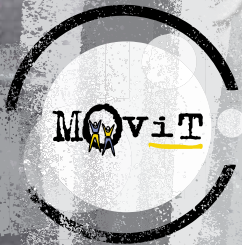




VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES
TO COMBAT LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT



Title: Volunteering activities to combat long-term unemployment

Publisher: (Movit, Ljubljana, junij, 2019)

Author: Jonathan Robertson

Editor: Maja Drobne

Proofreading: Nik Paddison

Designed by: Maja Cerjak, Aiko

Type: e-publication

Price: Free to use

VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES TO COMBAT LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

Katalogni zapis o publikaciji (CIP) pripravili v
Narodni in univerzitetni knjižnici v Ljubljani
COBISS.SI-ID=300252160
ISBN 978-961-6826-27-3 (epub)



To delo je objavljeno pod licenco Creative Commons
»Priznanje avtorstva-Nekomercialno-Brez predelav 4.0 Mednarodna«
(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

Author:
Jonathan Robertson

CONTENTS

8	Introduction	48	Section 3:
10	Aims and Objectives of This Research Project		<i>Innovative Partnership-Building</i>
11	Organisations and Participants	49	Introduction
13	Research Approach and Limitations	50	Case Study 1: Make Me Dream
		51	Case Study 2: I See You, You Are Here
16	Section 1:	53	Case Study 3: Future-Oriented Activity
	<i>How Volunteering Activities Impacts the Employability of the Young People Involved</i>	55	Case Study 4: From The Grassroots Up
17	Introduction	56	Conclusions and Recommendations
17	1.1 How They Got Involved and What Was Their Motivation		
19	1.2 What They Gained from Their Project as Individuals	58	Overall Conclusions, Recommendations and Reflections
22	1.3 The Social Dimensions of Volunteering Activities	61	Closing Reflections and Recommendations
24	1.4 Recognising the Next Steps		
26	1.5 What the Organisations Think	62	Appendix
28	1.6 Final Conclusions, Reflections and Recommendations		<i>Case Studies of Young People Who Participated in Volunteering Activities Projects</i>
30	Section 2:	65	Selected Bibliography
	<i>Effective Practices of the Organisations Involved</i>		
31	Introduction		
32	2.1 Building International Partnerships		
34	2.2 Working with and Preparing Young People for Volunteering Activities		
38	2.3 Selecting Volunteers		
40	2.4 Hosting Volunteers, Learning Processes and Mentorship		
42	2.5 When Volunteers Finish Their Activity		
44	2.6 What Young People Appreciate from Organisations		
46	2.7 Conclusions, Reflections and Recommendations		

FOREWORD

MOVIT, as the Slovenian National Agency for the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes, has always been interested in the impact of projects supported through our programmes; on participants, organisations, local communities and beyond. This particular project started back in 2012, when MOVIT, together with 8 other National Agencies and 2 SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres launched a piece of research on the topic of competences young people gain in the frame of the European Voluntary Service and how the experience changed their lives. This was followed by a European Voluntary Service activity for long-term unemployed young people, co-organised with the United Kingdom National Agency ECORYS in 2016. This activity aimed to explore the possibilities of working more closely with employment offices and in developing the competences of long-term unemployed young people through short-term volunteering service. As this was a networking activity, our aim was to build strong partnerships between different organisations and monitor more closely the impact on participants, organisations and local communities.

As a result of the previous research and the 2016 activity, a two year research project was started in 2017 to better understand the impact of Volunteering Activities on long-term unemployed young people. Over the two years the research followed 43 young people from 9 different countries and

from various backgrounds, 24 of them were young people with fewer opportunities. Their volunteering activities took place in 16 different organisations all over European Union.

During the course of the research, the European Voluntary Service, which used to be a part of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, was transformed into 'Volunteering Activities' in the frame of the new European Solidarity Corps programme. In the new programme, the context of the volunteering service slightly changed with more focus being put on solidarity and community building. However, one thing remained the same and that is the important impact these activities have on participants, organisations and local communities. In fact, RAY1 research suggests that when young people with fewer opportunities are involved in such projects it is even more so. The stories shared by the volunteers and their hosting organisations during this research are truly inspiring and prove that investment in mobility projects, especially for young people with fewer opportunities, is really important. Through these projects the young people can develop skills valuable in the job market, their self-esteem increases and they become more aware of their potentials and passions. With the support of a mentor, provided by their hosting organisation, they are able to reflect on their learning outcomes and have the courage to

¹ <https://www.researchyouth.eu/>

try new things that stretch them beyond their comfort zone. As one of the participants in the research said "Education and information are best things." This is a perfect example of why the EU should keep investing in young people, especially those with fewer opportunities. When doing a comparison of before and after experiencing a Volunteering Activities, it is these young people who show the biggest difference and experience the biggest impact.

We invite you to read this research and explore its treasure of interesting case studies, inspiring quotes and valuable insights on how volunteering can change somebody's life. It shows how organisations can benefit from hosting volunteers and how such projects can enrich the local communities. It also shows that volunteering is not a 'silver bullet' and that it can also be challenging, especially afterwards when the young people return to their home country. Another important aspect is the involvement of other stakeholders, such as employment offices, social services, schools and other relevant institutions, which – when working hand in hand – can together create even greater results.

We believe that stories like Paolo's, speak for themselves: "I think my boss has admiration for me because of my volunteering project. They see the person who has more force of will – not to surrender in life, not ever."

We would like to thank the researcher for extracting such valuable lessons from the enormous amount of data gathered during the research and for presenting it in a coherent, readable and interesting way. We would like to express our gratitude to all of the organisations and especially to all of the young volunteers that were willing to cooperate with the researcher and share their valuable insights into the impact of volunteering.

We hope this publication will contribute to better understanding and awareness of the impact that mobility projects have on young people. We also encourage you to get involved in and support Volunteering Activities so that we can, in the words of Baden Powell,

"Leave this world a little better than you found it."²

We wish you great reading and inspiration.

² Baden Powell

INTRODUCTION

“The key to getting a real feel for the work is to become familiar with and sensitive to the profusion of tales, small and large, that make up the youth work saga.”

(In Defence of Youth Work network, 2012)

In 1996, Édith Cresson, the member in charge of Education, Training and Youth Policies for the European Commission, launched a new programme. It was called ‘European Voluntary Service’ – or EVS, for short. Cresson announced: “the aim [of the programme] is to make young Europeans know Europe and, during their voluntary service abroad, to learn the language and culture of another country so that contact networks may be created.”¹ EVS became a part of the ‘Youth for Europe’ programme, which was “designed, in particular, to encourage the participation of young people who experience the most difficulties in being included.”²

Since 1996, EVS has become an important part of successive European youth programmes. In 2016, Jean-Claude Juncker introduced a new programme – European Solidarity Corps. The aim of this programme was to take the place of EVS and expand upon it. Under the European Solidarity Corps, what was previously called EVS, projects are now called ‘Volunteering Activities’. The name has changed, but do the same needs remain? Those born around the time when Cresson first introduced EVS into the European youth programme are now themselves moving into adulthood.

1 http://www.europarl.europa.eu/workingpapers/educ/pdf/w6en_en.pdf

2 88/348/EEC: Council Decision of 16 June 1988 adopting an action programme for the promotion of youth exchanges in the Community - “Youth for Europe” programme

What is the Europe they are growing up into? From the economic crisis of 2009 and subsequent austerity, to climate breakdown and political turbulence, these young people are facing some almighty challenges.

The rates of youth unemployment across Europe may have dropped overall compared to the early 2010s. But the employment landscape of the 21st Century for young people is full of uncertainty and black holes – from precarious / poor employment through to young people not in education employment or training, and the scarring effects³ of long-term unemployment. These are big challenges for the whole of society – not just the youth work sector. “Our perspective is to prevent this long-term unemployment. To prevent it.” This is the voice of Yuki Marquez, Project Co-ordinator of Europa Joven Madrid – one of the youth organisations involved in this research project. Marquez, along with some of the other youth workers interviewed, see Volunteering Activities as (amongst other things) a preventative measure against long-term unemployment.

So, what has previous research established on this topic, and where does this research project fit in? From 2012-2014 a large-scale research project was conducted on the connection between EVS and employability by 8 National Agencies and 2 SALTO resource centres, with support from the RAY Network⁴. [EVS Competences For Employability](#) (2014) did much to establish an evidence base for the link between employability and EVS (or Volunteering Activities, to use the new name). It also recommended some areas for further study. Three of these recommendations became the foundation for the aims of this research project:

- the need to better understand the impact of Volunteering Activities on young people with fewer opportunities;
- share examples of effective practice within organisations active in Volunteering Activities;
- explore the potential for youth organisations to collaborate more closely with employment offices (and other institutions linked to employability).

In 2018, youth work researchers Nicodemi and Şenyuva⁵ described how young people with fewer opportunities have been squeezed out of EVS projects – a programme that was originally created for them in particular. This important piece of research justifies much further investigation into and the monitoring of Volunteering Activities (and European Solidarity Corps more widely) and the experiences of young people with fewer opportunities around this programme.

3 Scarring’ is “a phenomenon, whereby long-term unemployment – particularly during the formative years of a young person’s life – has significant negative impacts on people who go through it, well after the initial unemployment is over.” p.16, Goldring, *On Track*, Salto-Youth Inclusion and Diversity (2015)

4 Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme. <https://www.researchyouth.eu/> 5 Chapter 13, Learning mobility, social inclusion and non-formal education: Access, processes and outcomes, edited by Maurice Devlin et al., Council of Europe, (2018)

Over the past 2 years this research project has collaborated with 16 organisations from 9 different countries across Europe active in Volunteering Activities. Through these organisations, this project has met with and interviewed 43 young people during their 'Volunteering Activities' journeys – the majority of whom were young people with fewer opportunities (herein YPFO). The project interviewed the young people and key staff members of the organisations, the aim was to better understand the impact of these projects on the employability of the young people and, also, to share examples of effective practice and innovative partnerships amongst the organisations involved.

The Nobel Prize-winning author Svetlana Alexievich once said: "There are lots of these stories that I don't see as a lesson happening every day. Preparing yourself to see some things as a nice lesson is a state of art. It's the martial art that we all want to achieve one day." This research project has attempted to practise this "state of art" and through this report we invite you to 'prepare yourself' and join us in seeking the lessons from what the young people and organisations have shared.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

This research project was set up to:

To better understand the impact of Volunteering Activities on the employability of young people – in particular, young people with fewer opportunities.

This research project followed 43 young people from a diverse range of backgrounds across Europe through their Volunteering Activities journey. The aim was to hear about their experiences at different stages of their respective projects in their own words – especially after the end of their activity. After all, the young people themselves are the leading experts in their own experiences. It is important to note that 'YPFO' is not a homogenous group. It is a very diverse category, as described by the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme guide, made up of a whole range of potentially intersecting social exclusions.

To share examples of effective practice from youth organisations active in supporting young people through their Volunteering Activities projects.

The inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in these projects does not just happen. It requires thoughtful practice from committed organisations across Europe. This research project visited the participating organisations and interviewed key staff members to gather examples of effective practice that we hope are valuable for other organisations working with young people with fewer opportunities.

To explore the potential of innovative partnerships between youth organisations and other institutions, particularly employment offices.

There are many different people, organisations and sectors that work with young people. This research project has explored how youth organisations collaborate with other bodies – such as employment offices, municipalities and educational institutions – to make volunteering activities a reality for the wide range of young people for whom the opportunity is intended. The hope is that these case studies will inform and inspire other organisations and institutions to work together in new ways.

This report is divided into three sections, one section per aim:

Section 1: How Volunteering Activities Impacts the Employability of the Young People Involved

Section 2: Effective Practices of the Organisations Involved

Section 3: Innovative Partnership-Building

At the end of the report there are some overall conclusions, reflections and recommendations.

ORGANISATIONS AND PARTICIPANTS

Who Are the Organisations Who Participated in This Research?

- Achieve More Scotland, Glasgow (UK)
- AKSELS, Pernick (Bulgaria)
- Atelier Europeo, Brescia (Italy)
- Europa Joven Madrid (Spain)
- Frie Filmere, Sandefjord (Norway)
- Iter, Gothenburg (Sweden)
- Leonard Cheshire, London (UK)
- Mladinski Center Krško (Slovenia)
- Mladinski Center Slovenj Gradec (Slovenia)
- Mladinski Center Trbovlje (Slovenia)
- NAV, More og Romsdal (Norway)
- PUM-O Škofja Loka (Slovenia)
- Red Cross (UK)
- STRIM, Krakow (Poland)
- Zavod Manipura, Begunje na Gorenjskem (Slovenia)
- 4YOUgend, Linz (Austria)

VOLUNTEERING ABROAD

I TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR BECOMING DIFFERENT

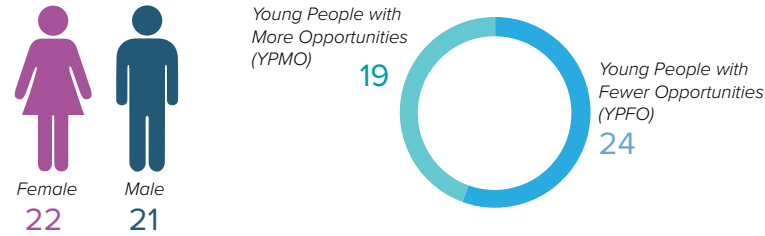
Loesje

www.loesje.org
loesje@loesje.org



Who Are the Young People Who Participated in This Research?

TOTAL NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE:



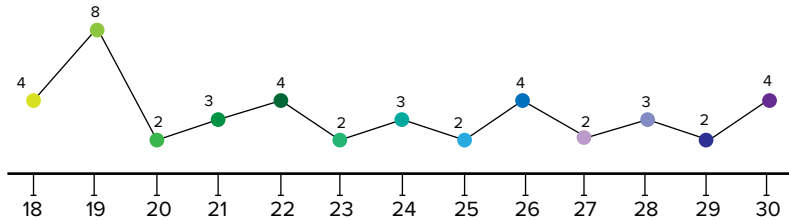
VOLUNTEER'S NATIONALITIES:



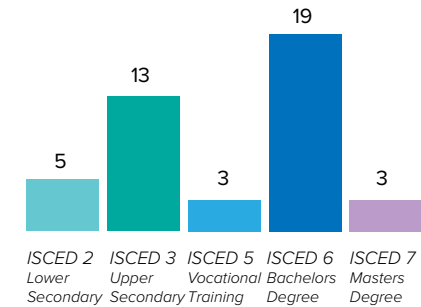
BEFORE THEIR VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES:



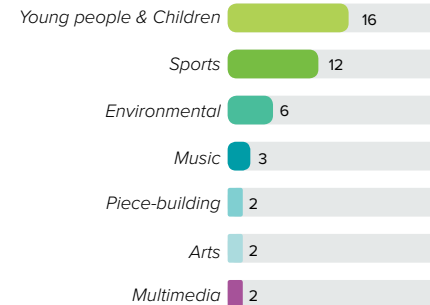
AGE AT START OF VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES PROJECT:



HIGHEST LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION (CURRENTLY STUDYING OR ACHIEVED):

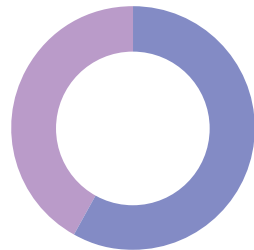


PROJECT THEMES / TOPICS:



Long-Term projects (2 months up to 1 year)

18



Short-Term projects (2 weeks up to 2 months)

25

RESEARCH APPROACH AND LIMITATIONS

1

1st phase:

An international Partnership Building Activity in June 2016 hosted in Bled, Slovenia for staff members of around 20 different organisations across Europe active in Volunteering Activities;

2nd phase:

The participants from the Partnership Building Activity would be supported to work together to submit applications for Volunteering Activities projects starting from January 2017 onwards;

3rd phase:

Starting in May 2017, a researcher would follow the journey of the volunteers participating in these projects and document the impact their participation has had on their lives;

4th phase:

In Spring 2019, a report would be written to share examples of quality practice, explain the outcomes of the Volunteering Activities projects and share this model with organisations, institutions and communities across Europe.

2

3

4

Having established relationships with the organisations attending the Partnership Building Activity in June 2016, the researcher visited many of the organisations involved and met all of the young people in person. One reason for choosing to do interviews was to try to hear the experiences and reflections of the young people (and the staff of the organisations) in their own words, not anybody else's. One of the young people that participated in the research described how expressing themselves through the standard questionnaire evaluation at the end of a project was not really possible and that such surveys can be 'difficult to get around'. The interviews sought to be flexible enough to follow and respect the things that were important for the young people and organisation to talk about, even if they were not included in the prepared questions. Furthermore, the interview format provided the possibility of investigating a common or 'surface level' response. For instance, one of the common responses to asking young people what they gained from a Volunteering Activities project was that they became 'more confident'. But what does this really mean? Confident in what? Confident to do what? How did that confidence come about? Hopefully this exploration has resulted in a more nuanced and accurate set of responses to work with.

