



Regione Toscana



NEXT GENERATION

YOUTH WORKER

8

books of
GIOVANI *si*



Regione Toscana

GIOVANI si

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Preface

The “Next generation Youth Worker” path was set up to seek and receive ideas, proposals and suggestions from the world of Youth Workers, a world that is often forgotten or undervalued, but which nevertheless does a valuable job in promoting the independence of young people, whom the Tuscany Region has placed at the centre of the political agenda with the Giovanisi project, running since 2011.

This journey, which saw events held in four cities before ending in Florence last April, highlighted an aspect that has always been true, but even more for the younger generations: to design and promote effective policies, it is necessary to start from the needs, expectations and skills of the people involved. The attention of the Youth Workers, who work in close contact with young people, is therefore essential to listen to the territory and citizens, understanding and representing their needs.

This is what we have been trying to do in Tuscany for a long time, convinced that there is more to participation than just opening a discussion on a limited number of choices; instead, it must be part of a collaborative process, and the “normal” way of drafting regional policies.

For this reason, Tuscan policies on the reception of asylum seekers, urban security, the digital agenda and the collaborative economy - just to give some examples - were inspired by processes of participation, open to contributions from administrators, citizens, associations, bodies and research centres.

i.open.toscana.it

This is how OpenToscana¹ was set up three years ago, as a platform that hosts not only the digital services of the Region and the Municipalities, but also offers online spaces for participation and discussion.

Young people, Youth Workers, are the most sensitive interpreters of these processes, especially if they come from experiences of learning and professionalization aimed at developing the capacity for innovation and social design. It is therefore necessary to make the most of their work, so that they can increasingly play their role as positive instruments of change.

Vittorio Bugli

Regional Minister for the Presidency with delegation to participation
Region of Tuscany

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to talk about Youth Workers without taking into account the context in which they operate, looking at the places and those who live there, directly listening to what the operators have to say, and the problems they deal with every day.

Providing the new generations with the right tools to overcome the challenges of their time is undoubtedly one of the main tasks that an educator must fulfil. Too bad, however, that the educator is faced with a complex generation: a generation of many “no’s”. Young people who do not study, who do not work, who are not trained, who are not able to become independent; in short, simply a generation lost in “not doing”. Or at least that is how it is described.

Young people have been at the centre of political and sociological debates. The frenetic changes that affect the new generations make it increasingly difficult to identify who could be a “good partner” for them. We talk about it so much, and often with a negative tone, that one wonders who is really able to communicate with them in an appropriate way. Of course, not everyone can afford “not to know how to talk with young people”. This is the world of those who work with “growing people”, either adolescents or young people, and who are involved in accompanying them in the processes of becoming independent. These people are sometimes defined as Youth Workers, sometimes as local animators, or even a long-winded “person who deals with young people”. There are so many definitions of Youth Worker in the European Union that we risk ending up referring to different figures. And this is right where we started from, with a simple, yet complex, question: “What is a Youth Worker?”.

From the outset, defining univocally what a Youth Worker is has seemed difficult, because the figure of the Youth Worker undeniably lends itself to many readings.

We wanted to understand, in light of how the youth world has changed along with the policies that address it, what it means to be a Youth Worker today, what skills and what kind of training he should have.

The Tuscany Region has been focussing attention on young people for nearly ten years, first with the project “Filigrane. Giovani connessioni di comunità”, which invested in young people to make them protagonists, responsible and active participants of the policies that concerned them, and secondly with Giovanisi, the project of the Tuscany Region promoting the independence of young people².

[2. giovanisi.it](http://2.giovanisi.it)

Set up in 2011 with the aim of promoting a system of integrated youth policies, Giovanisi supports young people in building their own path towards adult life, strengthening and promoting opportunities relating to the right to study and training, supporting the insertion of young people into the world of work and launching start-ups.

Giovanisi is a system of opportunities structured in 7 macro-areas: Internships, Housing, Civil Service, Entrepreneurship, Education and Training, Employment and Giovanisi+ (which includes projects and in-

initiatives in fields such as participation, culture, legality, sport and social issues). The beneficiaries of the project are young people up to the age of 40 and the opportunities are financed with regional, national and European resources (POR ESF- POR CREO EFSR- PSR programming). The more than 50 opportunities related to the main dimensions of a young person's life, a coordinated communication and information campaign, and an integrated and transversal governance model, are the main elements that characterize and have characterized Giovanisi, reaching more than 260,000 young beneficiaries (as of September 2018), with an allocation exceeding 720 million euros.

Besides being a model of integrated governance, Giovanisi has always promoted opportunities to provide information and discussion with the world of young people; as a result, it has become a participatory welfare project that has built up a constant relationship with all local stakeholders over the years.

The main instrument with which the participation of young people is formally implemented is the Tavolo Giovani³, a consultative work table that involves young representatives from over 40 local organizations.

[3. giovanisi.it/giovanisiplus](http://3.giovanisi.it/giovanisiplus)

Over the years, these organisations and the various stakeholders in the field have repeatedly asked for a reflection on the figure of the Youth Worker, and it is precisely thanks to these requests that the idea of a project on the figure of the Youth Worker was born. Thinking about young people and their future necessarily entailed a profound reflection on the people who accompany them as they grow up.

We started, asking some specific questions: who are these people who can assist young people throughout their growth process? What is their job really? Which groups of young people do they target? And furthermore, is it necessary to recognize the skills that these operators have acquired? What skills do they have? In what kind of situation is a figure like this useful?

It is precisely in trying to answer these questions that the idea was born to promote a participatory path on Youth Workers ("Next generation Youth Worker"⁴), divided into four territorial meetings and a final follow-up event. The path, launched in December 2017 and promoted in collaboration with AssociAnimazione (National Association for Social and Cultural Animation), is part of the activities of Giovanisi+, the project area dedicated to themes such as participation, culture, legality, social and sport.

[4. giovanisi.it/giovanisiplus](http://4.giovanisi.it/giovanisiplus)

"Next generation Youth Worker" has visited 5 Tuscan cities (Empoli, Livorno, Massa, Siena and Florence), involving over 70 participants and 3 experts, with the aim of creating a space for discussion, open to the demands of the territory, on the figure of the youth leaders in contemporary society.

We knew that the path we decided to undertake would not be easy, especially because it would mean facing many difficult questions. Today more than ever, however, it is undeniable that the challenges must be dealt with on a local level; it is impossible to talk about Youth Workers without taking into account the context in which they operate, looking at the places and those who live there, directly listening to what the operators have to say, and the problems they deal with every day. Many challenges emerged during the journey, ten to be exact, which will be analysed later in more detail. This showed the importance of focussing attention on these issues in order to generate new perspectives, or perhaps more simply to create a shared and shareable starting point.

Generativity, hybrid spaces, skills, participation, agents of change are just some of the key words that have emerged. But Youth Workers cannot and should not be superheroes - they cannot be held responsible for having all the skills required to deal with the range of challenges that they are facing today.

There is no Youth Worker, without youth work. For this reason, it is essential to start a cultural work, starting from a local level, hoping to broaden the reflection to a wider sphere, which is able to motivate and make understand how the youth policies must work in synergy.

It is not easy to bring everything into a single discussion; a Youth Worker who is facing the inclusion of young migrants into society will certainly be facing different challenges than an operator supporting young people from disadvantaged or family backgrounds, or simply working in day care centres.

