

# Engaging in Lobbying – Positioning Youth Work

Outcomes and inspiration from the pilot project  
‘Lobbying for Youth Work‘ (2019/20)

special 12



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# Forword

## What is 'Lobbying for Youth Work'?

*Claudius Siebel*

6 **L**istening to the frequent complaints and hearing about the many tales of woe, it would seem that youth work in Europe is in a difficult situation. The continuing Coronavirus pandemic has not made matters any easier. In many cities, youth facilities are being shut down, jobs cut and budgets slashed, to much regret – regret that is often tinged with resignation and frustration. Youth work appears to be the victim of immutable political situations and decisions. However, that is not (always) the case.

As in all areas where decisions are taken that have an impact on people, it pays off to actively intervene, represent target groups' interests and influence po-

litical decisions, especially at the local level – an activity commonly referred to as lobbying. That said, the youth work community often seems unaware of the importance of lobbying; another common issue is the lack of necessary resources and expertise on the part of youth work experts.

A model project in the German federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate set out to change that. Between 2013 and 2015, a group of experts joined a long-term training programme designed to sharpen the profile of youth work, improve its position and visibility at the political level, and empower the youth work community to engage in lobbying.

The exceptionally positive outcomes of this project earned Professor Werner Lindner, the initiator of the project, an invitation to the first conference of the European project 'Europe Goes Local', where it was decided to pilot a similar training project but in a European setting.

This publication outlines the outcomes and experiences gained in the first European pilot project 'Lobbying for Youth Work' (2019/20), a multi-module training course for (local) youth work experts from Belgium (Flanders), Austria, Latvia, Switzerland and Germany. Besides covering the main technical aspects of successful lobbying (communication and

networking), the brochure offers country reports as well as contributions from individual participants, who detail their personal experiences and personal lobbying projects. Finally, the publication discusses and summarises participants' learning journeys and the challenges of lobbying in local contexts.

This publication is designed to inspire an interest in engaging more consistently in lobbying in the youth work field, and to serve as a source of guidance for future training courses at national and European level.

1.

# *Introduction*

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# ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ – some conceptual approaches underlying the project

Werner Lindner

The idea of applying lobby thinking, lobby work and lobby methods to youth work was developed in Germany around a decade ago, initially without any regard for a potential European dimension and of course without searching for similar approaches at the European level. The following analysis should therefore be read bearing in mind a certain ‘conceptual nationalism’, which has also been appropriately termed a “national silo” (Ohana 2020:67).

The incubation phase of lobby work in this field was preceded by a phase in Germany that looked specifically at the evaluation, measurement and accountability of youth work (Lindner 2008). However, the outcome was disappointing, because it did not result in any improvement in its (even empirically verifiable) status. There followed a (re-)discovery of the political dimension of youth work. This political (re-)turn (see: Lindner 2010:2012) was motivated by the assumption that it is no longer sufficient to implement and improve youth work within the given legal, institutional and political frameworks; instead, attempts should be made to transform the frameworks themselves. In connection with this proposal, it was discussed that developments in youth work are never exclusively attributable to the internal work field, nor are they the result of metaphysical powers; instead, they are always the result of political decisions.

The renaissance of this political dimension should not be misunderstood as criticism, ideology, pathos, or mere protest. Instead, it reflects a scientific insight into the functioning of politics as well as a very pragmatic knowledge of political decisions. How are decisions taken? How can they be understood in their specific context? And of course, how can they be influenced? Moreover, none of this should be seen as an exclusive field of activity for political-parliamentary stakeholders or politicians in general; instead, it is considered an accompanying and co-creative process inside every youth work organisation and for every youth work practitioner.

However, practitioners should not mistake this new awareness of the political dimension as a fig leaf, or as a kneejerk response to a distressing situation. At the same time, ‘(re-)politicisation’ does not mean ideologisation, radicalisation or party politicisation. Nor should this new conceptual strategy be used as a substitute for professional action or as an excuse for one’s own failures. Even the weak excuse that none of this action is necessary because youth work has always somehow been political anyway is invalid, at least unless it is not associated with concrete practical action.