One of the limitations of this study is bringing together data from organisations and young people coming from a very wide range of different backgrounds. This project includes diverse organisations, operating in different contexts, of varying sizes, and coming from different countries. The young people are of very different backgrounds, ages, and formal educational levels. The category of young people with fewer opportunities is anything but homogenous. The overall results of the data shared here are not offered as a definitive, 'one size fits all'



BLOK office with map of ex-EVS volunteers - Skofja Loka



MC Krsko - interview with Barbara

picture. Youth work typically responds to local contexts and needs and does not tend to follow the corporate approach of 'scaling up' an 'off-the-shelf' model. What is shared in this report is a record of recurring responses that have emerged across the data, in combination with case studies and many direct excerpts from the interviews to bring individual colour to the picture. The hope is that this will help to create a better understanding and articulate the link between Volunteering Activities and employability. It is also hoped that as readers of this report you are able to take tips and receive stimulation and inspiration from the approaches of organisations across Europe active in Volunteering Activities, to help you in your work with young people.

Several of the young people in this study described feeling, after speaking with volunteers on other projects, that they were lucky to be on the Volunteering Activities project they were on and not another one. These were anecdotal descriptions of volunteers receiving nowhere near the level of support from organisations that they should have. For example, compared to the poor experiences of other volunteers she met on the Mid-Term Evaluation seminar, one young person felt she got "the golden ticket" with her Volunteering Activities project. This raises a question mark over how representative this study can claim to be of the average Volunteering Activities experience – a limitation we must consider.

Finally, this report exists because of the time and energy committed by the staff members of the organisations and the young people involved. They have all been generous and willing co-investigators of the questions raised by this research project. It is essential as well to acknowledge the support, inspiration and encouragement given by the staff of the Slovenian and UK National Agencies who funded and managed this project.



Susanna from Jugend4U with gift from Poland



SECTION 1

“How about if we turned everything upside down and got another chance of getting to know ourselves through discovering the world anew?”

(Dagna Gmitrowicz, The Undiscovered Country, 2012)

Over the past two years, this research project has engaged with 43 young people from 12 different countries through their Volunteering Activities journey. This section of the report aims to share with you what they said.

The questions used include: Why did they want to go on a project? What did they gain? What does this mean for their futures? And, in particular, does any of this contribute to their employability? And if so, how? The hope here is to try to better understand how Volunteering Activities contribute to the futures of the young people involved.

Below, the main findings from the interviews will be outlined, with comparisons between the responses of the YPFO and the young people with more opportunities (herein YPMO). All the names used for the young people are pseudonyms. Also included are short highlights from the interviews that give examples of the main findings, providing some more detail and colour to the picture. The findings are organised into the 4 areas that the young people focused on in their interviews:

- 1.1 How They Got Involved and What Was Their Motivation;
- 1.2 What They Gained from Their Project as Individuals;
- 1.3 The Social Dimension of Their Volunteering Activities Journey;
- 1.4 Recognising the Next Steps;
- 1.5 What the Organisations Think.

Finally, this section will end with some conclusions, reflections and recommendations.

1.1 HOW THEY GOT INVOLVED AND WHAT WAS THEIR MOTIVATION

How Did the Young People Hear About Volunteering Activities?



ALBERTO, ITALY

“Before the Volunteering Activities experience, I was in a bad situation. Here in Italy it is hard to find a job. I finished my studies in 2009 with an IT Diploma. I tried to find a job for 5 years – a long time. I worked in some short jobs – cutting grass, gardening. But I never found a real job. In 2015 I started the year of Civil Service. It is voluntary. I really wanted to try the volunteer work and that was a really good way to start. Then I worked as a secretary at an office, then one month at McDonald’s. Then I started to search for information about Volunteering Activities and ran into Renata [from Atelier Europeo]... After I discovered that project, I hoped that Volunteering Activities would be my next step in this way.”

JULA, POLAND

“This is the first project we got involved in with STRIM. My Godmother volunteers here and told me about this project.”



MARTIN, SWEDEN

“It was a tough environment for me. I started using drugs. I was a ‘troublesome youth’, going out partying, doing drugs, doing stupid shit. Then my mother called social security here in Sweden and said my kid has got a problem, I am going to have to throw him out of the house if it doesn’t improve. So this was a wake-up call to myself. I have to do something with myself – I don’t want to be a 35 year-old guy living in my parents’ house. I want to do something about my life. So I was speaking with social services and they told me about this Iter [Martin’s Support Organisation in Gothenburg], and I thought ‘what is this? it sounds very exciting.’”



What Was the Young Person's Motivation for Getting Involved?



"Actually, at that time I was stuck in life. I didn't know what to do. In Georgia it is quite impossible to get a job without a Diploma and I was just stuck and at the same time I had a very hard depression and I really needed to do something to get over it. And then I just thought why not Volunteering Activities? I know what it is and that it's a really great opportunity. I found it and then I came here with another boy – this was short-term Volunteering Activities, last year – and that was the biggest experience. I changed the point of view."



"When I go somewhere, I don't have expectations because you can be disappointed. But if you go just to have fun and make a new experience, it's OK. It's a nice experience. I like to help people, to be a volunteer – you have many opportunities to learn something, meet people. I also have more chance than my colleagues at University – they just study and study. And it's not enough in Romania. If you don't have experience in something, then employers aren't interested in you. I think this experience will give me a better chance of getting a job and improving myself as well."

GEORGHE, ROMANIA



"Well, for me the main focus was to grow on a personal level. Because I had major problems with anxiety in the past. Even if I had to go to the capital in the past I was stressed out because of the buses and trains, unknown environment, places, people. So, to go from there to sit on a plane for the first time in my life and go just somewhere totally different. I really pushed myself out of that bubble to see if I can handle it. So, yeah, my biggest aspiration was to grow on a personal level and leave the fear behind. Because I really didn't have anything to fear, but I feared everything (laughs)."

Conclusions and Reflections

NOT LEAVING IT TO WORD OF MOUTH

Although it is a small sample, this data shows that YPFO are much less likely to hear about Volunteering Activities through word of mouth (friends or family) than other more privileged young people. The YPFO in this study heard about Volunteering Activities primarily from youth organisations they were already involved with. In other words, YPFO are unlikely to 'bump into' an opportunity like Volunteering Activities during their upbringing in the way that more privileged young people do. If hopes of equal participation regardless of background are to be achieved, there is much more work to be done in putting these opportunities on the radar of YPFO, and not just relying on word of mouth.

GETTING UNSTUCK

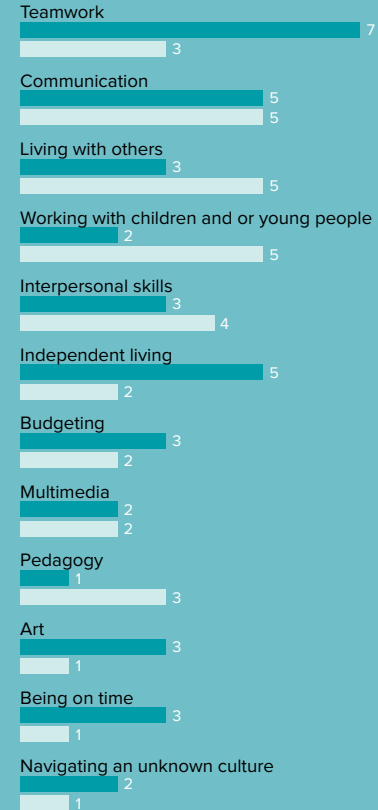
From limited employment prospects to family problems, from undiscovered talents to mental health problems, this research heard many ways in which young people were lost or stuck in their lives. Many young people perceived Volunteering Activities as a fresh start and a chance to change their situation. It is worth noting that nearly all the young people that identified with 'being lost' as their motivation for Volunteering Activities are YPFO. It is a valuable finding to see that these young people themselves identified Volunteering Activities as a way forward for them.

RECOGNITION OF LINK TO EMPLOYABILITY

It is noteworthy that 3 of the top 5 reasons that the young people describe for participating in a Volunteering Activities project are related directly to employability. This shows that for these young people – before going on their project – the connection between Volunteering Activities and increased employability is to a significant extent present. Additionally, amongst those that identified one of their motivations as employability two thirds were YPFO. Although this is a small sample, it can lead us to consider that YPFO, who are less likely to participate in further or higher education, may rely more on opportunities like Volunteering Activities to bring them closer to the world of work.

1.2 WHAT THEY GAINED FROM THEIR PROJECT AS INDIVIDUALS

What Skills Did the Young People Say They Gained?



What Changes in Attitude Did the Young People Say They Gained?



What Gains in Knowledge Did the Young People Report?



INA, SWEDEN

"I have become more of an adult I guess. Because for me I wasn't really feeling like I had grown up or done stuff in my life. And this was, even if other people I have talked to haven't seen it that way, for me it was a huge step. It really was. For me it was that I could do stuff by myself. People thought that I was crazy going down to Spain not knowing anybody. I think that's a huge step. Especially for someone as young as me."



LUCY, UK

"I definitely would put myself in the attitude / mindset category. I couldn't claim that I learned any new practical skills. Just because the nature of the task wasn't designed to do that. I am sure I could have done a programme about photography or something if I'd wanted, but I didn't."



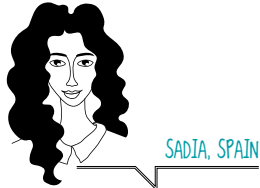
JULA, POLAND

"I learned that people like me – even when I am without make-up and pretty clothes... I learned 50-50 from free time and volunteering, maybe more from free time. We talked and laughed a lot. I am now more confident with English and with other people. Now I am at the top step."



MITJA, SLOVENIA

"I think the result is mostly learning new things – not only about the country, but also about yourself. Because you are living alone, you are somewhere in an unknown territory you have to do everything by yourself – no parents, no family members, no friends there – of course you meet people there, but you are in an isolated place. It's something like people who always stay home, go to parties and never go out of the world – you have to go somewhere else to gain new knowledge and experience of life."



SADIA, SPAIN

"Self-confidence, I've returned with more confidence, I feel I can conquer the world. I also learned to manage by myself, to be more independent, more self-sufficient, to do things by myself on my own initiative. 'I'm going to help you' – I go. Before I used to wait to be asked: 'Do you want to come help me?' Now I'm the one who goes. If there is something I don't understand, it's fine, I learn. That's what I learnt... Since I got back, I'm studying to be able to work, I'm volunteering, I'm trying to get my driving licence... I'm doing things that in the past I was like: 'I'll do it, I'll do it later'. And now I'm actually doing them, I want to get everything done to satisfy myself."

ANA, ITALY

"Things to do with attitude – like bravery – when it comes to employability aren't usually included. But it is what makes the difference. I think it was one of the best things I learned when I got back – when it comes to employability you have to be brave."



MARTIN, SWEDEN

"I was a volunteer – that didn't help me get a job. But I would say on a personal level, yes, there was a lot of stuff that helped me. Organising stuff, taking responsibility, cooking dinners with everyone are examples. I can have lunch for the next day sorted, I can have clean clothes – my parents did all of that before for me. But now I take charge of my own life. Small stuff like that. You have to keep going, you can't give up. I managed to get a job and now I am studying. The will to keep on fighting, to keep on living and experiencing new stuff. I did not have this determination before. It came with the Volunteering Activities project."

Conclusions and Reflections

ATTITUDINAL DEVELOPMENT OVER SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

The young people in the research identified significantly more development in their attitudes than their skills or knowledge – roughly in a ratio of 4:3:2 (attitude: skills: knowledge). Furthermore, in the majority of the cases, positive changes in attitude were discussed first by the young people in the interviews, before mention of skills or knowledge – again further suggesting the primacy of attitudinal development as an outcome of Volunteering Activities.

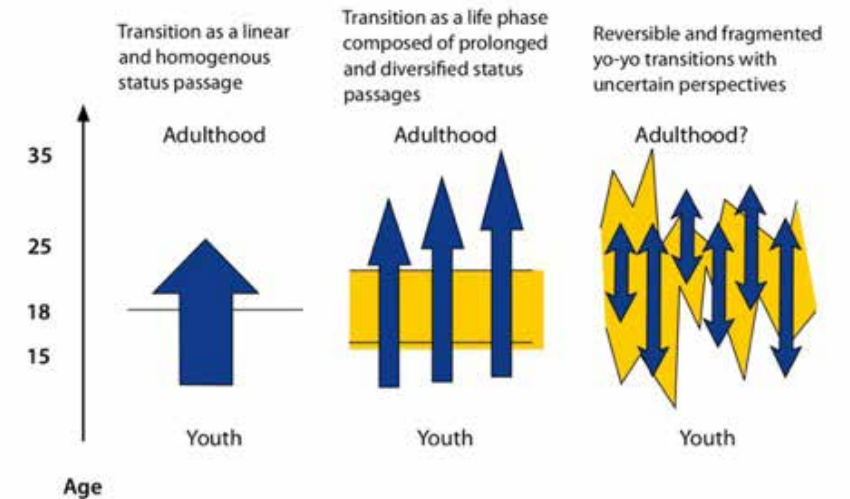
CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ATTITUDES AND EMPLOYABILITY

As Ana from Italy above describes, sometimes attitudes such as courage – the most common reported outcome in these interviews – are not often a big part of the conversation about employability. There can be a bigger focus on formal qualifications. Indeed, Martin from Sweden describes above how being a volunteer "didn't help get me a job" – and then goes on to describe that the determination he got from his Volunteering Activities project was a key factor in him getting into studies and work. The [Hidden Competences](#) (2014) research argued that "a vast amount of skills and competences developed through international experiences go unrecognised". Perhaps the connection between employability and the attitudes developed during Volunteering Activities deserves further recognition – and exploration. As Ana says, "when it comes to employability you have to be brave".

GROWING UP

The second most common response in terms of what attitudes the young people developed during their Volunteering Activities project was around becoming more mature or more adult. Notions of becoming more 'mature' and 'independent' have been a common finding in many such studies of Volunteering Activities⁶. These days, what does it mean to be adult, to 'grow up'? As Axel Pohl delineates in Figure 1.1⁷ below, there are different concepts of this transition. For a significant number of the young people in this research, their Volunteering Activities project was their first experience of independent living away from their family. Some young people also talked about the value of being given and taking on responsibilities as contributing to this sense of 'growing up'. Additionally, we see from the excerpt from the interview with Sadia from Spain (above), a sense of independence coming from developing her self-initiative. After the Volunteering Activities project, she is not relying on others to push her: "I want to get everything done to satisfy myself". Rather than using the phrase 'growing up', perhaps 'developing autonomy' is a more accurate expression. Viewed through the lens of employability, developing autonomy is an essential foundation on which a young person develops their work life. And, perhaps this is even more valuable at a time when transitions to 'adulthood' are arguably looking less linear and more fragmented in many places (particularly for YPFO).

Figure 1.1. Different concepts of youth and young adulthood (Walther 2016)



⁶ p.87, Fitzsimmons, C., The Effects of the European Voluntary Service (1999), from Sieveking, 2001

⁷ From Axel Pohl's chapter Youth transition regimes and youth work, with reference to Andreas Walther, from The History of Youth Work In Europe, Vol. 6, edited by Howard Williamson, Tanya Basarab and Filip Coussée (2018).

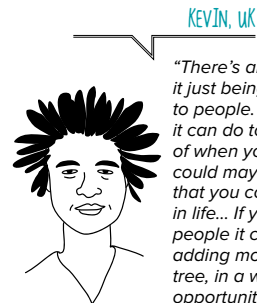
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

One of the most common responses when asking the young people what they gained was related to getting better at using another language – mainly English. It is one of the most apparent outcomes of the Volunteering Activities experience. Some changes are harder to identify or measure. In this report, the language acquisition is described as a knowledge.

However, it is worth stating that many of the young people valued highly the opportunity of actually using the language in a day-to-day, real life environment, rather than the more theoretical environment of formal educational spaces. There would be value in future studies measuring the language learning in volunteers in a more specific and structured way to evidence the development more clearly.

1.3 THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

What Are the Social Dimensions of Volunteering Activities That Young People Describe?



KEVIN, UK

"There's almost a friendly side to it just being chatty, talking away to people. You don't realise what it can do to you as well, that idea of when you go over here you could maybe network with people that you could meet up with later in life... If you get to know these people it can be maybe you're adding more branches to your tree, in a way, for potential future opportunities as well."

"This Volunteering Activities project is for musicians who are not employed. I think this is really good. We are meeting with musicians here who somehow in the future we may work with or they will help us with connections. I think it is a great opportunity. Also, for the Erasmus+ I think it is a great way to find a job because you are in touch with a lot of people, every day you talk with a lot of people, you meet people, and something can happen from that. If I stayed in my country for the whole summer and only went on vacation, I don't think I would learn the things that I just talked about."

CLARA, ROMANIA



MOJCA, SLOVENIA

"There were 6 other volunteers on my Volunteering Activities project. I feel like I made the strongest connection with them and with their perspectives and organisations. So, in the future if we [her Support Organisation, MC Trbovlje] have some projects I can connect them with us, just because of knowing each other and having this strong bond. So, that's awesome. Any future projects with a common theme we can do that and I appreciate that a lot."