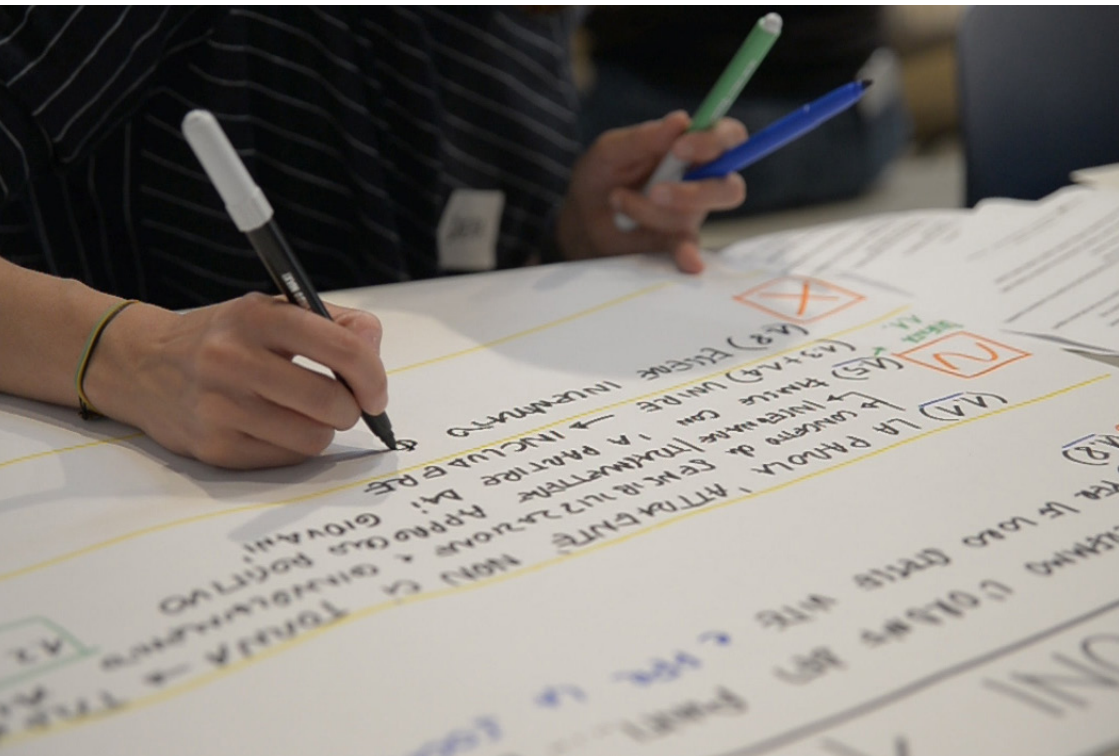
While it is true that the figure of the Youth Worker must be considered within its context, it is equally true that a common thread can and must be found to link Youth Workers in different contexts and territories. Finding this fil rouge is not easy, but with “Next generation Youth Worker” we have at least tried to create the bases to start from.

Young people are too often at the centre of numerous debates: loved, spoiled, undefended victims, or “snowflakes”. But let’s not forget that there is a world of Youth Workers (both varied and complex) that acts as a director, that talks to them, knows their problems, becomes the spokesman of their requests and shares their satisfactions. A world that is perhaps too often - unjustly - not valued as much as it should be.

The challenges that emerged from the various discussions are perhaps the clearest evidence that there are many needs that can be met by the work of a Youth Worker.

Discussing what kind of professional profile should be developed is cer-

tainly a good starting point to unlock the climate of immobility and uncertainty that often accompanies the figure of the Youth Worker, which today, at least in Italy, does not even have a universally accepted definition on a national level.



THE STAGES OF THE “NEXT GENERATION YOUTH WORKER” PATH

“Next generation Youth Worker” has visited 5 Tuscan cities, involving over 70 participants and 3 experts, with the aim of creating a space for discussion on the figure of the youth leaders in contemporary society.

The “Next generation Youth Worker” path was developed in 4 local stages, in Empoli, Livorno, Massa and Siena, each having its own focus on a specific aspect of the figure of the Youth Worker, and a follow-up event in Florence. Work during the local stages was carried out through informal education tools, alternating work in small groups with reports to the larger group as a whole. During the path, some experts were invited to provide participants with input on the topics dealt with, in order to stimulate discussion. The entire path was facilitated by Nicola Basile, a representative from Associanimazione who has been dealing with social innovation, no profit development, participation, youth policies, collaborative processes and community development for years.



2.1 What is a Youth Worker?

First stage - Empoli

The first stage of the path took place in Empoli on 6 December 2017 and was organized in collaboration with the ERGO Network. (Empolesevaldelsa in Rete per i Giovani e le Organizzazioni, coordinated by Consorzio Co&So Empoli).

The first meeting aimed at laying the foundations of the project, discussing the definition or redefinition of the figure of the Youth Worker. The meeting attempted to understand the space in which Youth Workers operate, so as to define the boundaries of the role both in relation to the reference organization and in relation to the community in which the organization is inserted.

Indeed, it emerged that the new social paradigms have also changed the way we work with young people. The processes of change also involved the Youth Workers, who have been forced to reinvent their role. This step, however, has not always happened in a conscious way and has often been promoted by changes in the mission of the reference organizations. In this situation, operators have had to metabolize these transformations and often have not had a real negotiating space in which to bring their expectations and their vision of social work with young people.

5. www.vedogiovane.it

Michelangelo Belletti, president of Vedogiovane scs (social cooperative)⁵, took part in the stage as an expert, providing some inputs related to the strategic role of Youth Workers at European level.



Michelangelo Belletti presented an overview of the Youth Worker in Europe, also underlining the main subjects and documents⁶ who have dealt with the issue of work and the role of the Youth Worker.

The Council of Europe (Youth Worker Portfolio) has developed the following definition⁷ of Youth Worker: “People who work in direct contact with young people, carrying out activities designed to support their personal and social development through non-formal and informal learning “.

Each country has its own definition of Youth Worker. In Italy the definition is not very clear, and the figure of the Youth Worker is often considered as a social educator. The Youth Worker, however, has recognizable tasks; in particular it offers spaces and opportunities for personal and social development of all young people.

In the 2nd European Youth Work Convention⁸ (27/30 April 2015) some elements were identified that can be considered as “defining” the Youth Worker:

- they create spaces for young people (also in other areas such as schools, training or the labour market);
- they use their own lives to offer bridges against social exclusion and in the life contexts of young people;
- they include the “different”, given that today one of the main tasks of the Youth Worker is to work with new subjects, such as migrants;
- they establish relationships with other sectors and stakeholders who work with young people.

6.

• Salto Center
salto-youth.net

• CoE and European Union partnership, in particular the Coyote magazine
pip-eu.coe.int/en/web/coyote-magazine

• CoE Youth Director
coe.int/en/web/youth

• National Youth Agency
agenziagiovani.it

• Tool box e Tool fair
salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox

• Umak (University)
humak.fi

7. coe.int/youth-portfolio

8. <https://goo.gl/14Czg9>

The following points emerged from the first stage:

- There is a great heterogeneity of experiences in the territory; Youth Workers find themselves working in very different contexts, so it is not always easy to define a common line or traits valid for all Youth Workers.
- In any context, the Youth Worker is called to re-launch alliances, removing young people from conditions of exclusion by building “bridges”, thus widening the audience of the partners and stakeholders involved.
- The work of the Youth Worker should not be based solely on the

management of emergency situations, but rather should be focused on processes of empowerment, directing young people to create their own paths to independence.

- Given the current economic situation, specific attention must be paid to the working conditions of young people. It is essential to deal with this aspect, despite the fact that services for young people are not always structured to accommodate this type of request.
- It is important for Youth Workers to have new incentives to develop their own profiles, to avoid becoming jaded. Boredom often leads to self-referencing and removal from the real problems of young people. In this respect, it is important to recover stimulation by building continuous learning paths.
- The methods used by Youth Workers are often standardized, not renewed or critically rethought. Interventions should be reinvented more often, while maintaining a strong connection with the needs of young people and their way of acting and relating to the outside world. In particular, we noted that digital tools are not always exploited in educational work with young people, although social networks are now the main means of communication used by millennials.

In any context, the Youth Worker is called to re-launch alliances, removing young people from conditions of exclusion by building “bridges”.



2.2 What skills do they have for working with young people?

Second stage - Livorno

The second stage of the path took place in Livorno on 16 January 2018, in collaboration with the Associazione Progetto Strada. The discussion centred on defining the skills, attitudes, abilities, approaches and values Youth Workers need when working in the fields of action defined in the Empoli meeting. The field of action of Youth Workers is diversifying,

and this makes it increasingly important to define the skills needed to face the challenges that are emerging. With this in mind, the main goal of the second stage was to describe possible ways to improve the skills considered most important, but least developed.