Building on this theoretical foundation, conceptual drafts for youth work were developed in several essays, discussions, and speeches and in 2013 carried out for the very first time in an experimental project

in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate under the heading ‘Learning to Fly’ with surprising success. An ongoing, reciprocal, and circular process involving new theoretical impulses, discussions, trials, published papers and essays, reflection, and evaluation produced a number of developments, which are briefly described below.

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- Conceptually, youth work stands on two pillars: professional-functional-pedagogical the one, political the other. Also, it became clear that youth work needs both of these pillars, or feet if you like, to move ahead: one foot helps the other to move. But in practical terms, the political dimension of youth work was entirely in a blind spot; a completely unknown and untouched space. In everyday practice, youth work stands on just one (mostly pedagogical) foot, which is a fairly insecure position.
- A related assumption was that it is possible to influence policy successfully; another was that, especially when it comes to youth work policy consulting, influencing and lobbying within a democratic system is legal, ethically permitted, and justified.
- Since systematic and reflective lobbying was completely alien to traditional youth workers, practitioners had to learn a new vocabulary, learn and try out new methods, and rethink their previous practices; especially with regard to new time resources and a new awareness for new deployments.
- Under the heading ‘All Politics Is Local’ (see: Lindner 2014) the participating projects followed the basic assumption that lobbying needs to happen primarily at the local level because that is where young people live their lives and where they encounter everyday challenges. So any policy, no matter from which level (European, national, regional) it originates, must ultimately come down to the local level. The very special role of youth work within youth policy therefore also is to transform the conceptual frameworks, political papers, and good intentions into concrete politics at the local level.
- Youth work at the local level is thus an important counterpart to youth policy at the national and regional level. In addition to the traditional tasks of youth work (social education, support for young people, non-formal learning), there is the additional and new task of being responsible and in charge of grounding youth policy from the higher levels down to the local ground. Youth work is hence a vital powerhouse and a guarantor of youth policy in line with the principle that either youth policy happens at the local level or it doesn’t happen at all.
- Since this new lobbying strategy extends beyond the conventional and traditional knowledge and skills of youth work practitioners, experts have to be recruited from other, previously unfamiliar, domains: policy consulting, network analysis, and practical networking, municipal and administrative studies, and (political) communication.
- Lobbying as a set of approaches and methods is per se neutral and has to be adapted to the special needs of youth work. It follows that new areas of development open up for youth work: on the one hand, in regard to participation of young people, who must necessarily be integrated

into all lobbying activities – for there may be no lobbying without them; on the other hand, new opportunities and connections open up in regard to political education for young people.

The project ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ was based on the ‘Learning to Fly’ project (which has since run a second time in Rhineland-Palatinate; a third course is in preparation there, and a course is currently running in the state of Thuringia). The title of the project was borrowed from a pop song by Tom Petty. While it sounds mildly megalomaniac, it essentially alludes to the assumption that youth workers can rise above their everyday work to take up new positions, from which they recognise more and different issues than other practitioners in this field - and then act differently, too. The *Praxis-Entwicklungs-Projekt (PEP)*, an applied research project to help raise the profile of youth work, ran from November 2013 to November 2015 and aimed to identify and promote self-chosen youth policy objectives at the local level. Specifically, it was designed to help organisations leverage insights from local politics, network research, and political consulting. An innovative, experimental approach was essential for the practical application and implementation of these issues, because so far they were only known from the ‘theory laboratories’ of political science and other political fields. The evaluation of the *PEP* produced the first reflected and exemplary knowledge about this transfer process and its specific conditions for success in the field of youth work/youth policy.

A remarkable learning effect of the *PEP* (and also for the project ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’) has

been an increase in strategic flexibility. When youth work professionals begin to look beyond the boundaries of their everyday routine, reflect on their actions, and plan them one or two steps ahead, they transform from ‘victims of a foreign power’ into self-efficient, active stakeholders. However, this crucially requires that sufficient time and energy for strategic thought and action are consistently sourced from an always tight budget.