"I have a lot of great friends because of this – friends for life. That's quite fantastic. It's a whole different thing to live under the same roof as someone and to go on excursions and cook dinner together and clean together. The biggest learning was about myself – how to tackle problems. I have had a lot of anxiety, a lot of depression. It is tough for me. Sometimes I just want to be alone – and you can't really be alone on these projects. But that opened my eyes and made me think maybe I shouldn't be alone in these situations, my life will only get worse if I am alone."

MARTIN, SWEDEN



ANA, ITALY

"Also, you find other people like you – who have skills and qualities but don't have a job. It makes you feel less alone – you feel less strange. So, there is something about Volunteering Activities that connects similar people."



CHRIS, UK

"Since I came back, I've come out of my shell a lot more. A lot of people in here [his Support Organisation, Achieve More Scotland] – obviously I've been around the organisation for a lot of years – but I think I've started to get to know a lot more people since I got back, people who I've seen around for ages but have never really spoke to me. I think from speaking to them they can see that my attitude has kinda changed – I think that I've grown a bit more."



SADIA, SPAIN

"When I came back and I told my experience, many people said: 'Wow! You're so lucky', 'I want to do it too', 'I should have applied too', 'so interesting I want to try it'. I told many stories. My mum was very, very happy: 'My daughter went to Estonia', 'she brought this from Estonia', 'she has done that in Estonia'. My mum was the happiest one, like if she went to Estonia instead of me. I don't know but many people were happy."

Conclusions and Reflections

MORE BRANCHES TO YOUR TREE

Young people meet a lot of new people as a part of their Volunteering Activities project: staff and other young people at their Support Organisation; educators and other volunteers on their On-Arrival Training; members of the local community where they are volunteering; and staff and other young people at their Host Organisation, to name a few. It is easy for adults to forget the transformative effect that the creation of new friendships or a new social circle can have on the mind and life of a young person. Through the interviews, the volunteers talked about how the people they met – and in particular the other volunteers – were a source of learning, support, inspiration, connections and opportunities. Whether this was getting new ideas for their work life, or gaining better understanding of their strengths, or making connections for future opportunities, the young people described how an exciting expansion of their social networks helped contribute to their employability. This was particularly relevant for the young people who described their motivation to be involved as being because they were lost or stuck in their lives.

PASSING IT ON

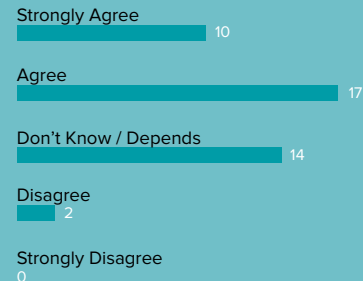
It was significant how many young people talked about how they would or, in many cases, have recommended Volunteering Activities to their friends and peers, in the interviews, this was not a specific question they were asked about. Towards the end of the interviews the young people were asked if there was something that was important for them that hadn't been asked. This was the most common response, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities.

EXPANDED JOB MARKET

In terms of employability, it is relevant that over a quarter of the participants in this research chose to highlight how their Volunteering Activities experience has made them feel able to live in another country. The ability to move (nationally and internationally) to go out and find work is an important factor in employability, particularly in the 21st Century global marketplace.

1.4 RECOGNISING THE NEXT STEPS

To What Extent Do the Young People Think That Their Volunteering Activities Experience Contributed to Their Employability?



ALBERTO, ITALY

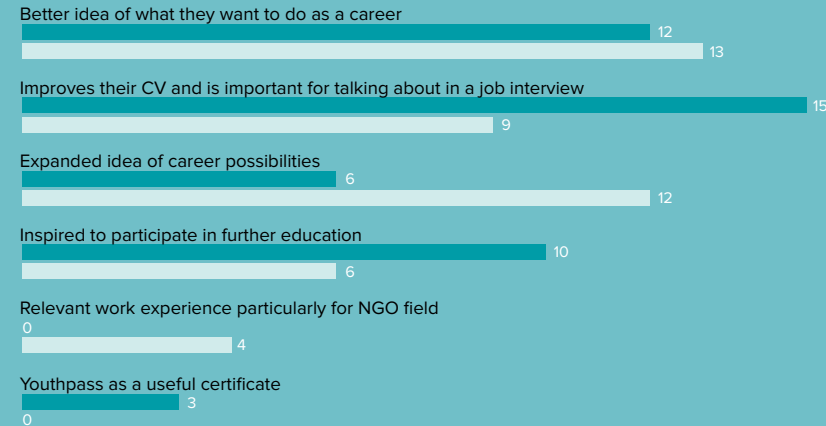
"I think that in the work time in Vienna I discovered that I like manual jobs – working with my hands. I also discovered that I really like the world of volunteering. I would like to work in this field. It could help me to meet other cultures, communicate with other people and help other young people to do a Volunteering Activities project. I think it is really useful – it's a really good way to grow up."



ADAM, SLOVENIA

"In Slovenia people usually just go with this formal education, this formal aspect, but we don't talk a lot about this informal employability – how you are as a person and so on. And here, I have a lot of experience of people from different countries, even the British, I met a German and so on. They told me there are a lot of informal ways of getting employed and even the mentor said, 'we have a lot of partners who are not looking for the formal educated people'. You can also get work from informal things – how you are as a person. So, for me, that was a mind-opener just to see that there are chances and you should send your CV. They said, 'you should send your CV to different organisations and maybe they will have an opening for you in this aspect – you never know unless you try'. It's definitely more like this – just try. Definitely there is a connection between Volunteering Activities and being able to get employment."

Further to Factors Outlined Above (Competences and Social Networks) How Do Young People Think Volunteering Activities Contributed to Their Employability?



PAULO, ITALY

"It depends. For example, the last interview had for this job for this school. It's still a formal school – it's a Czech national public school. Of course, they liked that I had this non-formal experience in a foreign environment. But then when it comes to it, the Volunteering Activities project is not the first thing that they look at, because it is a formal institution. But then I applied for this job that I have now. It's an international company – Western Union – and having international experience for a candidate is top priority. So, in this case, my job interview was focused 90% of the time on my Volunteering Activities project. For the school it was less, much less. But it had an impact."

KEMAL, SPAIN



"Me being in Spain before my Volunteering Activities project – if you ask me 'hey Kemal, you have the right to work anywhere you want in the world what would you apply for?' I think the last thing I would apply for are the corporations – not because I don't want to but because I don't know that they exist. Just the fact of being here in Krakow, I now know that these opportunities exist here and in other cities. So, for me it's totally different. Whenever I want to change country, maybe the first thing that I would look for is to get a job in a corporation – maybe here, maybe Berlin, maybe Australia, maybe New Zealand, maybe UK or the States. I see this job perspective that I couldn't see before. Here I could present a lot of volunteers, particularly from Spain. Maybe in Barcelona you know these corporations, but if you are from other sides of Spain you don't know anything about this world – it would be the last thing you apply for. And it's a big opportunity."



YULIA, GEORGIA

"When I went back home and said that I was volunteering for 2 months, they said, 'why were you wasting your time? You were working or on your holidays?' I was like, 'no I was volunteering' and stopped the conversation with them. Mostly people from older generation do not really know what is volunteering. So I was explaining that I was working with this organisation doing some activities and that I was getting money for food so I wasn't going hungry, don't worry (laughs)! Even my Aunt could not understand what was volunteering. She was like, 'is it safe where you are going, is there trafficking?' But they do not know. And then I was explaining that I was doing this and learning that. And they were like: 'aha, so it is worth going!' And I was, 'for sure it was'. We just need to give them correct information. Education and information are the best things."

Conclusions and Reflections

TRIAL AND ERROR FOR GREATER DIRECTION

Figuring out what you want to do in your career and finding direction as a young person can be hard. Reading about different careers only gives, at best, a partial insight into what they are actually like. A significant number of volunteers and organisations described the importance of responding to the interests and passions of the young person in planning their volunteer work. They describe Volunteering Activities as a site for multiple encounters with different kinds of relevant and engaging work experience – and a safer space to 'fail', compared to a paid employment situation.

THE ISSUE OF RECOGNITION

The majority of the young people stated that they thought their Volunteering Activities project would be good for their CV and or in a job interview situation. However, they also described how neither Volunteering Activities nor Youthpass are well-recognised by employers (particularly volunteers from eastern Europe). Only 3 of the young people (or 7% of those interviewed) believed that Youthpass would be valued by employers. But for young people with very few, if any, qualifications, the importance of Youthpass for them should not be understated. Some of the young people described presenting their Volunteering Activities project as something else (an internship or even a job) when looking for work. So, while the seemingly slow process of institutional recognition continues, young people seem to be more focused on the translation of their experiences (with varying levels of creativity!).

EXPANDED IDEA OF WHAT YOUR WORK LIFE COULD BE

Whether it is coming from rural Spain to a big city in central Europe and discovering the world of international corporations, or getting to know the employment possibilities in the NGO sector in the Balkans, some of the young people described a powerful expansion of the idea of what could be possible for their work life, as a result of their Volunteering Activities experience. "You can't be what you can't see", as the saying goes (attributed to Marian Wright Edelman). A significant number of the young people interviewed described how their Volunteering Activities experience helped them see futures for themselves that would not have been so easily visible otherwise. It is notable to observe that this was more apparent amongst the young people with more opportunities in this study.

NO 'SILVER BULLET'

"I am back where I started. The shit has returned." This is the dejected voice of a young person 4 months after returning from his Volunteering Activities project. His responses to the interview questions are short and scored with silences. Since coming back, he has started studying for his Upper Secondary diploma. On paper it is a success story. But in interview it's a different picture. He describes how returning back to his home reality has thrown up new challenges that make him question the value of going away. It is a reminder, if one were needed, that Volunteering Activities are no silver bullet.

1.5 WHAT THE ORGANISATIONS THINK

In this section, the quoted responses are from people working in the Volunteering Activities hosting organisations.

Overcoming fear and or becoming more courageous	17
Greater independence and or autonomy	12
Managing in a new situation and or becoming more capable	12
Improving language skills	12
Becoming more active in finding work	12
Increased self-knowledge and or understanding	9
New perspective and or greater curiosity	9
New skills	9
Improved soft skills and or attitude	8
Increased social network	8
Life-changing experience	8
Greater idea of career direction	8
Something for CV and or Job interview	7
Real life experience	6
Better time-management and punctuality	6
Improved interpersonal skills	6
A fresh start	5
Inspiring a next step in education	5
Navigating a new culture	4
An international experience	4
Overcoming anxiety	3

TOVE GUSTAD, NAV, NORWAY

"After you have been on such a programme, you get new key words to put down as your competence because before you didn't have that competence. But after you have been through such a stage you get that competence. It's not that you do a training specifically, but it's what you gain through all the activities, all the co-operation, the flexibility that you have. Everything you contribute is giving you these competences that you can put down on your CV, which is a valuable thing."

OLE KRISTJAN MYRBOSTAD, NAV, NORWAY

"The companies hiring people are getting more and more international, so having this international experience and understanding a taste of how different cultures work is a really important thing to put on a CV and might be an eye-opener for the companies."

ROSARIO CORONADO, EUROPA JOVEN MADRID, SPAIN

"I think it is the whole experience of going out from, for example, their neighbourhoods. I think the young people see themselves in situations they have never seen themselves in before. I think they need to solve situations and to face problems and they are alone abroad, let's say. I think, for me, one of the main points is for them to see themselves in situations they haven't been in before, so they are outside in the world and they need to face these. I think Volunteering Activities plays an important role in this. Of course, they can face new situations in their neighbourhoods, but it's like they are protected or in their comfort zone or maybe they block the opportunity or they don't take the step of going out of it. It is a very effective way of taking them from their families or relatives or situations they are used to and opening them to a new world. And they see that they are able to do lots of things that maybe they didn't think they were. For me this a key point."

ANNA LILJA, ITER, SWEDEN

"And it's usually a totally different Network Meeting after they come back – or at least it's a totally different participant, the volunteer is not the same. You can see it! This volunteer who I said was vague before she left was not vague anymore, she was steady and looking and talking with a loud voice. They grow several metres in a way. It's a different meeting. That's fun to see. That's good"

ANNAMARIA PAPINI, LEONARD CHESHIRE, UK

"I make sure that they understand that learning a new culture is exactly what they will need to do for any job application – they will have to understand what is happening and why and who is the boss – and who is the real boss! (laughs). These kinds of things. And then learning about the goals in any given culture, learning to learn culture is a key competence. When I meet them and when I get a chance to speak to them I really make sure that they make these links. And personally, I think that it is really relevant when they have to write their CV and when they have to actually apply for a job. I don't have numbers, I don't have more examples, but personally, I do think there is a big connection there."

MATJAZ VOJK, PUM SKOFJA LOKA, SLOVENIA

"Everybody who is involved is talking about how to support volunteers all the time. It is a learning project, but it is a non-formal learning project. There are no grades. There are volunteers who are successful and volunteers who are less successful. I think that by the end the young people are more mature."

Conclusions and Reflections

A HIGH LEVEL OF CORRELATION

The list of employability outcomes described by the staff of the organisations involved in Volunteering Activities matches very closely to what is described by the young people themselves. Like with the young people's descriptions, there is a big focus on attitudinal development, language skills and a fresh sense of purpose and direction. This high level of correlation backs up what the young people report and strengthens the evidence for claiming these outcomes as reliable.

DEALING WITH A NEW SITUATION AND A NEW CULTURE

As Rosario Coronado outlines above, Volunteering Activities draw young people out of their comfort zone to a new place where "they see that they are able to do lots of things that maybe they didn't think they were". Annamaria Papini (and two other interviewees) described how for them there is a direct parallel between this and encountering a new employment situation. Every workplace has its own culture and so learning to analyse that and adapt to it, is an important part of securing and maintaining employment. Seen from this perspective Volunteering Activities can have an important function – not easily replicated elsewhere – in preparing young people for meeting and adapting to the realities of the world of work.

VISIBLE DIFFERENCE

Whether it is a volunteer talking about how their parent thinks they have matured, or whether it is a staff member of an organisation observing the growth of a young person after they come back, through the interviews there were a small but significant number of references to the impact on the young person being so apparent it is visible. One common example given was making and maintaining better eye contact with other adults. This was something apparent when interviewing many of the young people after their projects, compared to how they were before. Perhaps a young person returning from months away will always look 'changed' to an adult in their lives whatever they have done. However, the reports of this phenomenon are too frequent to be so easily dismissed.

THESE OUTCOMES DON'T COME EASILY

Publicly available reports and case studies of international youth work tend to present an almost universally rosy picture of the projects. Tommi Hoikkala, Research Professor at the Finnish Youth Research Network, wrote: "besides the projects spun in a mandatory positive way, there should be more literature written and shared on projects that turn hellish" (2016). This research project did not gather much data that could contribute to such literature. However, from Slovenia to Sweden, from Scotland to Spain, one of the most recurring descriptions from the youth workers involved was the extensive time, skills and resources required to make these Volunteering Activities work for the young people – particularly young people with fewer opportunities, who this programme promises to include. Section 2 of this report explores this in detail. But any account of the outcomes that the young people gain would be incomplete without a recognition of the work that goes in to achieving them.



1.6 FINAL CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section we have seen how the young people involved in this study:

- Found Volunteering Activities mainly through word of mouth (YPMO) and the organisations they are already involved in (YPFO);
- Describe the main motivations behind going on a Volunteering Activities project as: feeling lost, seeking a new experience and improving their chances of finding work;
- Primarily describe developments in their attitude as a result of their Volunteering Activities – in particular becoming more courageous, mature, open-minded and having greater self-esteem;
- Pick up valued skills and knowledge, primarily in language, teamwork, communication and getting to know a new place;
- Value the growth of their social networks (or social capital), especially as a source of support, inspiration, new opportunities and connections;
- Highlight other employability outcomes, such as having: a better idea of what they want to do as a career; something to use on their CV and job interview; and an expanded sense of what is possible in their work lives;
- Both YPFO and YPMO, describe increases in their employability. Although to a large degree they describe similar outcomes, there are some notable differences in the areas of development that they highlight;
- Describe a very similar picture of development as the staff of the organisations they are involved with during their Volunteering Activities.

SOFT SKILLS OR HARD SKILLS?

One of the currently popular concepts in employability is competence development. Competences can be described as being made up of a combination of 3 things: skills, knowledge and attitude. From Martin Seligman to Angela Duckworth, there is a growing body of evidence showing that intelligence is not everything, and that the importance of attitude and ‘soft skills’ in someone’s employability should not be underestimated. Much of formal education still focuses on attainment of knowledge. More educators and policy makers are seeking out the places where attitude and “hard skills” can be developed. Volunteering Activities, this study suggests, might be one worthwhile place to look.