- In terms of the digital dimension, it is essential for Youth Workers to adopt a non-judgmental attitude towards social networks, learning to understand their potential so as to be able to develop and promote a responsible attitude to the use of these tools.
- Regarding the reception dimension, there is a need to learn and implement strategies for the inclusion of diversity, working actively and creatively to turn conflicts into opportunities and, in the case of migrants, to leverage their valorisation while avoiding stereotyping.
- As far as the alliances dimension is concerned, it is crucial to introduce innovative codes of communication to allow operators to effectively enter into relationships with new subjects, in particular non-profit organisations, which have not played an active role in youth policy in the past, and which are still difficult to get involved.
- Regarding the employment dimension, it is essential to support young people in identifying their needs and the most suitable paths/opportunities, even though the time available to Youth Workers is often not enough to follow individual paths of life.

Given the complexity of the figure of the Youth Worker, we observe that the skills are increasingly understood as situational and therefore related to the specific work context. Moreover, despite changes in the field of Youth Workers, and although a review of skills is required, it is also essential to maintain elements of continuity linked to the traditional services and activities accompanying and supporting young people.

Silvia Volpi, a Council of Europe trainer, participated as an expert⁹ on topics related to participation, youth policies and human rights education, and as coordinator of the project “BPE: Becoming a part of Europe¹⁰” run by the National Youth Agency.

9. coe.int

10. bpe-project.eu



Silvia Volpi showed how the role of the Youth Worker can take on different meanings, making it complex to define. The range of roles and skills that identifies a Youth Worker can lead to an “identity crisis”.

It is too complex to summarize what the Youth Worker is, since there are different meanings attributed to the term Youth Worker, as well as different functions exercised in different contexts.

Youth Workers act in unstable border areas, and need to act as an intermediary between the territory and the community in order to carry out their activities to the best.

Youth Workers face some particular challenges:

- the “desocialisation” of youth work;
- managing the implicit tension of the role between “freeing” and “controlling” young people;
- the lack of interface, and consequently the scarcity of strong and contaminating networks;
- burn-out, or resignation.

The remaining questions can be summarized as: how to enhance the “plasticity” of youth work? How to create “nodes” to create networks? How to fully implement holistic practices? How to make youth work socially “accountable”? How to make youth work “sustainable”? How to explain and recognize the role of youth work in personal growth processes?



2.3 From emerging professions to hybrid spaces

Third stage – Massa

The third stage took place in Massa on 15 February 2018, within the spaces made available by the Coworkeria. The meeting focussed on the themes of emerging professions and on the relative points of contact with the world of Youth Workers.

The discussion on the figure of the Youth Worker inevitably touched on areas that are not directly integrated into youth policies, or have not been until now, in particular the so-called “hybrid experiences” that modify the role of young people within social and economic contexts.

Two important questions emerged at the Massa meeting:

- new visions of young people and work methods; today young people are very different from the past, and this prompts a reflection on the current methods of action of the operators and also on how we imagine the position of young people within the activities and services.
- New codes, not to be over-analysed; new tools such as digital fabrication, coworking, and start ups are changing the role of young people within social and economic contexts. It is important for Youth Workers to try to learn different ways of intervention that can trigger processes of empowerment.

Alessandro Catellani, educator, community animator, designer and social innovator participated as an expert, speaking about the experience of Officine On/Off¹¹, of which he is co-founder and community manager.

11. officineonoff.com

Alessandro Catellani presented the Officine On/Off experience.

On/Off is an innovative project promoted by the Department of Youth and Innovation Policies of the Municipality of Parma (Italy), conceived and run by the Cooperativa Sociale Onlus Gruppo Scuola in collaboration with the On/Off Associazione di Promozione.

Officine On/Off is a collaborative community that promotes self-entrepreneurship in support of territorial social and technological innovation. It is a coworking space where the multidisciplinary skills of freelancers, professionals and small businesses are shared and valued, as well as being a digital fabrication laboratory that provides the tools and machinery needed for prototyping and manufacturing new products.

Finally, On/Off is a centre for the development of transversal skills that can improve the employability of adolescents and students and combat early school leaving. It involves the whole communi-



ty, and the space becomes a place of intergenerational exchange. A virtuous community cycle, which gives skills and resources back to the territory.

The following good practices were also presented at the meeting:

12. coworkingmap.org/coworkeria

- Coworkeria¹²
- Progetto Spiders – CreaLab
- Impact Hub Firenze¹³
- 91c – Coworking Space¹⁴

13. florence.impacthub.net

14. 91c.it

The choice to present and start from situations that we can describe as hybrid experiences, not attributable to the system of public policies for young people and generated by synergies between different types of subject, highlighted aspects of youth work that have not been covered or are poorly represented and not seen as a priority when it comes to youth services.

The discussion following the group work brought out some particularly interesting points. In summary:

- Hybrid experiences and spaces see the presence of young people as protagonists. Young people bring their own passions and individual skills in their activities, so as to realize participatory, engaging and generative actions to places with high relational intensity;
- Hybrid spaces, often run and/or co-managed by young people, have a strong focus on economic sustainability;
- The experiences and the hybrid spaces are often not imagined and are not declined as exclusively dedicated to young people, but develop with an intergenerational logic;
- The work processes that arise or are promoted within the hybrid experiences/places can in some cases be used as a tool for regenerating the territory;
- The high rate of creativity that characterizes hybrid experiences often clashes with institutional and regulatory rigidity.

In summary, the meeting showed that the construction of hybrid situations can be interpreted differently depending on the identity of the promoter (Public Administrations and/or No Profit Sector subjects) and that Youth Workers, must increasingly be able to play a flexible role.

2.4 The Youth Worker toolbox

Fourth stage – Siena

The fourth stage was that of Siena on 21 March 2018. The event, organized in collaboration with ESN Siena - European Student Network, focused on the theme of accompaniment during the phases of transition and change in the lives of young people. In particular, the meeting talked about how job placement is one of the most complex transition phases that Youth Workers have been facing in recent years, considering the blockage of the production system and the increase in drop outs,

With respect to access to the world of work it is important to highlight how Youth Workers stay a middle ground, suspended between the worlds of business, education and social services. The role of the operators becomes, on the one hand, that of a gatekeeper, and on the other, that of the person who during and after a failure (academic and/or work) is able to help young people to re-imagine themselves and prevent them from falling through the gaps in the system. Youth Workers very often provide pre-employment skills, whether defined as transversal skills, soft skills, or key citizenship skills.

The role of the Youth Worker is also to support young people trying to identify, in the contemporary economic and social context, interesting ways of emancipation that exploit:

- Voluntary experiences as a tool that helps to field and acquire skills that can be used in the workplace;
- Errors and unexpected circumstances as a development strategy rather than an element of rupture (for those who are able to reread their “story” constructively);
- Flexible strategies for adapting to reality, which require less formal learning, and more capacity for meta-learning.

Furthermore, the work groups found that the fundamental function of the Youth Worker is to build a process of intervention - in the case of access to employment - that allows young people easier access to employment.

To achieve this it is necessary to identify the stakeholders, highlight the geography, understand the interests and real powers. It is also useful to define intervention subsystems that can allow the creation of virtuous processes. In particular:

- The Education sector and the possibility of exploiting Work-School





- Alternation to create a collaborative fabric in the territory,
- The Economic Sector and the role played by Trade Associations in building a direct bridge between education and the world of work and between the latter and the community,
- The Financial Sector, above all for the support for entrepreneurship.

2.5 Summing up

Follow up event - Florence

In Florence, on 20 April 2018, at the Impact Hub, the follow-up event of the participatory “Next generation Youth Worker” path took place. In the morning the consultation of the first draft of the “European youth work card” was opened, drafted within the project Europe Goes Local (Strategic Partnership - Erasmus Plus). Maria Elisa Marzotti, from the National Youth Agency, led the consultation.

