regarding access for young people and new organisations. Civil society organisations require support and resources for this purpose (e.g. for the organisation and implementation of international network meetings, compensation for volunteers) to strengthen existing contacts and reinforce established processes. Contrary to the past, the relevancy of network sustainability is regarded as indisputable. In the long-term, local participants, in particular, should be allowed to participate in different networks and become involved in different issues. In the following section, we will present views, goals and ideas on the continued development of the Strategic Partnership "Europe for All."

STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY INVOLVEMENT

The perspectives presented earlier in this publication indicate the need for various parties to deepen their involvement (volunteers, professionals and organisations) to further develop the European Solidarity Corps. The Strategic Partnership has shown that these actors are interested in becoming involved and participating in the European Solidarity Corps. This commitment should be taken seriously. Organisations and volunteers are not only the target audience and users of this programme but primarily civil society actors.

We have observed strict programme requirements for organisations and young people, as well as how the programme's high threshold to entry limits access and opportunity for all actors. This calls for a strengthening of the actors' perspectives. If processing strategies no longer focus solely on the individuals but the structural barriers, civil society actors must be empowered to take appropriate action. The quality of national agencies also plays a key role in sustaining networks.

NETWORK “EUROPE FOR ALL“ – REFLECTION AND PERSPECTIVE

THINKING INTERNATIONALITY IN LOCAL STRUCTURES

Creating access opportunities through international networking and local cooperation is an important strategy of this project. The potential of the network approach consists of pooling resources, skills and know-how. The result creates both synergy effects and provides flexibility. The strategic and operational level of the “Europe for All” network should be differentiated.

The operational level strives to create new cooperations, certify and consult local partners, network and exchange with international and local players. However, the strategic level of the network “Europe for All” aims at processes, similar to lobbying. In addition to the cooperation approach at the local level, the international network “Europe for All” also offered the opportunity to network internationally. International network meetings were one of several opportunities provided for this purpose. These fruitful international meetings and activities were characterised by a high level of interest in professional dialogue, desire to improve educational practice, testing of new methods, and openness to new developments.

ENABLE CONSISTENCY AND FLEXIBILITY

The participants express a strong interest in continuing the existing processes and joint networking. Due to the loss of the Strategic Partnership, new incentives and reasoning must be found, e.g. to test innovative ideas, develop methods and concepts, and lobbying. The success of this network was due to the high level of identification with the project concept. This was an important motivator for many actors’ commitment. The project concept can also be used to stabilise the network.

CRITICALLY CONSIDER PRACTICE

Furthermore, it is necessary to discuss not only successes (best practices), but also the setbacks, conflicts and obstacles, and then conclude from this for further projects. Strengthening mutual youth policy cooperation, for example by lobbying, is an important goal for future networking. The peer education approach can be established not only as a forum for professional exchange but also as an instrument of cooperation in youth policy. An important aspect for the stabilisation phase is to enable participation for structurally and financially weak organisations in the network.

STRENGTHEN THE POSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AS SPOKESPERSONS

Creating an internal network of experts and youth participation was another special feature of the network. The network not only played an advisory role but used existing leeway to develop new ideas with young people. The network developed the idea of creating its youth network to give youths more responsibilities as spokespersons. Initial ideas on implementing this concept have been described earlier in this publication. The young people’s strong commitment and their interest in exchanging their experiences triggered this idea. We should not only approach the youth network and the adjacent idea of peer-education pragmatically to acquire new volunteers but also to give ex-volunteers the chance to become involved politically (e.g. stronger participation at an organisational and programme level).

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