THE DOMINANCE OF ENGLISH IN THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

It might be an odd experience to be sitting in a youth centre in rural Slovenia hearing that the main reason that a young person from Lithuania came here was to improve her English. But, according to the data in this research, it is not an unusual or uncommon ambition or outcome for the young people to have for their Volunteering Activities project. In terms of a specific thing being learned from the projects as reported by the young people themselves, improving their English was the biggest. As English continues to be considered a valuable asset to help find work (in their own country and others), this study suggests that the young people involved are finding this aspect of learning realised in their Volunteering Activities.



MC Trbovlje - Interview with Mitja

DO DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS LEAD TO DIFFERENT OUTCOMES?

A 2014 report based on extensive data from the RAY Network found that international youth projects benefit most those with fewer opportunities⁸. In this research project, although it is a small sample and there are many variables, we can compare the responses in interview of YPFO to those of YPMO to see if something can be learned. Overall, looking at this comparison it is difficult to conclude that there are large differences.

⁸ Guedens, T. et al., International youth projects benefit most those with fewer opportunities, Salto-Youth Inclusion RC / RAY Network (2014)

What we might conclude from this (being mindful of the limitations stated earlier) is not so much that one group develops their employability more than the other, rather they do so in somewhat different ways.

IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING SOCIAL NETWORKS

The value of building relationships and the importance of social networks for increasing employability is nothing new. Perhaps in our ‘LinkedIn’ era, it is even greater. It’s a cliché, but it matters who you know. The volunteers in this study describe the value that the wide range of people they develop relationships with during their Volunteering Activities brings to them – particularly the other volunteers. By viewing this through the lens of employability, we can see an additional benefit to the relationship-building that is so evident during a Volunteering Activities project. Or as Kevin from the UK puts it: “adding more branches to your tree”.

What can be noted is that, when it comes to employability, the outcomes the YPFO highlighted more were:

- teamwork;
- independent living;
- becoming more adult / mature;
- open-mindedness;
- determination;
- improving their CV;
- having something to talk about in job interviews;
- inspired to participate in Further Education.

Whereas, the outcomes that YPMO highlighted more were:

- language learning;
- knowledge of other cultures;
- an expanded idea of their work life;
- work experience at an NGO.



SECTION

2

Over the past 2 years, this research project has worked with 15 organisations active in Volunteering Activities from 9 different countries. Through visits to those organisations, interviews with key staff members and some observations of their work in action, a considerable body of data has been collected.

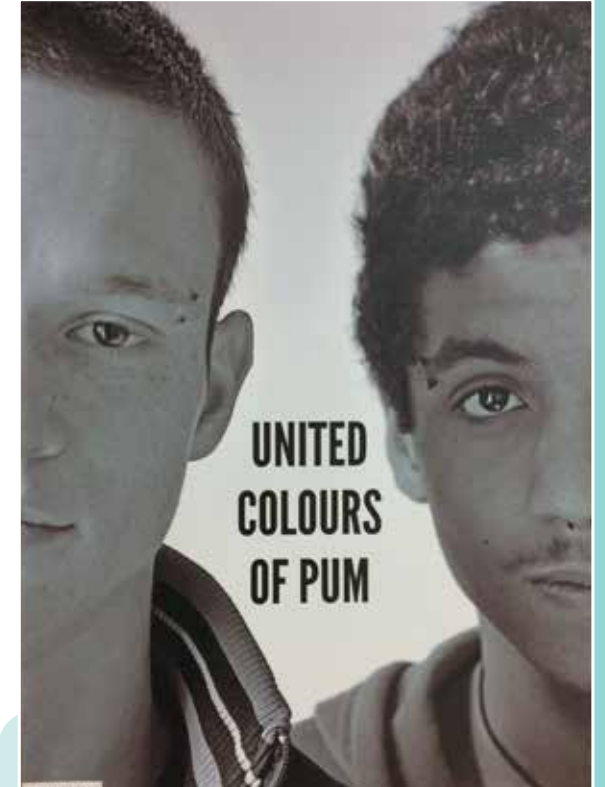
According to youth researchers Nicodemi and Şenyuva (2018), young people with fewer opportunities have been squeezed out of EVS (the predecessor to Volunteering Activities) – a programme that was originally created for them in particular. They explain, “after 20 years of existence, evaluations show that the EVS is mainly being used by resourceful groups of young people (for example students in higher education, for gap years and even graduates seeking to optimise their CVs), whereas underprivileged young people are scarce on the participant lists”. Nicodemi and Şenyuva describe a number of obstacles for YPFO that are “to a very high degree tied up with the very logic of the programme and the way in which activities are structured and implemented”. Many of these obstacles – and some other ones too – were described by the organisations involved in this study. When it comes to the areas that organisations have some control over, this section explores what we can learn from these obstacles and how we can get past them.

What the interviews explored were questions around how the organisations worked; How did they build partnerships with organisations in other countries? What approaches did they find successful in involving young people with fewer opportunities in their work? What are the effective methods for Host Organisations to engage young people with fewer opportunities? And how do they best work with young people when they finish their Volunteering Activities experience?

This section of the report explores these questions and more. Hopefully the knowledge shared by these organisations provides some practical guidance and some inspiring ideas for those working with young people and, in particular, young people with fewer opportunities. The following chapters outline examples of effective practice and ideas about:

- **2.1. Building International Partnerships**
- **2.2. Working with and Preparing Young People for Volunteering Activities**
- **2.3. Selecting Volunteers**
- **2.4. Hosting Volunteers, Learning Processes and Mentorship**
- **2.5. When Volunteers Finish Their Activity**

The section ends with conclusions, reflections and recommendations.



PUM poster - Skofja Loka

2.1 BUILDING

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

What Do Organisations Consider Effective Practice When Building International Partnerships for Volunteering Activities?

Close contact between Support Organisation and Host Organisation	12
Organisations with similar approach and values / understanding of realities of working with young people with fewer opportunities	7
Importance of meeting in person (Advanced Planning Visits, international Partnership-Building Activities and Contact-Making Seminars)	5

LASSE PELTTARI, ITER, SWEDEN

ESTABLISHING CLOSE CONTACT

"We know about the organisations and about their people, but when there is a change of person in the organisation we know that the ideology is still over the roof and just the person has changed. We try to have contact with this person to see how they are and what they are as a person. And it is always easier to talk if we have met them. So we go to these destinations, to establish who is working there and then it's easy to phone, it's easy to talk to them."

CARLA FYFE, ACHIEVE MORE SCOTLAND, UK

PARTNERING WITH ORGANISATIONS WITH SHARED VALUES AND APPROACH

"We have a really good relationship with the Madrid organisation. We just clicked as organisations. We have a Key Action 1 and a Key Action 2 in just now. We're doing so much with them – because the aims and objectives are so similar. And they are a bunch of people like us, really similar. From the pre-departure training onwards, we had such a good communication with them – they were able to Skype me straight away. I was more concerned about the Spanish guys because of their life in Madrid... These were young people who had been really far from opportunities and 'Europa Joven Madrid' had done a lot of work with them before – so when they arrived they were so ready and motivated."

BARBARA MASNIK, MC KRSKO, SLOVENIA

ESTABLISH A WORKING AGREEMENT BETWEEN PARTNERS

"In the phase when we are writing the project, we always get co-operation from the partners. We had this habit as well, an internal agreement that they have to sign – about what they need to do before, during and after. And that is before we even start. If an organisation breaks this internal agreement, we don't work with them again."



VEŠNA LENIČ, MC TRBOVLJE, SLOVENIA

UNDERSTANDING OF REALITIES OF WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

"Having the understanding what it means working with young people with fewer opportunities. Understanding that you need to do extra work and you need extra support. And you need to be really, really prepared and handle an actual crisis. It does come – a lot of things can happen that you can't predict. So be prepared. I think a lot of people say "we work with special needs yah, yah", but it's not just saying it – it's really understanding what it means, what are the backgrounds, what does that bring along. Being prepared. These things are crucial: communication, understanding Volunteering Activities and understanding what it really means to work with young people with fewer opportunities."

IN-DEPTH

HENK PERSYN, ZAVOD MANIPURA, SLOVENIA:

"I would like to refer to two Romanian volunteers who were with us in the last group – both were Roma, very poor family, father and mother unemployed, 5 children. The oldest child got in touch with this Support Organisation and said the two of the others would benefit so much from going abroad and studying in another country. So this organisation had 6 or 7 candidates for two places. We always ask them to select the volunteers – they know them better, who will benefit. That's one important part of the partnerships – trust. If they select them, we need to know that you select the right one. We already had some organisations where we had the feeling that this is not done the right way – and so we gave some comments and advice. But if we feel it is still done in this way, then we stop."

This organisation is very good. They have always the right target group, they do very good preparation, they are always on top of the young people. They do not host them, they only send. But during the project they are always available. The volunteers didn't speak English, so we had to do a lot of translating, a lot of Skyping going on. Both did a very good job. They were very happy to go back of course, as they were so young. Also, there was a lot of crying, we saw a lot of development. So, I don't know if they will find a job but at least they made a strategy with us and with the Support Organisation on what the next steps should be."

So, in general, I would say this is a very good example... A good example of how partnership should be. We had good information at the beginning, we knew what the working points should be. They were committed to the end, even when the two young people had troubles with the transfer from Romania to Belgrade, in the end the organisation put them in their car and drove them. So it's also a signal that they are really committed."

2.2 WORKING WITH AND PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

What Do Organisations Consider Effective Practice When Working with and Preparing Young People for Volunteering Activities?

Building a relationship with the young person	14
Working with local partners to help recruit and support the young person	13
Creating trust and reassurance of support	12
'Step-by-step' approach – e.g. building up from local activities, residential projects and up to going on youth exchange and then Volunteering Activities	9
The Volunteering Activities project as part of a bigger goal for the young person (e.g. 'Overcoming my anxiety'), not an end in itself	8
Involvement of relevant family members in the process	7
Young person getting to know current or past Volunteering Activities volunteers	7
Challenging the perceptions of volunteering	6
Establishing boundaries and creating a workplan	6
Providing practical information about the project	6
Promoting the opportunity through info sessions, social media and word of mouth	6
Travelling with the young person for the first days of the project	5
Patience and flexibility – going at the pace of the young person	5

VESNA LENIC, MC TRBOVLJE, SLOVENIA

KNOWING THE YOUNG PEOPLE

"For these kinds of changes to young people with fewer opportunities you have to know them, you have to know their backgrounds. And that is why you need this extra support for those with fewer opportunities – an extra preparation pre-departure, knowing who you're sending. Because someone with fewer opportunities will not just come and say "oh I see that you have Volunteering Activities and that you are sending". No, it will take time for them to go and it will take time for you to support them and maybe they'll say yeah. It's really, really an outreach programme."

BEATRIZ RWIZ, BALIA, LOCAL PARTNER OF EUROPA JOVEN MADRID, SPAIN

WORKING WITH A LOCAL PARTNER TO HELP RECRUIT AND SUPPORT THE YOUNG PEOPLE

"The volunteers that were sent were all teenagers with us. They came with us when they were young... The 3 of them, it wasn't hard to include them in the Volunteering Activities project. From the beginning they were convinced."

DAVID DOSENOVIC AND HENK PERSYN, ZAVOD MANIPURA, SLOVENIA

CONNECTING WITH LOCAL NETWORKS

"If we have an interest, when we know which projects are approved for the upcoming year, we immediately start to dig in and spread the information around, trying to connect with different governmental and non-governmental organisations that work regularly with young people with fewer opportunities... There are also the local partnerships which are really important. We do not only work with the employment office but also with centres for social work and care institutions and other organisations. And bit by bit, networking starts – 'I know this one, I know that one.'"

SUSANNE ROSMANN, YOUNGEND, AUSTRIA

TAKING IT STEP-BY-STEP

"Sometimes they don't have the motivation for it. I met this one girl last week who had been unemployed for over 1 year and I offered her short-term Volunteering Activities that she could start straight away. 'Oh, I don't know, I have a boyfriend...' I can't persuade her. I can just give her the hand, but if she is not grabbing the hand... But now I am sending her on a youth exchange to Croatia with a partner in another area. So, maybe that is a route into volunteering activities for her, a way for her to find her motivation. She was telling me she did not have any motivation, not even for applying for a job or for any education. She feels hopeless. We try to use other youngsters as a source of information. Bringing them to events and bringing them along as living examples. This is working very well. The guy who just got back from Lithuania I am going to ask him if he has some ideas for promoting Volunteering Activities to more people like him. Because he changed so much – I love this magic, the magic of Volunteering Activities is amazing really."

MICHAELA DIMEO, ATELIER EUROPEO, ITALY

BUILDING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS

"Young people with fewer opportunities really need someone to be a reference, an example and a relation to be there for them. Sometimes these young people don't have someone to support and guide them. And this is where a youth worker becomes very valuable. When they come back, they will really come back to you and ask for further support from you. Otherwise they can disappear."

MICHAELA DIMEO, ATELIER EUROPEO, ITALY

CHALLENGING THE PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

"Specifically for mobility, the people don't believe this opportunity is possible for a young person from here. So you need someone, someone physical who is able to speak with the young people and make them believe that this might be something for them. Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme is made for young people in a NEET [not in education, employment or training] situation. But when you see it advertised online it does not seem so accessible. Maybe the young person doesn't speak English, maybe it is hard for them to make a CV or Motivation Letter. To begin they are not self-confident, so they need someone to help them. So, this is why these opportunities are often being taken up by young people who are already mobile, confident and often not in a NEET situation."



IN-DEPTH

ANNA LIJJA, LASSE PELTTARI AND IDA PALM, ITER, GOTHENBURG, SWEDEN



ANNA

“I would say that Volunteering Activities is rather unknown in Sweden for youth. They don't know about it, they don't know about voluntary service or what this Solidarity Corps is. They don't know. It's pretty unknown. We try to talk and send the information or go out to speak with the employment offices and social welfare offices – of which there are several in the city. We reach out to other people working with the target group in different constellations, the youth centres, schools and the people working with drop-outs from the schools. We try to be part of different networks. Also, we put things on Facebook, put up small homemade posters in cafes or places where youngsters are. We try to reach the people who are working with youngsters in general... I think one of the best ways is youth themselves, talking to each other. So there are several ex-volunteers who have brought new volunteers. They come with their friends, ‘come on you have to come here, you should go!’”



ANNA

“Well, the next step is to meet Ida or Lasse and they ask a lot of questions, regarding what you have been part of so far and what is your history – all from allergies through to have you ever thought about taking your life. It's heavy questions, it's tough. ‘Do you have drug abuse?’ ‘How is your family situation?’ A lot of questions. And they meet at least 3 or 4 times and then we make a decision within our group – is Lter the right thing, is it possible to send this person? During this time they also make an action plan for what will happen when they get back home – because this is the important part. Volunteering Activities, yes it's important and it's different, etc, but the important and the most difficult part is what happens when you get back. So, in the preparation phase you do an action plan for what is happening when you get back home. And you also have meetings about where are you going, how does it look there, what people will there be...”

LASSE



“We usually have the first meeting here. And that is usually to see if they have the capability to come to an office at a set time and be here on the right day. It's like a first meeting to connect – so that we can see we are on speaking terms and can talk to each other. Also, I inform them why we are to meet these first times, about these questions that I want to ask them about. We have a formula – with name and addresses and contact persons and things like this. This is a good starter. First time they come here they are a bit nervous. They don't really know what this place is. In the beginning you have to make them feel comfortable and feel relaxed so that they can answer the questions. After 5 or 10 minutes you can go into the questions which link to the information that I need to get. And it's good to have that in the beginning because it makes them start talking – they aren't just sitting listening to the information. I want them to talk because it gives me information and hope about the future that they will talk and tell me about how they feel about this whole thing of going on Volunteering Activities.”

ANNA

“We wanted also quality. We wanted some indicators also trying to measure quality. So we thought, there are mental things, there is the body, there are dreams – because for us it is important in the preparation phase to talk about ‘what are your dreams?’. ‘What did you want to do when you were little before you lost track?’ Or ‘where do you see yourself in 5 years?’, ‘where would you like to be?’ Then you go to ‘how do you think about the future?’, ‘do you believe in the future?’ It's also important with democracy things. And it's also linked to if there is a place for you in this society, ‘is there a place for you?’, ‘can you take your place?’”



LASSE

“The preparation phase is from 1 month and up to 3 or 4 months depending on the person and project they are aiming for... In this preparation and interview phase, we check with other persons and professionals – welfare or employment office or whatever, doctors – to be sure that there is no other plan going on. Sometimes there is a social plan, a welfare plan and then we come with a third one. We have to really check this. I have to phone round or mail these persons and check that it is OK that the young person is in lter, and if they give us this carte blanche or green card to go on, then we try to involve them in the plan – because they usually have more muscles than we have, because they have more money or more contacts that could be useful for us to have in the future. So, we try to involve the network around the person.”



LASSE

“It is important to link to the family. Connecting a young person to a different place and different people, you can see that it is good for the young person and in turn this can be good for the family. This is why we have these network meetings. You need the context of where the young person is coming from”



IDA

“From my point of view, it's impossible to achieve any social changes without the relationship. If you don't have the trust that a relationship needs you can't get any social changes or development.”