In the afternoon, participants were involved in defining the results, possible outlook and follow up of the “Next generation Youth Worker” path, in the presence of Vittorio Bugli, Regional Minister of Presidency, with delegation to participation.

The following reflections and proposals emerged from the afternoon session:

- There is no Youth Worker, without youth work. It is therefore important to carry out cultural work at a local level that is able to make people understand the role played by everyone in youth policies. To this end, local participatory paths aimed at redesigning territorial policies through workshops and moments of confrontation between the various stakeholders could be useful and effective tools.
- Youth Worker has the important task of bringing the different subjects of the territory together, but cannot possess all the skills required today to support young people on the path to independence. The risk is to imagine a sort of Superman or Wonder Woman able to act simultaneously in different fields and develop actions with young people, system-level strategies and social and political communication activities.
- It is essential to reassess the technological potential, integrating it in the activities, services, programming and work of Youth Worker. In fact, technological potential can generate a strong social impact. For this reason it is crucial to experiment with ways of developing trans-

versal competences towards new languages as well as creating ways to bring together different worlds (service design, start-ups, youth work) that include technology.

- With regard to the Youth and Employment theme, young people need to be encouraged to approach job centres before they are in a situation of emergency. Hybridization should therefore come first and foremost from the Job Centres, which should develop their services in an innovative way (using languages and tools close to the world of young people).
- Without downplaying the need to build alliances and bridges between the various subjects that collaborate in the creation of youth policies, in particular by including the private sphere, as well as the public, it is essential to work on “intermediate bodies”, which guarantee the fluidity of the processes, the transversality and the continuity of the actions and initiatives for young people. Youth policies should not be limited to the actions of traditional stakeholders, but rather a shared among all the actors of a community.

WHAT IS YOUTH WORK?

WHO ARE YOUTH WORKERS

These are two perspectives from which we can start to untangle the skein that surrounds and encompasses the different experiences and practices of working with and for young people, as well as youth policies.

Following the thread of this skein, the local “Next generation Youth Worker” path, promoted by the Giovanisi project of the Tuscany Region, has become entangled with the European “Europe Goes Local” partnership, funded by the Erasmus + Program and promoted at national level by the National Youth Agency.

During the final stage of the Tuscan participatory stage - focused on the role and identity of the Youth Workers - a consultation was held on the text to be defined, within the framework of Europe Goes Local, in the “European Youth Work Charter at local level”.

These paths confirmed how interconnected and complementary the two perspectives of “who” and “what “ work with young people are. On





closer inspection, we are dealing with the two sides of the same coin, which includes young people and their multiple needs at this stage of life - not only a phase of transition from childhood to adulthood, but also a fundamental step in developing their abilities, passions and aspirations; it is a phase of growth that not only expresses needs, but also creative capacities able to contaminate and innovate a local context if they find the right outlets to express themselves through participatory paths.

The current European debate in search of a shared - but at the same time non-reductive - definition of youth work is perfectly in line with the effort that, as in Tuscany, is starting (albeit in a fragmented way) in several regions of Italy to validate training courses able to award a professional title to the different figures who, in the most varied ways and in the most disparate contexts, carry out educational and social work with young people at the local level.

The requests of the Tuscan Youth Workers emerging in the form of challenges in this document propose some transversal themes such as the recognition of the skills of the Youth Workers and their need for continuous training to interpret an ever-changing reality; the recognition of “hybrid spaces” as a new frontier of youth work, from which springs the need for youth work to be involved in active employment, social and territorial policies, from the non-profit to the private sector, from the ambit of services to financial and planning support for innovative ideas, from a holistic perspective and of mainstreaming of youth policies.

The Erasmus + Program can partly support the Tuscan Youth Workers (and not only) to tackle some of these challenges and to capitalize on the reflections developed during this project in stages, through a series of specific actions.

Participating in a mobility project (Ka 105) offers Youth Workers the opportunity to receive training on the new non-formal education methodologies necessary to keep up with the times (for example in the digital field) and offers individual organizations the opportunity to discuss in an international context and establish relationships at European level, with the aim of increasing the quality of youth work at the local level. Also in terms of training for Youth Workers, ANG offers numerous opportunities every year to take part in seminars, conferences and training courses promoted at European level, within the framework of the Training Cooperation Activities (TCA), on the most relevant issues in the sector of youth work.

With regard to the challenge of advocacy with and for young people in local institutions, the Erasmus+ Program offers a valid instrument in the

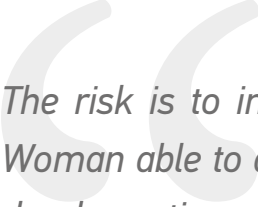
form of structured dialogue (through the Ka347 action) that allows the construction and financing of participatory paths and projects run with young people on the issues of their interest, putting them in dialogue with the most relevant local decision-makers.

Lastly, the perhaps greater challenge, the self-awareness of the Youth Workers with respect to their identity and the process of reflection on their work, can receive valuable help from projects (Ka 205) in which good practices are compared at European level in the youth work sector or promoting innovative work tools in non-formal education. These projects make it possible to capitalize, disseminate and systemize knowledge, skills and operational practices that otherwise would remain as isolated experiences within the patchwork landscape of youth work in the individual territories.

The Erasmus+ Program can therefore bring Europe to the local level and set up a dialogue between territories in Europe. This could also be a perspective and a challenge to be integrated among those proposed in this document.

Maria Elisa Marzotti
National Youth Agency





The risk is to imagine a sort of Superman or Wonder Woman able to act simultaneously in different fields and develop actions with young people.

THE CHALLENGES

From the reflections developed in the 5 stages, 10 dimensions of work stand out, which we believe to be the challenges facing those who want to build youth policies in the coming years.

3.1 Youth policies, breaking out

Youth policies are built on boundaries, and survive by breaking out of them. We observe how processes are able to activate social subsystems linked to education, perhaps through projects of Work-School Alternation, or move within the cultural context, constructing performative and community activities; at other times they still act within the context of job search and in other situations they take the form of community economic activities. The ideas set out here are just some examples that allow us to state that one of the specific features of youth policies is the ability to move in different fields, always maintaining the centrality of the subject and the processes of empowerment of young people.

In the framework described, it is also important to step over the borders and investigate skills and areas that are not directly integrated into youth policy, or have not been until now. The useful perspective for Youth Workers could be that of those who want to learn from the experiences of the young people, or which are targeted at them. In particular, it is necessary to use new codes and new communication tools in a conscious way, seizing all the opportunities without succumbing to the rhetoric around them.

Digital fabrication, coworking, and start-ups are changing the role of young people within social and economic contexts, and it is important that youth policies also include a range of interventions that can trigger processes of empowerment. Likewise, it is equally necessary not to passively succumb to these innovations, limiting ourselves to merely mimicking them.

We therefore need to analyse the situation from a generational perspective, building collaborative systems between young people and operators. In fact, while millennials have brought their load of innovation in recent years, the up and coming generation Z will be just as revolutionary, if not more. We will therefore need to grasp and follow the direction that this will take.

Building experiences related to youth policies means dealing with open processes that cannot be predetermined. It is particularly important to remember how the complexity in which we find ourselves living increasingly leads us to confront uncertainty, and the need to build on it. In order to allow young people to build their own paths in a personal and creative way, we need to find ways to valorise mistakes and failures, in order to support them in identifying a common thread that gives new meanings to the different experiences of their lives.

The figure of the Youth Worker plays an important role, helping to connect experiences and situations that would otherwise appear unconnected. All this takes place thanks to a light and undefined professional profile that allows them to act in a no-man's land, preventing young people from losing their way through the gaps in the system. The function of gatekeeper, which often puts operators in a difficult position, can be shared and built up as part of society, starting by holding an initiative and/or setting up the spaces.

I would like to emphasise one particular aspect: the importance of working on several levels and in a circular way. Youth Workers are not only those who work in the front line with young people, but include everyone who participates, in various ways and with different levels of responsibility (the ability to find answers), in the processes leading to the final service. Therefore, Youth Workers also include service managers, directors, and politicians.

In order for all figures to share the same culture and the same vision, training and engagement activities must be designed, on different levels, for all the types of actor involved in the process; otherwise, operators will always be alone and struggle in their tasks, while those responsible for planning and directing policy will continue to see young people as a problem rather than as a resource for the community.

In a broader sense, to create a truly educational community, Youth Workers are also the managers of clubs, sports associations and all those who, at some level, are in contact with young people, starting from their parents, who need to be supported in their role now as never before.

I hope, therefore, that we will increasingly work to encourage integration and interaction between the political, the public and the private technical levels, while also getting the local territory involved.

Giovanisì is well aware that working with young people means implementing a new way of working in the Public Administration: moving from a sectoral-vertical to a transversal point of view; from linear to circular processes. A new way of thinking and acting to build connections. That's how our brain works, that's how nature works: we all need it. We





can implement this in youth work, and use this as an opportunity to spread this change in other sectors.

Marcella Gozzi

Centro rete Valdarno Inferiore

Municipality of Fucecchio Responsible for the InformaGiovani service

3.2 Breaking out without getting lost

In these years there are many challenges that arise within the framework of youth policies. Looking around, we find experiences that have to do, in a more or less direct way, with social innovation. They are processes with a very powerful rhetoric, capable of driving the beliefs of a whole generation. All this must lead us to confront the theme of inclusion; in fact, youth policies have the task of promoting access to society for all young people and promoting their potential.

The challenge is to accept breakouts, innovative processes - from Fab Labs to start-ups, from community hubs to community cooperatives - while preventing public policies from acting as amplifiers of inequality. To do this we must maintain a pedagogical perspective, paying attention to the dynamics of power and the learning processes that are put in place.

Moreover, it is fundamental to take an innovative look at the situation, to know how to design new policies, to connect experiences that were not previously part of youth work, and to widen the boundaries of different actions, but without focusing exclusively on young people with skills. In our country, the theme is taking on dramatic dimensions¹⁵, and precisely because a definitive answer is not possible, we need to put in place a wide range of strategies and experiences (including light ones).

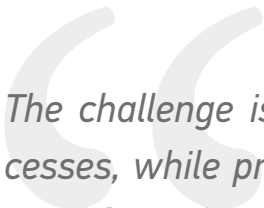
One possibility is to overcome some processes of dis-intermediation by trying to rebuild local social infrastructures. It is not a question of re-producing the institutional architectures of the 1990s. The challenge is to build lightweight, sustainable and viable systems that can reorganize even after failures. We must choose resilience over strength¹⁶. We need to create connections, accepting the challenge of weak ties and the logic of serendipity.

15. T. Chevalier, T. Vitale, *La cittadinanza economica e sociale dei giovani: Italia fuori dai giovani, Gli Stati Generali, glistatigenerali.com/cittadinanza-economica-e-sociale*

16. J. Hove, J. Ito, *Al passo col futuro: Come sopravvivere all'imprevedibile accelerazione del mondo*, EGEA, 2017, Milano, pp. 189-203.

A structure of this type, able to accept failure through re-organization thanks to situational awareness, can innovate work processes, engage the most capable and competent millennials, without letting those who have fewer tools and are more in difficulty being involved in global processes slip by the wayside.

The adaptability of the system allows us to experiment while maintaining its core functions. In this way, operators find their own space for action and protection, despite a weak and light deontological status.



The challenge is to accept breakouts, innovative processes, while preventing public policies from acting as amplifiers of inequality.

3.3 More social, less sociable?

The system of youth policies has been built around services such as Youth Aggregation Centres, Informagiovani (Youth Information Center), animation projects or territorial education. In recent years, special attention has not always been paid to the participation of young people in the activities. The focus, given the tightening of public resources, has become individual needs (for example, addiction in the past, and cyberbullying in recent years).

The current situation calls for us to build collaborative ecosystems within which the availability, skills, passions and the view of young people should be at the centre. The function of youth policies then becomes to promote territorial processes in which young people can find ample space to act as protagonists. As part of this reflection, there are two aspects we cannot ignore. The first is that, compared to the past, the digital opportunities are amplified and extremely powerful. The second is the difficulty that operators find in using technological tools and taking on new approaches such as, for example, the sharing economy.

It is immediately clear that it has become necessary to reflect on the changes produced by technological innovation and to build elements

that balance the experience of young people, an experience that is now strongly - and often uncritically - digitized. In this direction, if we widen the analysis it is easy to see how this need can be linked to a series of disconnection experiences ranging from local works like MI030: 10 VISIONS and 30 PROJECTS¹⁷ by S. Boeri at the international Burning man event¹⁸.

17. arccipelagomilano.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/M1030_manifesto.pdf

18. burningman.org

At the same time, it is also necessary to promote experiences that can stimulate and encourage the creativity of young people using the technological element. It is important to remember that the multiplication of these tools (from Fab Labs to visual storytelling tools), along with the constant acceleration of change and technological innovation, puts operators in difficulty and often leads to a reversal of power relations related to knowledge.

3.4 Skills to look to the future

In recent years one of the main functions of youth work has been to take care of the job placement of young people. This was partly due to the pressure of data on youth unemployment, the high percentage of Italian young people leaving our country because they cannot find a future here, and the increase in social problems that led to the phenomenon of NEETs and a fall in scholastic performance.

As demographer Livi Bacci wrote over 10 years ago, it seems to be connected to our system that produces the so-called delay syndrome: young people do not have strong political feelings, they struggle to find employment, they are incapable of influencing social contexts, they leave home late, they enter less and less into the world of work and hardly to develop a sense of economic-social initiative. All this results in a loss of generativity both from the biological point of view, as they have fewer children, and later from the social point of view, because they have very little influence on the community; their innovative drive is dispersed.

Youth Workers, as briefly outlined, must develop their own position with respect to the “youth and work” issue, in particular standing out from the figures closely connected to the processes of job integration, such as the operators at the Job Center. It is necessary to focus on pre-employment skills, whether they are defined as transversal skills, soft skills or key citizenship skills.

This is one of the major challenges of youth policies: to build environments for collaborative learning, development and enhancement of

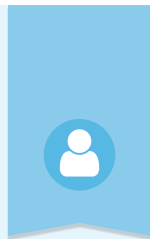
young people's skills. It is possible - through informal and non-formal learning - to carve out a specific niche of action for those who work with young people, offering extremely valuable experiences for young people.

It is essential, however, that this work be recognized by public institutions, so that it takes on a shared and important value. The Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning¹⁹, which re-defines the key competences of citizenship, also highlights the significance of soft skills and non-formal education.

At the same time, there is a growing need to build a chain of policies to promote the employability of young people. The connection must be made in the awareness that actions on employability must go beyond active search for work, to include a concept of empowerment that can be promoted in the context of youth policies. The challenge is to connect the different subsystems, ranging from education and economics to finance, to increase and to align social actors in the field: schools, families, companies and trade associations.

19. Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, "L'importanza e la rilevanza dell'apprendimento non formale sono evidenti nello *youth work*, nel volontariato e nello sport di base. L'apprendimento non formale gioca un ruolo importante nel sostenere la maturazione delle abilità interpersonali, comunicative e cognitive come: pensiero critico, pensiero analitico, creatività, *problem solving* e resilienza che facilitano i giovani nel passaggio all'età adulta, alla cittadinanza attiva e nell'ingresso nella vita lavorativa. È necessario stabilire meglio la cooperazione tra le diverse modalità di apprendimento in modo da promuovere una varietà di approcci e contesti di apprendimento".

In the meetings held, especially in the last one where we worked on the "European Charter of youth work at the local level", we needed to try to distinguish these two expressions, many times overlapping. The work of young people, with young people, and for young people is one thing; those who work with young people another. Those who work (the Youth Workers) cannot possibly be everything at once: professional educator, psychologist, doctor, case manager, street educator, animator, trainer, instructor, social worker, counsellor, job placement expert. The risk is to try to compose an ideal professional profile, perhaps looking at resources present in the region, with related training and final qualifications, similar to that of an achievable superman. Trying to create a true definition of a Youth Worker in a single individual is an impossible mission. The skills, knowledge, and abilities of a Youth Worker should be sought out, trained, and shared in the "community" in question, in





a reality that creates spaces, times, places, and professional profiles that are very different from one another and where young people live, grow, work, and make choices.