IDA

“We make a timeline in the beginning. If you can't even plan one day it's really difficult to plan the future – going to France! or studying for one year! So this is good to make the timeline and have it as a process and; ‘ah we have achieved this, where are we?’ And also to set up targets for the trip before they go.”



IDA

“So many young people in the evaluation write: ‘this was something else’. They have maybe been in contact with the social welfare their whole life and really they say ‘this was something else’. And the trip is something else – it is not that common. And the way that me and Lasse meet them – they are not used to it, they feel that no-one really saw them before. Sounds sad what I'm explaining, but we hear that so often – that you go through a whole school system without anyone really *seeing* you. Not everyone, but we hear that often.”



2.3 SELECTING VOLUNTEERS

What Do Organisations Consider Effective Practice When Selecting Young People for Volunteering Activities?

Host Organisation establishing the motivation of the young person	8
Using Skype interviews to talk to the young people – not just relying on CV and Motivation Letter	6
Bringing together and discussing the range of perspectives of the organisations involved	4
The volunteer can see themselves in the project	3
Informal, friendly approach taken by the organisations speaking with the prospective volunteers	2

BARBARA MASNIK, MC KRSKO, SLOVENIA

MAKING YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL AT EASE OVER SKYPE

"Maybe this is really important. You feel it from conversations with them. Even if they don't tell really good stories. We really try to have these easy, non-formal conversations. Often, they are terrified of these Skype conversations. 'Oh my God, English!' Also, 'I am speaking to someone who is going to be my boss!' We try to make them feel comfortable to be themselves. We ask them random questions like, 'what do you like to do in your free time?' Even if they are really introverted you can get a lot from them about it. You can tell if they are serious, if they want to do this. It's a bit of a psychology thing. It can happen that you are completely wrong about someone. It happened. But I guess we are trying to depend on this – talking to them. Also, speaking to the Support Organisation about the volunteer – to tell us their opinion about them. Just now we are going through this process with our French partners. We are accepting young people with fewer opportunities on a project and they have one guy who is really hyperactive and has this diagnosis and we were really discussing a lot about his background and needs."

STEVE PARRY, RED CROSS, UK

ESTABLISHING THE MOTIVATION OF THE YOUNG PERSON

"I think a lot of it comes down to the young people's motivations. It's recognising that not only do they want a year of an experience that is out of their own country, it is recognising that they have motivation and have understood the projects that they have looked at and that they want to do that one. For them to say, 'I want to go to the UK for a year, it's going to be awesome!' We want to see more than that. We want to see why do you want to work with our Refugee Service project in Liverpool."

MARCO TRIMBOLI, STRIM, POLAND

USING A NETWORK OF EX-VOLUNTEERS TO INTERVIEW THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE

"The most important things for people contacting us themselves is that we want to know if they have read the project, and what they really want to do when they come here. Everyone can write 'I love playing with kids', 'I love Krakow'... All the Assistants [a network of ex-volunteers] can speak different languages, so we can often make the Skype in the language of the young people themselves, which is great. If it is in English over Skype it might be the first time they have done this, and they feel it is like a job interview and they can't really express themselves. But when you speak your own language it is more relaxed."



HENK PERSYN, ZAVOD MANJPURA, SLOVENIA

TRUST THE SUPPORT ORGANISATION TO SELECT THE RIGHT YOUNG PERSON

"Mainly it's the Support Organisation who selects them. They know what they can send and who they can send. And we know a bit the backgrounds, but we are always wondering 'oh what is going to happen?' (laughs) It's always a challenge. But mainly it turns out much better, like this boy from Norway who has Asperger's. We worried about how it would turn out. But actually he's doing very good."

IN-DEPTH

MATJAŽ VOUK, PUM SKOFJA LOKA, SLOVENIA

"The usual process for selection is we do a lot of Skype calls with the young people. Project co-ordinator, mentors, Host Organisation, also current volunteers are involved. We present the organisation as fully as we can so that the volunteer will not be shocked by anything when they arrive. We need to make a common decision that the volunteer will be OK. The minimum is that they have a decent ability to speak English; motivated to learn and that's it. We don't have a clear idea in advance. I think it is not good if you make a really specific profile of the volunteer. It might be possible on paper, but then the reality arrives... There is often something unspoken behind. If this is shared at the beginning then we can rearrange the project."

"That's why as I told you this selection period is so long. First, we select the person, then we talk with the person, and then we adjust the project to the needs of the selected person. It's not like we make a project and we select the person. No, we do the project together. And we are following the agenda that we decided at the beginning for the whole period. And that's a good tip how to make a successful project. It takes a lot of time and energy. But if you go into the project unprepared, then the time and energy that you have dedicated to the project is much less than the problems that you can face afterwards if you don't do this. And I would say that because of this there are a lot of organisations that just organise one project and quit because it's too much for them. But some organisations, in my case, of course, first year you cannot know anything, you can just identify some problems and try to eliminate those problems and that's how the projects are getting better and better. So, we are now on the 6th version of this long-term Volunteering Activities project."

2.4 HOSTING VOLUNTEERS, LEARNING PROCESSES AND MENTORSHIP

What Do Organisations Consider Effective Practice When Hosting Young People on Volunteering Activities?

Care and Close Support	15
Following the volunteer's skills and passions	11
Creating a learning plan and or sharing expectations	11
Flexibility or dealing with the unexpected	11
Connecting with local community	9
Connecting with local young people	9
Embedding reflective practices	7
Giving responsibility to the volunteer	6
Providing mental health and wellbeing support to volunteer	6
Investing in training	6
Volunteers living in the same place as each other	5
Using mentors	5
Keeping the volunteers active and busy	4
Rewards for the volunteers	3

BARBARA MASNIK, MC KRSKO, SLOVENIA

WEEKLY MEETINGS AND MONITORING THE LEARNING

"We need to take time to evaluate every week where they are and not take it for granted. We were just discussing this at this training. They gave us this question: 'Can participants of Volunteering Activities learn without support?' Yes, you don't necessarily need support to learn stuff. But it doesn't have as much impact if they don't have that support. I think evaluation is really, really, really important... We have a really strict thing of meeting at least once a week. Sitting down and talking about what was happening in the previous week. I actually have this habit of encouraging them to follow their knowledge based on Youthpass."

FOLLOWING VOLUNTEER SKILLS AND PASSIONS

"I think the most important thing is to talk as much as possible and listen to the volunteer. It can be her problems or her ideas. So it's not like I'm giving her things to do like she works in a factory, but that we do the programme together and her ideas are being heard and we try to do them. I think this is the most important thing. And then the magic happens - or not! (laughs)"

STEVE PARRY, RED CROSS, UK

MULTIPLE LEVELS OF MENTORSHIP

"We try to double it up... Formally the mentor is the person in the Red Cross office, but I think the really valuable mentors are the ex-volunteers and the other people we can connect them to. We try to match volunteers up with young people who are local who might have been involved with our sending programme or might have been involved 3 years ago and are there as a local mentor or guide or someone to talk to. We also connect the new volunteer to the previous volunteers from last year. We try to connect them as early in the process as we can. And they do videos to each other so the departing one has left a video and left a guidebook for the incoming volunteer. We try and make sure that there is this 'handing over to you'. And they come back and visit. So, there is this ongoing mentoring support as well."

VESNA LENIC, MC TRBOVLJE, SLOVENIA

MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING AND EXTRA SUPPORT

"It can be dangerous doing Volunteering Activities with young people with fewer opportunities if you are not prepared. For organisations who are doing Volunteering Activities with young people with fewer opportunities it's 3 times more work. You have to really ask for this additional support and have it. Because, as youth workers we are very different backgrounds, actually. Most of us are not psychologists or people who are really in this area, some volunteers need extra, extra support."

SASA KOSENJINA, PUM SKOFJA LOKA, SLOVENIA

BUILDING CLOSE COMMUNICATION

"This is the start – just to talk with them about needs. Also, maybe what the volunteer will not tell to the Host Organisation directly maybe they will tell to me [as a staff member of the Co-ordinating Organisation]. You never know. You can question them from many angles... 'Are you happy about your work here?' 'What ideas do you have in your mind?' And then you really get some ideas from them. I think it's just important that you create this feeling that whatever you need you can come to us."



IN-DEPTH HENK PERSYN AND DAVID DOSENOVIC, ZAVOD MANIPURA, SLOVENIA



HENK

"We always test how good they are with painting. We don't say we will test them. We say we need some decorating done and everybody needs to do some. We see immediately, 'ah you are good at this or we are going to work on that'. Sometimes it takes quite a long time to discover where they actually can be good – we ask ourselves how can we find something which is their talent. And sometimes you have to see it in very basic things. It can be cleaning, for example, or it can be cooking or taking care of animals, it can be with kids, it can be practical work."

DAVID



"Definitely it works if you support them while they are working, while they are doing their projects. Literally when they are doing a task you are there with them, physically, then the miracles start to happen. Then they start to feel that they are equal to you as a mentor, that you are not their boss and that they are capable of doing their tasks even though they are afraid, and so on and so on – not all of them of course, in some cases. Throughout the work, through this process of doing specific tasks you create a relationship of trust. Obviously, it does not always work immediately – you need some time for that."



"We do small excursions with them. It sounds stupid. But we always try to give them a positive reward – 'ok you did a great job, we bring you on Thursday to the Caves of Škocjan', for example, and we pay for the entrance. You bring them there and it's really a reward. But also, there is a moment when you bring them there with 8 volunteers – that's why we have the minivan – and they are talking. That's the moment when you hear things – there is always a trick behind it. It's also the moment when you tell things and can speak about things. If you – and this is the big problem with these young people – if you tell them that you are going to have an 'official talk' then nothing comes out. Because it's official it doesn't work."

DAVID



"Also, what else really helps is the language support, really stressing out that paying respect to everyone who is there, that we are equal, and that we are here to learn the language and giving each other a chance to do it."



HENK

"And the living together here in the group, in the community is very important. I can give a very good example of a boy from France, Pierre. Pierre was always complaining when he was here, 'oh it's so difficult to be here, to live with the others'. In the same group we had a boy from Sardinia with the mental level of an 8 year-old, living together with the others. He was eating pizza for lunch time, pizza for dinner time, 7 days a week, so we really had to teach him to cook. Pierre was so confrontational with him. But in the end he became more positive – they had an OK goodbye. With visits and talks we saw Pierre changing bit-by-bit. And after he left, 1 month later, Pierre got a job as a hotel receptionist. Why? Because he lived in community, he lived with a person he found very difficult and he could show that he learned to be patient, he developed his English, he could do it. So there were a lot of little puzzles that fitted together. He started working there and he is still working there. From time to time I'm in touch with him and asking how's it going and he says, 'fine, I'm happy'. So, I think it is really important this living together and extracting this attitude that you don't have in the formal learning. You have the knowledge and the skills and so on. Here we work a lot on attitude."

DAVID



"When it comes to the local reality the best way to inform them about our local culture is usually I prepare a simulation game where they go into a role of journalist and they have to go into the village with various tasks, like: 'buy 10 eggs for €2'. That's a challenge. Connect with the locals and find where you can do this – because nearly every house has homemade eggs. I give them €2 on purpose because eggs are usually €2.50. Sometimes they come back with the eggs and the €2! And they say, 'eh David, I met a super-nice lady and she said I can come back tomorrow for more eggs'. So, connecting also with the local environment and building the base from there is important."



2.5 WHEN VOLUNTEERS FINISH THEIR ACTIVITY

What Do Organisations Consider Effective Practice When Young People Finish Their Activity?

Supporting recognition of competences	10
Connecting the young person to a network of organisations and local opportunities or sign-posting	7
Continuing to be there for the young person, helping them through the potentially difficult transition	6
Peer network and sharing their Volunteering Activities project with others	5
Supporting the reflection process	5
Rewards and awards	4
Reconnecting with the original aims of the project	3
Further opportunities within and through the organisation	3
Keeping the volunteers active and busy	4
Rewards for the volunteers	3

CARLA, FYFE, ACHIEVE MORE SCOTLAND, UK

CONNECTIONS IN THE LOCAL NETWORK SHOULD BE STARTED FROM THE BEGINNING

"For us, they are so integrated in our programmes, the returned volunteers still take part in our weekly projects and turn up to sessions and play sports. We are quite lucky in a way – they can't run away from us! (laughs) They'll either be up at the football or the dancing. We can always go and speak to them. What we see is that they up their game when they get back. They are more involved more in our volunteering programme, for example. We do the debrief, they do a blog piece, promo, podcast, and then they are integrated in the programmes... For us, the Volunteering Activities is a part of a bigger process. But going overseas has become a rite of passage for the young people. The ones going on to employment have all done European projects. It's been a rite of passage for them."

DAVID DOŠENOVIC, ZAVOD MANIPURA, SLOVENIA

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS DURING REFLECTION

"They won't tell you anything if you don't ask the right questions. If you ask them 'how was it?' 'Ah, it was OK.' (Laughs) 'What did you do?' 'Na, nothing.' 'Wait, are you sure you didn't do anything?' 'Ah, we helped a little bit.' 'I'm sorry, wait but' – I'm starting to become suspicious about the Host Organisation. Did they really do something with this guy or was he just 2 months doing nothing. And then when you start asking more specific questions – you ask them to bring the schedule, before they go to the project you ask them to write a diary, in any way that they want, drawing, writing, recording, whatever – then they start opening up."

TOVE GUŠTAD, NAV, NORWAY

SUPPORT IN RECOGNISING OF COMPETENCES FOR EMPLOYABILITY

"There is the need to present your experiences as a positive asset afterwards to employers. People say 'you've been abroad', but you have to say 'yes I've been abroad and learned this, this and that'. You have to specify. And when you specify, then the employers know exactly what you mean. We are going to support them to present their new competences that they get."



ROSARIO CORONADO, EUROPA JOVEN MADRID, SPAIN

REWARDS AND RECOGNITION

"We also have an event Awards for European Mobility. We want to recognise the work of some organisations, institutions, workers, young people have been doing this past year to encourage youth mobility. I am talking about this because two of the volunteers we've sent have been given an award. Of course, it's been a challenge, but we are very glad with the things that they have reached. They have been really engaged, so we want to reward them as a way of encouraging more people to have this kind of experiences."

MICHAELA DIMEO, ATELIER EUROPEO, ITALY

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL NETWORK ON-RETURN

"Another thing: the network. After 1 year of Volunteering Activities you are coming back and you are without money. And you need to find a job. You are going back to your house with your family – just where you came from. And you really want to find some work, in one month maximum or you're going to be depressed. And that's where the network is really important."

IN-DEPTH ITER, IDA PALM, SWEDEN

"When they come home I see this phase as the most challenging phase... You come home and you have so much expectations, 'I'm up here, I need to continue this, I have managed so many things, and this shitty life that I had before I don't want to go back to that'. So, it's a lot of pressure. And the family are happy that finally they are doing something with their life. So it gives you pressure. And I am happy. You have applied for school and so on. We have this network meeting and it is showing beautiful pictures. But I think it is really important to talk about how difficult it can be to come back and to prepare the person for that. I mean, how does it feel for you to have your whole family looking at you and they are so happy for you, and you are about to start school – how can you manage all this pressure? So don't be afraid to talk about that, so you are a step ahead..."

Then I think the most important thing is the time that we are still here for them. I got a message in March from a young person who went away saying 'today it's been a year' since he went to Iceland. I, of course, didn't remember this date. But for him it was something really big. He even remembered the date that he took the flight with me. And he got back here and he's been back to drugs, he's been back to... but I've been here the whole time. I went with him to school. We had a meeting with the teacher explaining that him attending is something really special. He's been trying at five different schools and it didn't work. And he's been talking about this – he really wants that this time it will be different. What can we do? He was telling what he thought he could do. We made an agreement that 'OK, so, I really trust you that you will go, and I don't hear anything I will think that you will be in school. If you don't show up, what do you want the teacher to do?' 'OK, if it's been one day don't do anything, if it's been two days call me, if it's been four days call Ida.' So, I've been following him and here it comes again: the time, the relationship – he has a lot of trust with me – and the network, and of course the power, the engine started in Iceland. That was where it started. From there then we could continue all this."

2.6 WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE APPRECIATE FROM ORGANISATIONS

What Do Young People Say They Particularly Value in Terms of Support from the Organisations Involved in Their Volunteering Activities Project?

Close connection with Host Organisation support staff and volunteers	15
Close connection with Support Organisation staff and volunteers	11
Space to develop their own passions and ideas	7
Introductions to get to know other colleagues and the wider community	7
Non-judgemental, listening atmosphere at Host Organisation	7
Organised socialising time	4
Language support	3
Pre-departure guide from Support or Host Organisation	3

KNOWING WHO YOU CAN RELY ON

"All the people that work here are really, really kind people. And I have support 100% from them. I didn't have any problems here. Always, no matter what, I talk to them. It's easy to work with these kind of people. They are really flexible. If I feel sick today I will just call someone – usually Barbara [from MC Krsko] – and she says 'yeah, that's fine, we can do what we were planning later or tomorrow'. We have a regular check-in when we're working on particular projects. She tells us, 'that's your part, this is your part' and that kind of thing. For every kind of problem I always call her."