Discussing youth work helps a civil community to think about setting up working groups, creating conditions and getting systems to interact. It helps to identify tasks and roles that are diverse yet connected between the public and private sectors, without reducing this relationship to a simple relationship between State and Market, but giving space to the no-profit Sector, meant as the organization of citizens who mostly in an informal way create the vital fabric of everyday reality scenarios: education, training, production, animation, assistance, and care. This is where we find the space and the possibility of carrying out many actions to combat the phenomenon of school drop-outs, helping those who struggle to enter the workplace, significant learning opportunities, and social enterprise initiatives that combine bottom-up approaches that are capable of allowing the fragile recipients of these actions to grasp an active role as protagonists. Often all this is totally or partially unconnected to public funding. Youth work obliges us to reflect on the idea of a young person attempting to disentangle themselves from paternalistic or over-protective perspectives, developing and cultivating an approach characterized by the reassurance and authentic empowerment of young people.

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CIOFS FP TOSCANA

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3.5 Hybrid actions, creating generative spaces

In these years we are witnessing, in large cities as well as increasingly in small and medium-sized towns, the creation of hybrid places, where different actors collaborate in generating social capital. These spaces often host privately-funded community initiatives, with strong links to the community of reference. In these places their potential explodes, and protagonism becomes the predominant element.

Hybrid experiences and spaces see the presence of young people as protagonists. Young people bring their own passions and individual skills in their activities, so as to realize participatory, engaging and generative actions to places with high relational intensity. In this kind of situation, the role of young people is almost always a priority compared to that of the operators, which makes it possible to redefine the role of the Youth Worker. The role becomes one of facilitating the development of young people's skills, promoting cultural and social processes within the community and connecting areas of public policies that often have parallel and even divergent paths (e.g. the use of cultural heritage processes within welfare policies). The Youth Worker performs a function of territorial development, and collaboration between young people and operators becomes central. This is where one of the most interesting and extreme challenges appears. Hybrid spaces focus strongly on economic sustainability, and this concept translates to the search for economic models that do not base their sustainability exclusively on incentivising private as well as public funding. It is clear that these places participate in the construction of social infrastructure and are an opportunity to build communities. They often incorporate welfare services directed at young people and/or the community at large. All this puts traditional welfare institutions and agencies into crisis (e.g. No Profit Sector), because the processes that enable young people are not always sustainable for other types of organizations, both from an economic, bureaucratic and administrative point of view. In the coming years this will be one of the main areas that the youth policy system will have to support if it wants to participate actively in the development of local welfare.

The hybrid experiences, in continuity with the previous point, create cognitive dissonance in participants: they create different representations to those we are used to, giving rise to an imbalance that can activate reflexive and elaborative processes. This recalls the learning mechanisms that lead the subject to develop knowledge, to increase their skills and to develop new skills.

The Youth Worker, given the variety of actors described, will increasingly need to play a flexible role, speak different languages and create connections between different experiences.

3.6 Generativity, young people as opportunity for development

Another fundamental challenge will be to build initiatives in which young people, together with operators, become agents of local development.

The work processes that arise or are promoted within the hybrid experiences/spaces can in some cases be used as a tool for regenerating the territory. In this way, hybrid spaces take on a leading role in a social network capable of creating new connections and synergies. Particularly interesting is the possibility of using social and/or environmental sensitivity as a driver of development, on the one hand, to strengthen the resilience of the territories and on the other, to strengthen the economic sustainability of the experiences. An interesting model is community co-operatives, in particular those that see the commitment of young people²⁰.

20. C. Andorlini, N. Basile, *Giovani che fanno il loro futuro dando un futuro al loro paese*, Animazione Sociale 313, pp. 45-54.

In the experiences that encroach on the classic standards of services for young people and that seek a different dialogue with the community, there is a high level of creativity that often clashes with institutional and regulatory rigidity. It is important to emphasise the importance of a constant dialogue with legislation, in order to avoid negative impacts both for the experiences and for the people. Risk management systems need to be built, capable of grasping the problems and developing management strategies and sharing problem solving solutions to the issues created by the activities (also in order to promote the exchange of good practices and connection of the different experiences present in the territories).

Promoting experiences that go beyond the boundaries of current services very often means taking responsibility for accompanying young people to experiment with new languages and new contexts. It is important for operators to support this kind of experimentation, and to ensure

that they are accessible to as many young people as possible, breaking through the idea that some of the best experiences are not accessible to the most fragile subjects. The most capable and competent young people can be used as promoters and innovators, while the operators can act as facilitators.

The construction of hybrid situations can be interpreted differently depending on the identity of the promoter. In the field we find the Public Administrations and/or No Profit Sector subjects who try to build processes and initiatives to generate innovation within them and within the communities that see them as protagonists. The young people with most skills, on the other hand, find spaces for valorisation, action and personal research. These processes can lead from situations related to free time, to environments offering employment and professional skills. Lastly, we have subjects who have chosen to develop a business in the field of social innovation, and develop strong and significant skills in this area.

The Youth Worker, given the variety of actors described, will increasingly need to play a flexible role, speak different languages and create connections between different experiences.

3.7 Advocacy as a solution to prevent exit

As already mentioned, young people are given minimal importance in our country. There are few of them, and they have very little political influence. As a result, they are often seen as irrelevant in political agendas. In recent years, we have witnessed cuts in funding for youth policies and, at the local level, we see a disinvestment in the services and projects system. This fact is something we must reflect upon. And if, as mentioned in the first challenge, the process described above must also lead to redesigning services for young people, it is still true that there is a problem linked to representation.

We can discuss this question on two levels. The first concerns the processes of advocacy that must be promoted to highlight the youth situation in Italy. It is essential to build a more comprehensive vision of our society in order to avoid breaking issues down into individual problems, a process that necessarily leads to a personalization of needs and viewing the elements of fragility and weakness in individual young people. Therefore, depending on the situation, we will talk about bambaccioni (Mummy's boys), social isolation linked to the excessive use of technology, and other categories that tend to personalize problems by transforming them into individual needs. The Youth Worker has a fundamental function in denouncing a lack of policies for young people and opposing the focus on individual young people, in their hypothetical incapacities,

21. A. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, Loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations and states*, Harvard University Press, 1970.

as reasons for failure. If youth policies were to abdicate this task many young people, probably the less structured ones, would not find anyone to represent them and - as described in the famous Hirschman book²¹ - would choose to exit, continuing the impoverishment of our society.

But we need another type of representation: the ability to describe - perhaps we could say storytelling - the functions, tasks and role of youth policies within our society, and in particular our country. In fact, while it is true that at a European level a series of documents recognize the strength and significance of youth work within Western democracies, it is equally true that in our country there is no real recognition of work with young people. Too often the function of youth work is reduced to a sort of aggregation and/or socialization.

The challenge, in this sense, will be to trigger a virtuous process that in giving weight to the issue of youth also manages to build a shared meaning of work with young people and to restore social value.

3.8 Institutions: retreat or repositioning

Many recent developments have put pressure on the services and operators that animate them. The demand for change is not always negotiated and shared with the Youth Workers, and this creates displacement and misalignment within local systems. According to the situation outlined above, a strong coordination would be appropriate, but this does not always happen. In some situations, moreover, there is a kind of lack of interest on the part of local authorities that amplifies the difficulties. In order to respond to these critical issues, Youth Workers will have to be more and more able to put in place design skills and reconstruction of the social architecture.

There is a clear need to develop network nodes to allow the maintenance and/or reconstruction of social infrastructures for young people, with particular attention to: the relations between these and the reference institutions; the relationships between different kinds of youth and between these and the service system; the capacitive contexts able to circulate the resources and energies of which young people are primary carriers. It is essential to understand the role of the municipal authorities in order to be able to introduce innovations to the intervention measures in place. In fact, if the Municipalities do not want to resign themselves to a role of rearguard and defense, acting more and more on a minimum status scheme, they must reposition themselves through continuous exchanges and discussions. If it's true, as French sociologist René Lourau²² claims, that "institutions are present in the collective imagination", then we need to build territorial devices capable of influencing the cultural

22. Lourau R., *L'analyse institutionnelle*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 1970

assumptions and relationships that define the institutions themselves. Moreover, as also emerges from the latest studies on neo-institutionalism²³ and the theory of action²⁴, institutions and institutional processes see their *raison d'être* in the exchanges and interactions between social actors, and not in their specific identities. This is why building local relations means facilitating institutionalization processes. This all takes place through a change based on slow and complex micro-steps that involve a modification of the role of social subjects and their organizational culture. The ability to build connections and exchanges between the subjects becomes fundamental. Only through a repositioning of the public body will it be possible to get out of the supply logic that exclusively involves an exchange of economic resources with benefits. This is a logic that led, on the one hand, to crushing an important part of the No Profit Sector in a role of distributor, and on the other, due to the situation of public finance, a continuous retreat of the local entity that brought it to reduce its scope of intervention. The game being played is strategic, both because it concerns - in this case - a precious, essential and scarce resource such as young people today, and because the real goal is to reposition the welfare system from a perspective of promoting wellbeing, rather than just repairing it.

23. Bonazzi, G., Presentazione in Powell, W.W., Di Maggio, *Il nuovo istituzionalismo nell'analisi organizzativa*, Edizioni di Comunità, Torino, 2.000.

24. Czarniawska B., *On Time, Space and Action-nets, Organization*, 2004.

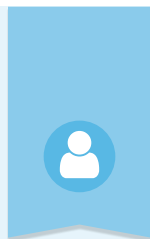
There are some issues, in my opinion, to underline, on both a political and cultural level, when talking about Youth Workers.

Youth policies cannot ignore young people. In fact, young people must be initiators of the processes and participate in a co-management system. Youth Workers thus become tools, so that young people can be listened to, be seen, express their needs, propose strategies and solutions to problems they face in their daily lives and beyond.

Undoubtedly the private, public and social worlds can be allied and aligned, so as to unite their respective skills in support of young people.

But we must also redesign the services on the basis of the needs of young people, because it is undeniable that without their support, there is a risk of reinventing short-sighted, ineffective mechanisms.

Silvia Volpi
National Youth Agency



3.9 Weaving territorial networks, towards hybridization

In the framework described, which is undergoing strong changes, the problem of innovating the operators' codes of communication in order to effectively enter into relationships with new subjects stands out, especially but not only in the non-profit, who were not previously active in the field of youth policies.

It therefore seems fundamental to re-launch alliances in favour of young people. However, some critical issues arise for the operators. The expansion of the network is not easy and it is not always easily achievable by Youth Workers; an element that will become fundamental to work on in the coming years. Only through a wider and more diversified network will it be possible to facilitate young people in accessing opportunities.

It is therefore necessary to devise and implement territorial measures capable of generating connections and relationships, in the awareness that only the continuity of these measures can allow a dense network to be created, together with an alliance capable of generating an ecosystem favourable to young people.

The role of the operators is fundamental in their ability to break out and experiment. It is no longer possible to think of providing interventions for young people only within social policies, but it is important to take a look and a systemic approach that includes other segments of policies, from cultural to productive. It is essential to maintain the specificity of the Youth Worker which, in our opinion, has the ability to animate informal and hybrid processes able to produce passion, activation and capacity.

These are the processes that can also - slowly - regenerate institutions and change political agendas. The questioning of roles, the choice to move in a perspective of co-responsibility, and the acceptance of more horizontal power relations, become central.

At stake is the growth of the trust and resilience of the system: a complex system with a dynamic balance and capable of accepting the challenges of modernity.



For some time, we have felt the need for an operational proposal that would re-launch an ongoing interaction between the actors in the field of youth policy in Tuscany. The “Next generation Youth Worker” path has allowed us not only to reconnect the threads of relationships between local experiences, but above all to ask some penetrating questions about many aspects, starting from the needs, limits and resources of today, while at the same time imagining future scenarios in which both operators and organizations will have to cooperate. Our area, consisting of fifteen municipalities, structured in two Educational Conferences and recently united in a single Health Provider, has for years aimed at harmonizing the measures, planning in an integrated way between sectors and responsibly involving different subjects in expanded governance models. The Ergo Network, set up to make use of the wealth generated by the collaboration between cooperatives and associations in the field of services and projects with and for young people, is committed alongside institutions to building links and facilitating relations between different fields (school, non-formal education, social service, vocational training, the world of work); this means operating in a land that is difficult to manage and often with little acknowledgment of the role of “process tutor” that the Youth Worker has to play. For this reason, Ergo has decided to invest energy in the path promoted by Giovanisì - Tuscany Region, taking part in all the meetings and with a large number of operators and managers. The challenges that emerge from the synthesis of the opportunities for deepening and sharing experiences have stimulated in our work group, on the one hand, an awareness of the strategic importance of the role of Youth Workers (especially in the function of experiential trainer able to equip young people with soft/life skills), and on the other, the need to widen the cognitive field and the connective capacity between worlds that are different but extremely closely connected to the “youth sphere”, thus generating hybridizations and peer to peer systems that are able, with adequate educational tutoring, to override the fence of social intervention as reparation and promote values and resources that each young person possesses.

Fabrizio Fioretti

Rete Ergo - Empolesevaldelsa in Rete per i Giovani e le Organizzazioni

3.10 Youth worker as agent of change

Any youth policy developed today, must be set within the context for which they are designed (territories, communities, socio-economic field). Therefore, these figures also require the ability to be generators of new perspectives, to be agents of change also in the community in which they operate.

We need to be able to read the innovative aspects of some processes such as central theme of digital, which redefines the communication tools, or the proliferation of experiences such as community cooperatives where apparently distant skills and paradigms meet to establish new models of cohabitation, increasingly involving, not by chance, Public Administrations. The operator of youth policies thus becomes a subject capable of acting as a fulcrum for a series of intersecting processes, designed to improve the lives of the young people with whom they work.

Flexibility and the ability to transform are fundamental attributes for the Youth Worker. In this sense, it is crucial to know how to quickly grasp the direction of change and achieve innovation. All the subjects (PA, EELL, no-profit Sector) who, for various reasons, are involved in the processes that concern the younger generations, are increasingly in need of people who know how to be “agents of change”, or who interpret their role in an innovative way and promote change and innovation in the processes they manage. It is important to emphasise that the skills are not to be considered exclusively linked to individual operators, but often the reference is the team, the working group and/or the intervention system.

These skills have a strong impact on the young people involved. They themselves can become agents of change and acquire the power to change reality by positively influencing attitudes and changing the behaviour of the communities in which they live.

All the subjects who are involved in the processes that concern the younger generations, are increasingly in need of people who know how to be “agents of change”, or who interpret their role in an innovative way and promote change and innovation in the processes they manage.

The challenges within the theme of Youth Worker and youth work bring reflection to a higher level. Often the work of those who are in contact with young people is “head down”, on the one hand linked to the pressing need to be problem solvers, and on the other hand to do a good job at what they can do. The work done by associations, bodies and all the other organisations that work with young people is too often closed within a specific circuit. Alliances are formed by chance, and everyone tries to “waste” the least energy possible, in order to dedicate it entirely to the young person. In this sense, the profound and rapid changes that young people experience within the social order risk having a different gear compared to the responses they receive. It becomes a continuous attempt to keep up with innovation, new ways of relating, communicating, and approaching the outside world and society. Operators can become frustrated with not being able to be constantly updated and in step, making it difficult to recognise themselves as youth workers. They therefore prefer to stay anchored to their own way of doing things, which has worked so well up till now. The solitude of operators and associations is the result of a lack of real contamination with others, partners and young people. By definition, the young must be allowed to dream, to hope, and to elbow their way into a role in society, whatever it is. The lengthening of the phases of this process is likely to lead to discouragement and immobility. The risk is that Youth Workers will also experience the change as a passing phase that they can only manage to





observe. The questions and the answers lie in these 10 challenges, and this is the point from which we as youth workers must start (or re-start) to dream that we can truly be agents of change for the young and for society as a whole.