Saadia, Spain

CLOSE AND INSPIRING SUPPORT

"I grew fond of the two supervisors in charge of the volunteers, I grew fond of them. Especially, with one of them called Li, she was like my second grandmother, I don't know, I loved her very much, she helped me a lot. She was there in case I needed something, looking after me in case I had a bad day, because that can happen, here in Spain or anywhere. Sometimes you are not happy, so she was always there, cheering me up. I don't know... I loved her. I thought of her like a strong woman, she conquers the world and used to tell her: 'I want to be like you! I love it!' I grew fond of everyone there, and I felt sad when I had to come back to Spain, I wanted to be with them."



Lazar, Serbia



Chris, UK

Mojca, Slovenia



CREATING SAFER SPACES

"I think it's just this open space. Because people don't judge you, they don't laugh at you if you do something silly or whatever. So that would be the answer – it's an open space. You can try and fail and no-one is going to laugh at you and point their finger. They are going to come and ask you 'hey how can I help you for you to succeed?' I almost got a little teary-eyed there!"

Ina, Sweden



OVERCOMING LANGUAGE BARRIERS

"Obviously with the language they were helping us out on the first week with how to speak to people. At the Host Organisation there was one worker, Matthew, who was translating for us, I found that helpful as well"



Adam, Slovenia

A WARM WELCOME

"My fears just disappeared. When I arrived my co-ordinator and my mentor were actually waiting for me, they showed me around, they showed me my flat. My room-mate was already here, she was super nice, she is very understanding, we get along very well. She is always there if I need her. If I get lost I can always rely on her, even if it's hard to get lost in Sarajevo it can still happen (laughs). Those fears are gone."

PRACTICAL HELP AND GUIDANCE

"I have this still - I got this (holding up a piece of paper) – it is a map with different notes, that my Support Organisation wrote. It has when the plane was leaving and the bus tickets and a schedule when we're going to be at the airport – the last minute you should be there. You could follow that. For me who hadn't travelled alone that was really helpful. But I got some other things. I got a little bag and some batteries and a torch. And we also got vitamins. What else? Of course, a dictionary. When we were down there they gave us quite a lot to take with us, so we could have something to do. It was really nice."

IN-DEPTH KEMAL, SPAIN

"As an anecdote, a lot of people not related to Volunteering Activities, they ask me, 'hey Kemal, you have a lot of friends here, how did you do that?' I know I am open and so on and it's easy for me to have friends but here it was very easy because of STRIM and how they work as a Co-ordinating Organisation. I always give the same example: on the first day you meet the other 25 volunteers who are in Krakow. Each volunteer has a mentor, so we are talking about 50 people already. Each 5 volunteers have an assistant, so 5 more – that makes 55. STRIM staff, some friends of the friends from the mentors. So the first party – a party opening – we are talking about 70+ people there. From this party, you are living in a flat with 3 people, and you already know there are a lot of flats. So, you have a lot of parties, people coming to your flat, going to another flat, mentors, volunteers, Polish people, not-Polish people..."

From the beginning you have a lot, a lot of friends. Now I would say 50% of my friends – now, one and a half years after my Volunteering Activities project – are from this atmosphere. One of my best friends, she stayed with me in the flat, she is still here, another one she stayed last year we were living together in a flat after the Volunteering Activities project, we said 'OK we both stay, we are living together'. She is one of my best friends, she just left one month ago to Amsterdam. A lot of friends.

I met other young people on Volunteering Activities when I was travelling in Poland. They were volunteering and they were the only ones in their organisation in the middle of the mountains. They were crying when we were going – because we had a training course for one week. For them it was crazy because they had the chance to see people at this training course that they can talk to – they didn't have this at their organisation. They were crying. I had the opportunity to see this so many times. Coming to STRIM this is something that you have to worry less about – having friends or having plans, because you will always have plans, every day you can have plans."

2.7 CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INVESTING IN THE POWER OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

The organisations involved in this research highlighted the importance of ‘building a relationship with the young person’ in the early stages of a project above anything else. In working with partner organisations in other countries, what was emphasised was the need for close contact and the value of meeting partners in person. During a project, the organisations placed ‘care and close contact’ with the volunteers at the top of their recommendations for effective practice. And when the young people themselves were asked what they most appreciated from the organisations the most common response was ‘close connection and support’. It is clear what the data from this research is recommending those involved in the programme to focus on: close relationships. Ida Palm from Iter talked about how she often hears of young people going “through a whole school system without anyone really seeing you.” Volunteering Activities can be, to use her phrase, “something really different”. As she summed up, “if you don’t have the trust that a relationship needs, you can’t get any social changes or development.”

BEING HONEST ABOUT WHAT IT TAKES

A clear theme that emerged through speaking to the organisations is the need for ‘extra support’ when working with young people with fewer opportunities. Whether it is the long preparation work of the Support Organisation, the careful support of the supervisor or mentor of the Host Organisation, or the practicalities needed to help the young person forge their next steps on-return, what the data

from the interviews above demonstrates is the inescapable need for those working with these young people to have the time to do the support work required. As Vesna from MC Trbovlje explains, “I think a lot of people say ‘we work with special needs, yah, yah’, but it’s not just saying it – it is really understanding what it means, what are the backgrounds, what does that bring along. Being prepared.” Being open to young people with fewer opportunities is an easy thing to say. Making that a reality is anything but easy. For organisations interested in using the programme or those involved supporting the programme, the interviews with the organisations involved in this research offer a window into what it really takes.

THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORKERS IN GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES INVOLVED

Beatriz Ruiz is a youth worker for ‘Balía’, one of the organisations that is part of Coordinadora in the Vallecas neighbourhood of Madrid. For Beatriz one of the outcomes of their young people going on Volunteering Activities has been, “getting their basic needs covered better than they would here at home”. She continues, “there are young people who are eating from foodbanks, they have really hard situations.” Such young people can sometimes be described as ‘hard to reach’. But through the close relationships established by youth workers like Beatriz – and, crucially, connecting with the European youth centre, ‘Europa Joven Madrid’ – a different picture emerges. For example; they send some of these young people on a Volunteering Activities project to Achieve More Scotland. She describes how “for the three of them, it wasn’t hard – from the beginning they were convinced”. Without youth workers like Beatriz the participation of these young people in Volunteering Activities is highly unlikely to happen.

STARTING EARLY IN SUPPORTING WHAT COMES NEXT

Arriving back to your old life after being away can be, as is described above, one of the most difficult challenges for a young person. One of the main recommendations from the organisations is the importance of adding new branches to the network of the young person – connecting them to new people, sources of support and further opportunities. The earlier this process starts the better. This is not something to start thinking about when the volunteer gets back from their project. It is something that must be embed from the start. Through doing this the Volunteering Activities project does not become an end in itself, rather it becomes one part in a process working towards the achievement of a wider goal for the young person (such as restarting formal education or finding employment). Of all the stages of the Volunteering Activities process described above, the one that the organisations admitted to struggling with the most, is when volunteers finish their activity. As a result, this is an area that would merit further research and support for organisations.

SUPPORTING YOUTH WORKERS IN EXCHANGING SPECIALISED EXPERIENCE

One example of a positive action to help support youth workers was the ‘Key To Inclusion’ seminar that was hosted by Movit, the Slovenian National Agency of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme, in December 2018. This brought together over 70 representatives of organisations who focus on Volunteering Activities with young people with fewer opportunities. Such events help exchange knowledge and practice and create a network for organisations who are committed to inclusion in this field. Research undertaken by Movit⁹ shows that youth workers value, in particular, opportunities to exchange experiences with other practitioners and specialised training courses to support them.



Wall art at Dom Bosco Maribor



Wall of ex-EVS volunteers at MC Trbovlje



Volunteers walking above Slovenj Gradec

⁹ p.49, Learning support within the volunteering projects in Slovenia and the West- ern Balkans: the practices, challenges and needs for development, Institute Movit, (2019)



SECTION

INTRODUCTION

Where do good new ideas come from?

Volunteering Activities demands partnership building. Nobody can do these projects on their own – collaboration is at the heart. But where should that partnership-building begin and end? Who is included (and who is excluded)?

What follows are four Case Studies. Four stories from different parts of Europe – north and south; rural and urban. These stories seek to communicate a summary of ‘a lived’ reality in these places. They tell of how organisations there have reached out, opened themselves up to new learning and transformed the opportunities they offer to the young people they work with by creating innovative partnerships.

These Case Studies aren’t presented here as being representative. They are written from the perspective of the researcher who interviewed and visited these organisations. The hope is that these stories prove to be an inspiration to new ideas and a future where such cases aren’t as exceptional.

3

Below is a summary of the four Case Studies:

Case Study 1 – Make Me Dream:



How youth workers in Gothenburg reached out to bring relevant professionals and family members together to support vulnerable young people towards a more coherent future.

Case Study 2 – I See You, You Are Here:



How a partnership between the Employment Office and the Youth Centre in a small town in Slovenia has been developed to combat long-term unemployment.

Case Study 3 – Future-Oriented Activity:



How staff at the Employment Services (NAV) in the Norwegian county of Møre og Romsdal brought in Volunteering Activities to make the difference for long-term unemployed young people.

Case Study 4 – From the Grassroots Up:



How an organisation in the Vallecas neighbourhood in Madrid organised to get the Mayor’s approval for a European youth centre for the whole city.

CASE STUDY 1

MAKE ME DREAM

Iter, Gothenburg, Sweden

“I think I got goosebumps many times during these network meetings we have before and after. It’s really ‘wow!’ what you see there.” Sitting in the office building of the Municipality of Gothenburg speaking to Ida Palm, one of the social workers for Iter, I want to hear more about these Network Meetings.

I first heard of Iter through other organisations in Slovenia and Spain active in Volunteering Activities who had collaborated with them and encouraged me to speak to them. The Iter team is led by Anna Lilja. She explains that “the target group is between 18 and 29 years of age and they are usually not in any employment or in school or they are drop-outs from school”. I ask Anna about young people with fewer opportunities. “We don’t use this term, we use ‘undiscovered opportunities.’”

The Network Meetings take place before the young person departs on their Volunteering Activities project and again once they come back. The idea is to gather together a range of key people involved in the future of the young person in an inclusive and equal atmosphere. It is for the young person to choose who comes and to invite them, with the help of Iter.

Anna explains, “it could be family members of the volunteer and the professional network – it could be their doctor or employment officer – and it could also be friends”. She continues, “In this network meeting, you look at the activity plan, and talk about their dreams – what does this participant dream of when they come

back, and how do we help this person to actually reach their goals?”

The collective is key here in the view of Lasse Peltari, another of the social workers on the Iter team. “For the young person it is important to see how many people are around that are concerned for them. In one way you lift the question from the person to a family issue and this is why we have these network meetings. You need the context and it is very important to stay in the context where you have support, because alone you haven’t got the tools to survive.”

Bringing these key people around the young people together is an idea that came from the experiences of the young people themselves and the, sometimes, fractured support they receive. “Young people in social welfare get sent sometimes to so many different people, from there, to there, to there”, Ida explains. “And they have to tell their story – sometimes really tragic, always heavy – so many times. So, can I bring all those people together instead of the young person running around to all of them? Can we make one plan instead of ten different plans – ‘this for work, this for school, this for...’ you know?”

Lasse recalls the story of one mother of a volunteer who attended: “She had tears coming from her eyes when she saw what happened to her son. In her eyes she has seen remarkable changes in his attitude. She sees him coming up to the adult stage. If the family tells you this, you are on the right track.”

This idea is backed up later in the day when I meet Henrik, one of the young people Iter worked with, who went on a Volunteering Activities project to Iceland. “The network meetings were good. I got to invite all my friends and family and they were there. So, they got to know what I was going to do and why I was going to do it. And to know what I was going to do when I got back, what we had spoken about with Iter, what my biggest fears were, what I hoped for. It was really good.”

And Iter’s approach, helped by the practice of the network meetings, is creating real results for the young people and the city. Anna concludes, “Usually there are about 80%-85% that we work with on Volunteering Activities, who are in work or are studying when they are finished with Iter. We think this is a very good number for this target group.”

CASE STUDY 2

I SEE YOU, YOU ARE HERE

Mladinski Center, Trbovlje, Slovenia

In the cafe at Mladinski Center Trbovlje, Aneta Kovačič, Project Worker at the local Employment Office, is drinking a mid-morning espresso and reflecting on the past 3 years. “At the beginning there were around 40 of us young people who got employed to work in the Employment Offices across Slovenia, contracted until 2022. The ambition was for the Employment Offices to become closer to young people and their mentality, and, as a result, to better help young people find employment.”

Increasing the employability of the young people of the European Union is one of the permanent priorities of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme. How do youth organisations active in Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme work to realise this aim? One such innovative example comes from the town of Trbovlje, in Slovenia.

“This generation of young staff has had an impact on how the Employment Offices work”, Aneta continues. “Before you only had 15 mins with the young unemployed people. Now we have more time with the young people. Now we are inviting them to more events, making it more personal and also, we started to have more workshops for the young people. The whole approach changed. It started with us and now it is spreading to other staff members and offices.”

Upstairs at Mladinski Center Trbovlje (MCT), the change is apparent to Mitja, one of the youth workers here. “Now it

is much easier – they understand really what we are trying to do. Before, there was more focus on the formality of the whole thing, they didn’t really understand what we did. But now it is much easier – now it is like speaking with a youth worker from the neighbourhood.”

The Employment Office in the area and MCT have developed a mutually beneficial partnership, working together to improve the employability of the young people. Through this the Employment Office and MCT have helped bring opportunities such as Volunteering Activities closer to the young people of the area. At the core of this has been the authentic willingness of both the youth centre and the Employment Office to learn from each other and put that learning into action.

What has the employment office learned from MCT?

Aneta:

“It is the way they approach the young people. With our generation this formal way was not working. These informal, ‘soft’ ways are a lot better for the young people to feel that you understand them. I like the way MCT have their meetings when they came to our office – how they were presenting everything. It wasn’t like ‘sit there and listen to me’. It was like starting in the circle and involving everyone – ‘I see you, you are here, so what do you want to do?’”

Mitja:

“Years ago when we invited the Employment Office staff to come here it was a very classical presentation – PowerPoint, half an hour speech, a bit boring for the young people. But now they see there are different methods. When we go there, we never do this – never you just sit and listen. It’s always different. And then they started thinking ‘maybe this is better – they are not bored, they are not sad’. And then you already see that the Employment Office staff are starting to change something. It is really important for their brand, because usually they do not have a good image in the public.”

What has MCT gained or learned from the employment office?

Mitja:

“We as youth workers are acquiring some of their methods and implementing them in our work, which means that we don’t just see young people as person-to-person, but as a group. So, we are also following the trends within the group. It is now easier for me to say, OK, we will include 10% of unemployed young people into our activities. This is really important, you can operate from the macro perspective and not just the micro perspective. This is something that is lacking in a lot of youth centres – they are only working from the micro perspective.”

Aneta:

“We have around 600 young people on our books in Zasavje, it is easier for us to contact them than it is for MCT. They also learned that it is not so easy working in employability. MCT have more of a sense of the challenges involved and by working together we can start to come up with new ideas.”

What have you learned about how volunteering activities contribute towards employability?

Aneta:

“This links with employment a lot. With young people a lot of problems are with their self-esteem, they say they don’t have enough experience or knowledge or anything to show employers in a job interview. But when you’re outside your comfort zone, you can be searching for your true you.”

Mitja:

“Volunteering Activities are understood in terms of employability more and more. One month ago we had a big business meet-up. The key message coming from all the entrepreneurs was that every young person should go abroad. If you do it, it won’t guarantee you a job, but if you do it, it will improve your competences really, really a lot. Also, the staff from the Employment Office know that too – it is a good opportunity.”

Aneta:

“What is really good, also, with this generation they sometimes struggle with their commitments, being tired and having too much to do. And through Volunteering Activities they can develop a work ethos and an attitude for work. OK, it is fun, but there is a schedule and they get some discipline as a result and I think that is very important and can be shown to them in a ‘soft’ way.”

Although it is still quite early in the collaboration, we already have some conclusions about this partnership. So often young people with fewer opportunities fall through ‘the gaps’ of society. One of the successes of this story is how it has worked to reduce some of these gaps. Firstly, the Employment Offices have moved themselves closer to the young people by employing and putting faith in young staff members who better understand the realities that young people face. Secondly, the Employment Office has worked tightly with the youth centre in Trbovlje and learned from them how to get closer with young people. Thirdly, the youth centre is becoming more united with the Employment Office, working more strategically in building youth employability and developing how youth work and Volunteering Activities are understood by different groups in society. The aim of all this ultimately is to close the gap between young people and employment and have less young people falling down the damaging hole of long-term unemployment.