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keywords



CONCLUSIONS

The challenges described and the various considerations that emerged inevitably lead to the last question: what will Youth Worker become?

The complexity that emerges from the challenges identified leads to the emergence of some unresolved issues, which in our opinion are central to the debate on Youth Workers and their role. It therefore appears to be necessary to end this contribution with some questions, presenting reflections that could be points for discussion on the future of work with young people and the role of the operators who support the action on a daily basis.

The first question concerns the need to build consensus around social action for young people. In recent years, the generative process that led to the realization of collective responses, starting from the problems and the demands of citizens, has been interrupted. Situations that involved, in a first phase, an institutional positioning inclined to listen, and subsequently the presence of the public body with an active role in structuring the service and/or the project. The processes, like the one described, made the growth and evolution of welfare in a shared and participatory manner possible, through methods that created consensus, allowing social policies to become relevant within the various political agendas. Today these processes, for different reasons, seem to be interrupted at times, and this, especially for youth policies, translates into marginality both in terms of the allocation of funds and the possibility of promoting a public cultural debate that involves different decision makers in developing actions for young people.

In Florence, in the follow-up event, it was developed reflection on the intermediate bodies and the need to imagine new ones to guarantee the fluidity of the processes, the transversality and the continuity of the actions.

Moreover, the need to re-launch alliances for young people appeared essential at the meeting in Empoli, and try to broaden the audience of partners in order to build a strong consensus.

The issue of consensus building is also linked to the theme of representation and, as emerged during the third meeting, the ability to tell and describe more effectively what Youth Workers do, especially with a view to enhancing the skills of the operators. The need to realize a youth work storytelling was immediately important, because only by increasing the recognition of what has been achieved will it be possible to increase the significance of youth policies in the public debate.

Another issue is the use of digital technology within social policies, which also has an obvious impact on youth work. The question that more and more people are asking is how to use algorithms within their activities, how to use digital platforms so that they do not produce so-

cial and human impoverishment - through excessive disintermediation processes - but instead make processes of connection and sharing that can be useful for young people. In this sense, it is important to reflect on innovative ways to generate social value from online interactions. Young people, even in the situations outlined above, are the first interpreters of the changes described, and could therefore be seen as innovation drivers able to push communities - and perhaps even institutions - towards new worlds. The role of Youth Workers, in the situation that we have outlined, is fundamental to foster the right mediations and metacognitions useful to the main protagonists, and in reality to the whole social system. In fact, it is quite obvious that the innovative content of technology, such as blockchain, will have an important impact on all local policies and on the public machine and its bureaucratic and administrative structure in general. Being able to actively interpret the change described could allow us to promote favourable scenarios for citizens, with particular reference to the younger ones. The theme of digital-related change, moreover, went through all the 5 stages of the journey, from the first meeting, in which we discussed how technology can become a tool for strengthening youth creativity, through to the last meeting where we talked about how to create value within digital exchanges.

The challenges linked to hybridization, which emerged mainly in the third stage, lead us to reflect on how the services interact with young people, from the Aggregation Centres to the Informagiovani (Youth, or from the Job Centres to the social engagement activation projects. Will we be seeing hybridization processes between the different services? In the next few years will it be necessary to apply some different skills for certain services in order to construct a more varied intervention with fewer boundaries? Will the collaboration between professionals and volunteers - not necessarily synonymous with poor professionalism - see a new level of integration? All this certainly calls for interdisciplinary, as well as the possibility of exchanging experiences between the different communities, especially on a larger territory such as a regional one. The questions are provocative, because they question the boundaries between services, role definitions and deontological statutes, but in our opinion they could open the way to a new understanding of the changes taking place in the last decade. After all, the great lesson of modernity is that what works, survives.

The Youth Worker, in this direction, could act as a connection between the parties, a way to exchange experiences between territories. We must emphasise that this should not lead to substituting other figures or performing vicarious functions, but to playing a role of connection and stimulation of the other parts of the system. In this way, the Youth Worker becomes none other than a figure able to deal with complexity,

with open processes and with the understanding of light relationships and weak ties. The Massa meeting made a very specific study of hybrid spaces where the work processes intertwine and mingle, and we found issues related to economic, social and environmental sustainability, the ability to build an intergenerational context and processes able to influence the community.

The challenges described and the various considerations that emerged in these conclusions inevitably lead to the last question. What will Youth Worker become? The superhero metaphor was used consistently in the follow-up event in Florence. We therefore need to reflect on the fact that it is probably not enough to think about a single profile of Youth Worker, which would lead to losing the wealth that emerged during the meetings, but it will be useful to define a multilevel approach with different profiles that deal with it.

Only thanks to a multilevel and systematic vision - a figure capable of reading complexity - will it be possible to develop a genuine discussion of the figure of Youth Worker, while avoiding the creation of paralyzing fears or delusions of omnipotence. This reflection can also have an impact in view of training and possible recognition of the figure. Here too, it is important on the one hand to avoid allowing training courses to get set in stone, leading subjects to move away from the areas of work, and on the other hand, to open a process of identification and enhancement of the figure in order to restore social value to the work done by Youth Workers - or figures that perform this function - on a daily basis. In the coming years this will be one of the main questions that will probably affect both the results of the policies and the training paths of the people who want to work in the field of youth work.

The Tuscany Region, with Giovanisì, is one of the first to have started discussing the figure of the Youth Worker, through a participatory process involving a range of stakeholders linked to the Tuscan territory. This reflection is undoubtedly a good starting point for evaluating the direction to be taken, taking stock of what has already been achieved at local and regional level.

APPENDIX I - Participants

ANCI Tuscany | National Association of Italian Municipalities
ARCI Siena | Italian Recreational and Cultural Association
ARCI Massa Carrara | Italian Recreational and Cultural Association
Associazione Cantieri Aperti
Associazione Due.Zero Massa
Associazione Il Sestante Livorno
Associazione Progetto Strada Livorno
Associazione Solidarietà Caritas Onlus Florence
Azione Cattolica Italiana
Livorno Job Centre
Massa Carrara Job Centre
Pistoia Job Centre
Siena Job Centre
Cesvot Florence | Tuscany Volunteer Service Center
Cesvot Siena | Tuscany Volunteer Service Center
CIOFS-FP Toscana | Centro Italiano Opere Femminili Salesiane - Professional Training
Municipality of Fucecchio (FI)
Municipality of Livorno
Municipality of Massa
Municipality of Rosignano Marittimo
Municipality of Siena
Confcooperative
Cooperativa Arnera Pontedera (PI)
Cooperativa 54cent(r)o Massa
Confartigianato
Coworkeria
CreaLab Rosignano
ESN Siena | Erasmus Student Network
Fondazione Territori Sociali Alta Val d'Elsa
Forum terzo settore
Impact Hub Florence
Informagiovani Livorno
Ingenium
Libera Toscana
Movimento Cristiano Lavoratori
PromoCultura Società Cooperativa Empoli
Rete Ergo | Empolesevaldelsa in Rete per i Giovani e le Organizzazioni
Semi Cattivi Massa
Terre di Siena LAB
University of Siena
91C – Coworking Space Florence

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1st stage Empoli (6 December 2017)

Rete Ergo (Empolesevaldelsa in Rete per i Giovani e le Organizzazioni)

2nd stage Livorno (16 January 2018)

Associazione Progetto Strada

3rd stage Massa (15 February 2018)

Coworkeria

4th stage Siena (21 March 2018)

Erasmus Student Network

5th stage Florence (20 April 2018)

Impact Hub Firenze

For taking part in the stages:

Michelangelo Belletti

Alessandro Catellani

Maria Elisa Marzotti

Silvia Volpi

For his help organising the path:

Nicola Basile