Mitja from MC Trbovlje with gift from Slovenj Gradec



Interview with MC Krsko volunteers



Europa Joven Madrid - Vallecas

CASE STUDY 3

FUTURE-ORIENTED ACTIVITY

NAV employment office, Møre Og Romsdal, Norway

“We are a bit excited because two of our volunteers are travelling today to Slovenia”. Behind the north European understatement, Ole Kristian Myrbostad’s enthusiasm is palpable. The two young people leaving for a 2-month Volunteering Activities project in Slovenia are the first sent by NAV (the Norwegian employment office) in the county of Møre og Romsdal.

Back in 2017, Ole Kristian and his colleague Tove Gustad were participants at a conference in Gothenburg on Volunteering Activities. It was here that inspiration from the example of the work of Iler made them decide to bring the idea to Møre og Romsdal. “The results are so good that we have to try this back in our county.”



PUM-o Skofja Loka

The majority of organisations active in Volunteering Activities are NGOs. I was really curious to hear why this employment office had chosen to send young people directly on Volunteering Activities.

Ole Kristian explains that “in our county, we have a challenge in finding measures that meet the needs of those young people who have been outside of work and education for a long time”. Tove explains how the employment office decided that Volunteering Activities could provide something to the young people that they had been missing. “We wanted to try the Volunteering Activities to see if we could actually see a change in the young people. Our colleagues in the public employment service have been struggling to find a future-oriented activity.”

Tove continues, “because of their experience so far in life, they don’t have so much self-confidence about their own possibilities. And there are many reasons for that.” One of the issues that they highlight is mental health. “We see on a national level that of the young people not in employment, education or training 60-70% of them have mental health issues.”

What did they and their colleagues think that Volunteering Activities could bring to these young people? For Tove, the aim is to “move them onto a different track than they have been on before, so they see they have possibilities, they can gain confidence, they can gain knowledge about themselves that they haven’t learned from other experiences that they have had so far. To give them a tool within themselves

to look at opportunities in a new way.”

What is special about Volunteering Activities compared to anything else? “Because they are in a new country with a new language, with new people, doing new things – everything is new. They are far from home, far from family, friends – positive things, negative things – basically on their own two feet. They have to manage themselves – with support of course. That we see as very valuable and an important thing to go through.”

One of the things that helped them implement this idea was collaborating with young staff members. Ole Kristian explains, “it is very easy for us to sell Volunteering Activities to the [employment] offices, particularly where there are a lot

of young people working in the offices, because they themselves have personal experience in working abroad or doing part of their education abroad.”

Tove goes on to highlight the impact introducing Volunteering Activities to their organisation has had. “It is broadening the horizons of our colleagues to see new opportunities to help the young people become job-seekers out in society. That is a different method, not just the traditional ones that they might have heard of before.”

So for them, what is the link between Volunteering Activities and employability? Tove argues that “it’s not that you do a training specifically, but it’s what you gain through all the activities, all the co-operation, the flexibility that you have. Everything you contribute is giving you these competences that you can put down on your CV, which is a valuable thing.”

“The companies hiring people are getting more and more international”, Ole Kristian continues, “so having this international experience and understanding a taste of how different cultures work is a really important thing to put in a CV and might be an eye-opener for the companies.”

I catch up with Tove a few months later to hear how the two volunteers who went to Slovenia got on. “Both of the volunteers learned a great deal about themselves and their own strengths. They learned about how to interact with people from other cultures, in a foreign language”. She continues, “in my opinion I think the focus during the eight weeks enables the volunteers to a larger degree to form positive thoughts about their own future and possibilities. We only have experience with two candidates so far and are excited about the future possibilities for other volunteers.”



European day of languages poster - Polski



European day of languages poster - Slovak



European day of languages poster - Slovene



European day of languages poster

CASE STUDY 4

FROM THE GRASSROOTS UP

Coordinadora and Europa Joven, Madrid, SPAIN

“The point is that Vallecas is one of the most under-privileged neighbourhoods in Madrid – with low rates of income, and high rates of school drop-outs,” Jorge Hermida the Director of Coordinadora explains. I am in a neighbourhood centre in north Madrid to hear from the people involved in Coordinadora, Europa Joven Madrid and the work going on presently to bring Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme opportunities to “young people in vulnerable situations”, as Jorge describes it.

Jorge is one of those people that has a gravitational effect on a room – when he talks people seem to turn their head to listen. “Coordinadora is an NGO which was founded in 1989 with the aim of bringing together social organisations that work with children and young people. We are formed of 20 youth centres for youth at risk – all in this area.” Jorge tells the story of how “in 1997 Coordinadora launched its first European project. Since then we have run more than 40 projects relating to education and youth. This experience has given us a great understanding of how European programmes work.”

This story leads up to 2006 when Coordinadora approached the Mayor of Madrid to talk about the need for greater support to connect the young people of Madrid with these European opportunities, like Volunteering Activities. Jorge explains, “an organisation does not get money for staffing costs from these Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme activities. An organisation needs money to support the

project and do well. We don’t want to send people outside and leave them on their own. We need to take care of our people abroad – and when young people are hosted here too.”



Carla from AM Scotland with gift from Slovenia

Coordinadora reached an agreement with the Madrid municipality to finance a European youth centre – Europa Joven Madrid – to support young people across Madrid, not just Vallecas, into accessible international opportunities. Jorge continues, “since 2006, Europa Joven Madrid has sent more than 100 people and hosted around 50.” The municipality continue to fund Europa Joven Madrid to this day.

But one question kept coming up over recent years. As Yuki Marquez, the European Projects Co-ordinator from Europa Joven Madrid, outlines: “we sent a lot of people, but most of them – I can say maybe 80% or more – are graduates, they have studied,

they have already travelled. OK, this is good, because they have improved their competences but, the target group we are working with are not taking advantage of this opportunity. So, the main question we have is: why do the young people with fewer opportunities not participate in Volunteering Activities?”

Through following and exploring this question they came to hear about some of the key obstacles. “And, so, we found some answers: mainly it is lack of information, access or lack of resources. For example, we think that everyone has the internet at home, but in Spain it is quite expensive. Also, there can be a lack of motivation – because it is something they may not see as interesting or relevant to their lives. As well, these young people have many problems, so maybe this is not the main objective for them at the moment”. Yuki adds, “we had a partners meeting in February and visited an association of Coordinadora and one educator said, ‘for us it’s difficult to send girls because some of them at 14 are married or engaged’. We don’t see those barriers, but they exist.”

In their mission to involve more young people with fewer opportunities, one of the main resources they used was the Coordinadora network – a return to roots. As Rosario Coronado, European Youth Advisor from Europa Joven Madrid, describes: “one thing that has been very important is that the volunteers we have sent have come from different organisations in Vallecas that are part of Coordinadora. So, they are boys and girls that have been users of these organisations and now some of them are volunteering in them.” Rosario continues, “for us it has been important to have the support of these organisations, because they know the young people so well. They know what are their difficulties or possible problems, so this helps us to prepare them better and to help them

better when they are abroad. We work as a network”.

Through their work over the years Coordinadora and Europa Joven Madrid have got a strong sense of what it really takes to work successfully and connect vulnerable young people to transformative international opportunities. Jorge explains the different elements required. “We really need for this to be well done. We really need the extra structures. It’s not only the young person – it’s Balia [one of the neighbourhood organisations in Vallecas], it’s Coordinadora, it’s Europa Joven Madrid with support from the Madrid municipality, and the partners in the other countries. But I really think this one month is going to change the lives of the young people, because it’s opening minds and offering opportunities”, he concludes. “This is the reason that we are interested in the extra effort.”

“Our perspective is to prevent this long-term unemployment. It’s to prevent it,” Yuki is very clear. “Sometimes the young people we work with are not unemployed – they may be studying – but they are far from the labour market. We offer to improve their competences and this is the way to avoid long-term unemployment.”

CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CLOSING THE GAP

One theme that comes through across these case studies is how partnership working has helped close the gaps between different organisations and institutions that work with young people – gaps that young people often fall through. The network meetings in Iter literally bring the relevant people together – different professionals working with the young people and family members – in a circle with the young person. The question Ida Palm poses for her practice in Iter is a powerful question for anyone working with young people: “Can I connect all those people instead of the young person running around to all of them? Can we make one plan instead of ten different plans?”

THE POTENTIAL FOR YOUTH WORKERS TO LEAD CHANGE

It can be easy for youth workers to feel that they are unable to influence other sectors of society and lead change. However, these case studies are full of examples of committed youth workers demonstrating the value of their work and taking these arguments to powerful gate-keepers in order to forge lasting partnerships. The work of Coordinadora, for example: bringing grassroots international youth work in one neighbourhood of Madrid to the attention of the city Mayor and securing a European youth centre for the whole city. Iter itself started from a few youth workers employed by the municipality of Gothenburg in Sweden, stating the case for core support to enable some of the most marginalised young people in the city to benefit from Volunteering Activities. And, now that story of change is being spread to employment offices in Norway, amongst many others.

NOT RELYING ON ‘BUSINESS AS USUAL’

It can be easy to dismiss working with certain organisations. However, these case studies demonstrate that cutting through first impressions to discover fresh thinking, unexpected learning and collective strengths through new partnerships is a strength. The story of Mladinski Center Trbovlje and the local Employment Office is a clear example of the willingness to learn of two organisations and the staff within them – and the benefits that brings to the young people who they work with.

TRUSTING IN YOUNG(ER) PEOPLE AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As Aneta Kovačič described, “there were around 40 of us young people who got employed to work in the Employment Offices across Slovenia, contracted until 2022”. The case study of Trbovlje gives one example of the impact of just one of those people has had. Since the Erasmus student exchange programme started in 1987 it has become more and more common for young people in Europe to have an international experience as part of their education. As Ole Kristian Myrbostad from NAV explained, “it is very easy for us to sell Volunteering Activities to the [employment] offices, particularly where there are a lot of young people working in the offices, because they themselves have personal experience in working abroad or doing part of their education abroad.”

THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

One thing that is striking when reading through these Case Studies is the value that the staff members interviewed place on Volunteering Activities. To hear it from a youth organisation might be somewhat unsurprising, but the perspective of the Norwegian employment office is particularly striking. As Tove Gustad describes, “We wanted to try the Volunteering Activities to see if we could actually see a change in the young people. Our colleagues in the public employment service had been struggling to find a future-oriented activity.” The staff members interviewed here are in little doubt that Volunteering Activities can offer something unique, something not readily available elsewhere, something that can change futures.

WORKING WITH EMPLOYMENT OFFICES

When this project commenced in 2016, there was a strong interest in exploring the potential place of employment offices in the promotion of Volunteering Activities. This focus is reflected in the stories above, which nearly all feature involvement – to some extent – with employment offices. However, it is important to state that of the 15 organisations participating in the study:

- 7 did not consider employment offices as potential partners. The most common reason given for this is that employment

offices were perceived to have a set of practices and priorities that were far removed from the practices and priorities of the youth organisation;

- 4 made efforts, following the Partnership-Building Activity in Slovenia in 2016, to reach out to their local employment office but reported limited success. The most common reason given by the youth organisations was constraints on staff time and organisational priorities lying elsewhere;
- 4 organisations have developed constructive partnerships (on some level) with employment offices – and 1 organisation was an employment office. The stories of two of these organisations are given above (Case Study 2 and 4).

Amongst the organisations involved in the research collaborating with employment offices is not a common practice. Although the Case Studies above point to some examples which might suggest partnership-building between youth organisations and employment offices could be fertile territory, it is important to acknowledge the reservations stated by the youth organisations. Furthermore, some people in the youth work field might balk at the idea of Volunteering Activities projects being run by an Employment Office as we see with NAV in Norway. Is youth work being colonised by the employability agenda? Likewise, looking into the perceptions from staff at employment offices about working with youth organisations could be a valuable area for further investigation on this topic.

In terms of recommendations for better relations with employment offices – further to what has been described above – many of the youth organisations involved in this study have strongly expressed the key importance of young people not being punished by having their social welfare payments removed because of their participation in a Volunteering Activities project (or any other international youth work activity). It is evident from what these youth organisations are saying that the prospect of lost welfare payments for young people (and their families) often stops any possibility of them participating in these potentially transformative international opportunities.



OVERALL CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

This research project was set up to better understand the following:

1. To better understand the impact of Volunteering Activities on the employability of young people – in particular on young people with fewer opportunities;
2. To share examples of effective practice from youth organisations active in supporting young people through their Volunteering Activities projects;
3. To explore the potential of innovative partnerships between youth organisations and other institutions, particularly employment offices.

In Section 1 the results of the study indicate that the young people involved:

- Find Volunteering Activities mainly through word of mouth (YPMO) and the organisations they are already involved in (YPFO);
- Describe the main motivations behind young people going on a Volunteering Activities project as:
 - *feeling lost*
 - *seeking a new experience*
 - *improving their chances of finding work*
- Describe developments in their attitude as a result of their Volunteering Activities – in particular becoming more...
 - *courageous*
 - *mature*
 - *open-minded*
 - *having greater self-esteem*
- Picked up valued skills and knowledge, primarily in...
 - *language*
 - *teamwork*
 - *communication*
 - *getting to know a new place*
- Value the growth of their social networks (or social capital), especially as...
 - *a source of support*
 - *inspiration*
 - *new opportunities*
 - *connections*
- Describe other employability outcomes, such as having:
 - *a better idea of what they want to do as a career*
 - *something to use on their CV and job interview*
 - *an expanded sense of what is possible in their work lives*
- Both YPFO and YPMO describe increases in their employability. Although to a large degree they describe similar outcomes, there are some notable differences in the areas of development that they highlight;
- Discuss a similar picture of development as the staff of the organisations they are involved with during their Volunteering Activities.



Section 2 outlines a wide range of tips and effective practice from organisations throughout the various stages of the Volunteering Activities journey, including:

- Building strong relationships with international partners through shared organisational visions and in-person meetings;
- For Support Organisations, the necessity of building a close and trusting relationship with the young person before departure, particularly in supporting YPFO;
- The importance of embedding the Volunteering Activities project as part of a wider goal for the young person (e.g. 'Overcoming my anxiety'). Volunteering Activities on their own are no 'silver bullet';
- Providing close support to the young person during their volunteering, including creating space to follow the ideas and interests of the young person within the project and connecting the young person to the communities around them;
- After the Volunteering Activities project is over, working with the young person on the recognition of competences and continuing to help to add 'branches' to their local network to open up next steps and opportunities;
- When the young people themselves were asked what support they particularly appreciated from organisations they highlighted the importance of maintaining close connection and care – particularly the YPFO;
- Youth workers value when National Agencies provide practitioners the opportunity to exchange experience with others in their field and can be part of specialised training courses.

2

3

In Section 3, four different case studies of Volunteering Activities projects were highlighted. Reflecting on these case studies identified how:

- Collaboration between youth organisations and other institutions (such as employment offices) can help to reduce the 'gaps' that vulnerable young people fall through and unite the professionals involved in a young person's life around one plan;
- Youth workers are able to lead change and influence other sectors in society through demonstrating the value of their work and taking these arguments to powerful gate-keepers in order to forge lasting partnerships;
- This current generation of young professionals (in their 20s and 30s) who have experienced international experiences, like Erasmus, themselves, can be instinctive and passionate multipliers of opportunities like Volunteering Activities when empowered to do so;
- Partnerships between youth organisations and employment offices around Volunteering Activities can bring new and unexpected benefits to all involved, provided there is sufficient willingness to learn on all sides;
- However, employment offices are more a part of the problem than the solution when they reduce or remove the welfare payments of young people participating in Volunteering Activities.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

So, what do we take away from this? And what next steps might this call you to take?

This research adds to the growing evidence demonstrating the connection between Volunteering Activities and employability. What is particularly evident in this study is that outcomes are less easily achievable within traditional formal educational frameworks, in particular: greater courage, autonomy and expanded social networks. In a fast-changing world it can be difficult to anticipate what skills and knowledge will be useful to young people and their employability in the future. But it is reasonable to say that we are unlikely to regret equipping young people with greater courage, maturity, open-mindedness, self-esteem, and the ability to manage in new and unfamiliar environments.

EVS Competences for Employability (2014) concluded that these projects are 'a life-changer'. Volunteering Activities are no 'silver bullet' but the data from this research suggests, indeed, that these projects can significantly impact the lives of the young people who participate. However, what is abundantly clear in this research – and the work of Nicodemi and Şenyuva (2018) – is that the involvement of YPFO within Volunteering Activities does not just happen. It requires extensive work, connections and support. The case studies, young people's testimonies and organisational practices featured in this research project, hopefully offer useful examples and inspiration for organisations seeking to make these projects a reality in the lives of the YPFO they are working with. But if Volunteering Activities are going to fulfil its promise and potential in the lives of

YPFO, then the youth workers and partnerships that make these projects happen need to be invested in and supported – on various levels. There is a real need for further attention and action. Otherwise, YPFO will continue to be marginalised and Volunteering Activities will continue to be dominated by more resourceful and educated young people.



Sharing results from research at Key to Inclusion seminar - Dec 2018 - Ljubljana

APPENDIX

CASE STUDIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATED IN VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES PROJECTS

These four Case Studies are expanded versions of articles originally published on the website of Movit, the Slovenian National Agency of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme, where the content of the research was presented from different angles while it was still running. It is a very interesting read.

Volunteer Case Study 1 – New relationships and new challenges in Bulgaria and Italy

What significant dates in your life do you remember?

The birthday of a family member? A wedding anniversary? The date your football team finally won the cup?

“I remember very well when I arrived in Bulgaria – it was the 28th February 2017. I remember going together with Renata for 2 or 3 days to get to know Bulgaria and the organisation and where I was staying. She was with me. It was OK for me this new adventure.”

I am in conversation with Paulo, a young man from the north of Italy, a few weeks after coming back from a 12-month Volunteering Activities project in Bulgaria. ‘Renata’ is Renata Dolega, volunteer co-ordinator from Paulo’s sending organisation, Atelier Europeo, in Brescia, Italy.

Later, I speak with her about her work with Paulo. “It was very important [for me] to be there, otherwise he would have had a crisis in those first days.” Before going to Bulgaria, aged 27, Paulo says he was “unemployed and fed up staying at home”. Other than his Civil Service, he had been mostly unemployed for the last 5 years.

Paulo was volunteering full-time for an environmental organisation on projects to reduce local polluting. Going to Bulgaria was no doubt a big challenge. “In Bulgaria, when I arrived it was a really tough experience”, he tells me. “But through 1 year, it improved. When it started it was a disaster – I understood nothing, only Google Translate!”

Paulo continues, “When I started, I had a difficult time. When I started new relationship with other volunteers it was hard for me to begin. But this became easier for me – making new relationships.” He goes on to acknowledge the support of the staff at his receiving organisation, AKSELS, in particular Liliya Georgieva, Project Development Manager. “Thanks very much to Liliya the supervisor, she was the master for showing me lots of things.”

When I ask Paulo the what was the biggest thing he gained from his time he tells me, “The most important was meeting new people. Now I know people in Slovakia, in Spain, in Greece. I learned a lot from different people outside of the project.”

I ask Renata what she thinks Paulo gained. “I think the more important result for him was that he did something that was successful. He could see that he can manage. That’s a really winning situation for a person that comes from a path of life that is ‘challenging’. It’s a new chance – they can see with their own eyes. Internally he feels that.”

Paulo talks about learning a lot about computers from his Polish roommate, learning about his own strengths and weakness, and how his English really improved. “I also improved my force of will for getting a job”, he adds. “Before returning to Italy I spoke with Liliya and she was saying how I have now more of this force of will – ‘you have fire in your body, Paulo!’” This leads Paulo to conclude that “there are a lot of connections” between Volunteering Activities and employability.

Renata goes further: “With the situation in the job market and with schools we say that there is a big gap between the current school experience and being prepared for the world of employment. And I think there is a lot of space with Volunteering Activities to develop soft skills and some professional skills – not just in theory but in practice.” Renata adds, “I think all the transferable skills that they get are really strong there. It is not just about the 6 or 7 hours of volunteering, it is about the 24 hours of life abroad. In this sense they come back as other people. I think this is the real impact.”

6 months later I speak with Paulo again. “I have good news for you”, he says. Over the summer he describes how he returned to Bulgaria on his own to meet again with the people he had got to know and the new volunteers on the project. In Brescia, he has got a job working in a restaurant very close to his home.

I ask his opinion on how his employer perceived his Volunteering Activities experience. “I think my boss has admiration for me – about the Volunteering Activities project. They see the person who has more force of will – not to surrender in life, not ever. Now, maybe in the future I will become the right arm for my boss”, helping with the management of the restaurant. “For my experience of the Volunteering Activities project, in my body, in my mind, it changed something. In this case, not to surrender.”

On his first shift at his new job, he faced another challenge that required his new-won determination: “The boss says: ‘I have a job for you as dishwasher and cleaner’. OK. I remember on the first night it was – I don’t remember the right term – very big. But evolving in the job, now it is easy for me. When I go to the job I have my way of organising the things, yeah it’s really fantastic.” He concludes, “I am really, really happy. And you?”

Volunteer Case Study 2 – Volunteering Activities and the Golden Ticket in Slovenia

Last year I wrote about the collaboration between MC Trbovlje (MCT) and the employment office in the area. The article focussed on the work the staff members were doing to bring opportunities like Volunteering Activities closer to young people, and particularly unemployed young people, in the area. Coming back to Trbovlje this year, I wanted to know what some of these young people have gained from the experience.

“I was about 27 when I figured out what I don’t want to do with my life”, Mojca explains. “So about 2 weeks later I went back to school. I enrolled to get a higher education.” Another month or so later, she found out about Volunteering Activities through an email from the employment office inviting her to an info session at MCT. A couple of months later she was starting a 6-month project with Teatro Metaphora on the Portuguese island of Madeira.

“I had major problems with anxiety in the past... So, yeah, my biggest aspiration was to grow on a personal level and leave the fear behind, because I really didn’t have anything to fear, but I feared everything (laughs).”

I asked Mojca, before her Volunteering Activities project, did she have a sense of what she wanted to do as a career? “Yes and no... I tried myself in a couple of professions, but none of them was the right one. But when I went on Volunteering Activities I was like ‘this is what I should do’. You meet so many different people, like every person is different and you can help them any way you can, for me this was really awesome.”

One key element that she highlights was the flexibility offered to her in her volunteering work plan. This gave her the possibility to follow opportunities that weren’t part of the original plan, such as the chance to help facilitate a training course at a local youth centre. She explains, “the light just went on – ‘this is what I should be doing’... All my life I wanted to work with people in some capacity, but I couldn’t figure it out and this Volunteering Activities project opened that door that this is what I could be doing.”

For Mojca, there is a clear connection between Volunteering Activities and employability. As well as gaining a decisive direction for her career as well as new connections and skills, the unique experience of a Volunteering Activities project has helped her ability to manage in different situations. “Like I said before, I really needed to push myself out of that comfort zone. So when I get a job and the boss wants me to do something that is out of my comfort zone, first I’ll be more comfortable. I know how to organise and plan, and even delegate something. So I think that’s a huge learning curve about the simplest things in life, and it is these things that school cannot teach that I took from Erasmus+”. She continues, “in school it is just 1+1 is 2 and that is how it is. The end. And here there are so many different ways of learning and helping each other. That was really awesome.”

Mojca describes her Volunteering Activities project with MCT and Teatro Metaphora as “the Golden Ticket”. During her mid-term evaluation she became aware that the support she received in her project wasn’t typical of the other volunteers’ experiences in other organisations. So what was the support that Mojca so appreciated?

Firstly, she talks about how the pre-departure training organised by the National Agency gave her a clear sense of the emotional ups and downs of a Volunteering Activities project. As well as the flexible work plan, she valued greatly the close attention and care given to her by the staff of Teatro Metaphora and the staff from MCT keeping in touch with her when she was away. In her organisation in Madeira all the staff and volunteers worked in one office space in a friendly and non-judgemental atmosphere where she felt she could share anything. Finally, she describes how she received important encouragement from the other international volunteers, from the locals in Madeira and from her mentor, who went above and beyond their responsibility to be, in her words, “the doorway to the other culture”.

Mojca is now a mentor herself to one of the young people from Madeira who has come to Slovenia on a Volunteering Activities project with MC Trbovlje. She is also doing promotion

work in schools so that young people growing up in her area will know about Erasmus+ opportunities. “If I have an experience that can help another person, the least that I can do is to share it so that others can take something from it.” Her passion to pursue her new path is clear. “When I saw the Training of Trainers course I said ‘I am going’. It wasn’t a question of could I or couldn’t I, it was: ‘no, I’m doing this’. And just 2 days ago I applied for a youth worker job, so fingers crossed for this. And if not, then the next one. Either way I’m determined to work in this field.”

Volunteer Case Study 3 – Breaking Barriers with Banter in Scotland, UK

I am speaking to Johanna from Romania about proverbs. She translates one of her favourites from back home into English: “If a guest arrives at someone’s house empty-handed, it’s as if they arrive with their hand in their arse.” I love hearing proverbs from different parts of Europe, but this one makes me feel a bit self-conscious. The only thing I have brought with me to this house in north Glasgow where the volunteers are staying is a digital recorder to capture the interviews that I will be doing with them. Better than nothing, I hope.

Johanna is one of 12 young people from 5 different European countries here for one month of volunteering with Achieve More Scotland. The volunteers have been helping support Achieve More’s summer sports programme, working with 100s of young people from around north Glasgow on dance and football activities.

But there is much more to this project than just helping with the summer programme. Project Co-ordinator, Carla Fyfe, explains: “Achieve More doesn’t just work with Scottish people who have been here all their life. We have 92 different nationalities – we work with migrants and refugees. So, we wanted to bring the Erasmus+ volunteers over here to help to find common ground.” This aim gives the project its title: ‘Breaking Barriers with Banter’.

“For attitudes, I think it is life-changing”, says Akis, one of the volunteers from Greece. “You go somewhere else completely away from your

home, you are with different people from different countries and backgrounds, you are helping with others on a small level but also on a big level. You develop friendships by interacting with the kids, other volunteers and the locals.”

Before going on this project Gheorghe from Romania had never met any Muslim people. “I had an idea before that they were bad. I think that came from the media – hearing bad stories. But when I met them, my ideas changed. So, meeting a different culture like that changed me.”

As well as creating greater understanding, Breaking Barriers opens up new opportunities for learning and employment, as Gheorghe explains. “Now I know that I can live in another country away from home for some time. I am also more confident in speaking to others in another language.”

This belief is echoed by nearly all the volunteers I speak to, including Marta from Poland. “The most important thing was getting better in English and also being more confident. I am not afraid to talk to people now. So, it’s a big experience and I think I can manage.”

Being placed in a project like this, living with 11 other strangers and helping run sports sessions with a diverse range of young people is an experience outside the comfort zone of most of these volunteers. Johanna from Romania sums it up: “Here you have to do things. I think I am more courageous now. Why? Because I needed to be. Necessity.”

The new language skills, confidence and increased employability of the volunteers aren’t the only results of this project that I hear about. I ask Carla about the impact of these volunteers on the local young people. “The majority of the young people we work with have never been overseas before, so it’s quite a big thing for them – there’s quite a lot of fear. We take away that fear by hosting young people here in Scotland. Our young people see other young people like them doing it. They get to reflect on that situation and often decide to go for it themselves. So it’s created a pipeline of oppor-

tunities for youth empowerment and figuring out who they want to be.”

Speaking to Carla reminds me of a Spanish proverb I once saw: “Where there is no want of will, there will be no want of opportunity”.

Volunteer Case Study 4 – ‘What’s this thing volunteering?’ Soft skills and expanded horizons in Poland

“One volunteer who came here from Ukraine was having big discussions with her family before she left over whether she should come or not,” Marco explains. “Because she had to quit her job to come and her parents were asking – ‘what’s this thing volunteering?’”

The offices of STRIM in Krakow are smaller than I was expecting for an organisation that is so active in Volunteering Activities. I am talking with Marco Tromboli, a Volunteer Co-ordinator at STRIM, about how these projects are perceived by different groups in society.

“We are sending less and less volunteers in Poland generally. Maybe because it is easier to go abroad and there are other options. Also, the vision of volunteering within Erasmus+ is not so professional to young people, especially where they have the formal education option within Erasmus+ available to them.”

STRIM co-ordinate a diverse group of volunteers – between 20 and 30 at a time – to come to volunteer in Krakow on 9-month placements. Most of the volunteers do their placements in kindergartens across the city but some volunteer at other educational institutions, such as primary schools.

Kemal came to STRIM when he was 26 to volunteer on one of these projects in 2015. “The picture of my life is quite multicultural we can say. First, I was born in Morocco, in Casablanca in 1989. When I was 15 years-old we moved to Spain. I had a brother there already, so I moved basically to have High School there”, he explains. “I finished my High School a bit later than expected. Then I went to University and studied Social Work in Murcia.”

One of the big legacies, he tells me, of his Volunteering Activities project in Krakow is the network of friends and connections he developed. “As an anecdote, a lot of people not related to my project ask me, ‘hey Kemal, you have a lot of friends here, how did you do that?’ I know I am open and so on and it’s easy for me to have friends but here it was very easy because of STRIM and how they organise. I always give the same example: on the first day you meet 25 volunteers. Each volunteer has a mentor, so we are talking about 50 people already. Each 5 volunteers have an assistant, so 5 more – 55. STRIM staff, some friends of the friends from the mentors. So at the first party we are talking about 70 people there.”

The EVS Competences (2014) research found that approximately 1 in 4 of young people stay on in the place they did their Volunteering Activities project. For Kemal, and his generation of volunteers at STRIM, the number is higher. “From these 25 volunteers, 11 of us stayed in Krakow and all of us have jobs.” Kemal has now been in Krakow for 2 years after his project ended.

I ask him what were the biggest skills he gained from his Volunteering Activities project. “All these soft skills I think they really help a lot if you continue with employment”, he says. “It sounds very simple, but not everyone can have it, not a lot of people practice it in university, because in university you are mostly with people that have the same background as you. But when you travel and you are dealing everyday with different people and lots of things that you don’t understand, and that you don’t like.”

He continues to talk about some of the other volunteers he knew and their progression into jobs in call centres in Krakow, “Call centres are basically soft skills – how you talk with people. All of them in the interview, for sure, they had to say ‘I am working in a kindergarten’, ‘I am working in the primary school’. So, for sure the Volunteering Activities experience helped them.”

Kemal works as a Corporate Social Responsibility manager for a multinational IT company. “Here we have a lot of corporations – they

are hiring a lot of people. The way they see people, it’s not about what they need, but it’s about what you have and how they can adapt what you have. They see people and they say, ‘ok you have this, we take it and we will polish it and you will do this job’. So, I think the Volunteering Activities project experience was kind of crucial.”

One of the biggest changes he describes is how his career horizons have expanded. “When I was in Spain before my Volunteering Activities project, if you would have asked me: ‘hey Kemal, you have the right to work anywhere you want in the world what would you apply for?’ I think the last thing I would apply for are the corporations – not because I don’t want to but because I don’t know that they exist. Through coming here, I know that these opportunities exist here and in other cities. So for me it’s totally different. Whenever I want to change country, maybe the first thing that I would look for is to get a job in a corporation – maybe here, maybe Berlin, maybe Australia, maybe New Zealand, maybe UK or the States. I see this job perspective that I couldn’t see before.”

Perhaps Kemal’s is a vision of volunteering that needs to be shared more widely.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bammer, D. et al, [Exploring Erasmus+: Youth In Action Effects And Outcomes Of The Erasmus+: Youth In Action Programme](#), (2017)

Bolles, R., [What Colour Is Your Parachute](#), Ten Speed Press (1970)

CIMO / Demos Helsinki, [Hidden Competences](#), (2014)

Devlin, M et al. (ed.), [Learning mobility, social inclusion and non-formal education: Access, processes and outcomes](#), edited by Maurice Devlin et al., Council of Europe, (2018)

Duckworth, A., [Grit](#), Scribner, (2016)

Evrard and Markovic, [EVS Competences For Employability symposium report](#), (2014)

Glaze, A., [Character, Cultures & Values video](#), accessed online January 2019, (2015)

Goldring, [On Track, Salto-Youth Inclusion and Diversity](#), (2015)

Granovetter, M., ["The Strength of Weak Ties"](#), The American Journal of Sociology, (1973).

Guedens, T. et al., [International youth projects benefit most those with fewer opportunities](#), Salto-Youth Inclusion RC / RAY Network (2014)

Hoikkala and Karjalainen (eds.), [Finnish Youth Research Anthology 1999-2014](#), Finnish Youth Research Society, (2016)

In Defence of Youth Work, [This is Youth Work: Stories from Practice](#), (2012)

Kimmig, M. et al. (ed.), [The Undiscovered Country, National Agency of the Youth in Action programme Poland](#), (2012)

Markovic, D., [Learning support within the volunteering projects in Slovenia and the West- ern Balkans: the practices, challenges and needs for development](#), Institute Movit, (2019)

Seligman, M., [Flourish](#), Atria, (2011)

Şenyuva, [EVS Competences For Employability research report](#), (2014)

Sieveling, K. (ed.), [European Voluntary Service for Young People](#), Peter Lang, (2001)

Williamson, H. et al. (ed.), [The History of Youth Work In Europe, Vol. 6](#), Council of Europe, (2018).

MOVIT

Nacionalna agencija programov
Erasmus+: Mladi v akciji
in Evropska solidarnostna enota
Dunajska cesta 5
1000 Ljubljana

Telefon: +386 (0) 1 430 47 47

Splet: www.movit.si

E-pošta: info@movit.si

Publikacija je financirana s strani Evropske komisije in Urada RS za mladino. Vsebina publikacije je izključna odgovornost avtorjev in v nobenem primeru ne odraža stališč Evropske komisije ali Urada RS za mladino. Nacionalna agencija, Urad RS za mladino in Evropska komisija niso odgovorni za kakršno koli uporabo informacij, ki jih publikacija vsebuje.