After a speech delivered on 1 July 2017 at the conference ‘Youth Work Goes Local’ in Ljubljana, the German experience was applied to the European project ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’, which became a reality thanks to the efforts of the German National Agency, in particular its representative Claudius Siebel. As the project unfolded, the varying situations of youth work in the participating countries became clearer. Also, towards the end of the project, which coincided with the preparations for the 3rd European Youth Work Convention in December 2020, its relevance for the European debate around youth work became more visible.

While no clear connections exist yet to available documents or practices in European youth work policy (e.g. Youth Goals), the project has received new conceptual support from a number of publications on this subject. First of all, Yael Ohana’s paper ‘What’s politics got to do with it? European youth work programmes and the development of critical youth citizenship’ (2020), which outlines some developments in youth work that are applicable to the German lobbying projects and the practitioners. The article indicates evidence of an existing non-simultaneity of

some developments in European youth work. For instance, it asks “Political or not political? Is that the question?” (2020:14) or “Defining European youth work as political?” (2020:17), questions that are clearly applicable to German youth work discourse and practice, but also to the project presented here. Moreover, Howard Williamson’s discussion paper ‘Cornerstone Challenges for European Youth Work in Europe. Making the Connections and Bridging the Gaps’ (2020) flags up many similarities to the ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ project, for instance the emphasis on the local level (2020:20) or as regards the “challenge of building political recognition of youth work” (2020:25).

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Proven knowledge about setting politics in motion, maybe even in the desired direction, does not exist for youth work. Maybe there will never be any, because youth work as a policy field is too complex. So there is no miracle formula for bringing about the desired results immediately. However, at least some of the ingredients are known. Successful policy-making in youth work and by the youth work community is the result of co-ordination between a whole range of actions and planning elements, comparable to the preparation of a magic cocktail. This cocktail consists of about 20 different ingredients, which should be permanently tested, substantiated, and verified. As a matter of fact, experiments cannot guarantee a certain outcome; if they could, they would not be called experiments. While in lobbying there is no guarantee of success, we can increase its probability. And so that is why we entered into a structured and reflected experiment rather than a game of hazard.

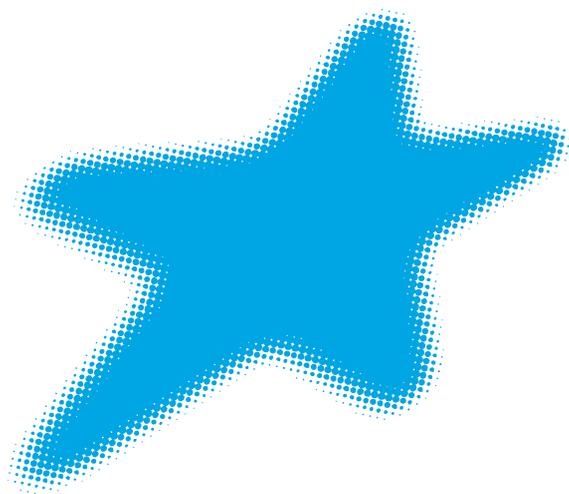
This explains why although the final goals may be fixed, the journey towards them needs to be guided by self-critical and reflective action. For the project, this means that the participants may suffer defeat or deviations or may even miss their goals altogether, which is not a problem provided they draw the right conclusions, learn their lessons, and are better prepared for the next attempt. This project’s participants were wise enough to follow Samuel Beckett’s famous words: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. You won’t believe what you can accomplish by attempting the impossible with the courage to repeatedly fail better.”

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2.

## *On lobbying and on positioning*

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## 2.1.

## The youth work lobbyist

*Marco Althaus***Shaping government relations and making politicians listen**

Youth work is, in many ways, about advocacy and representation. First, youth work aims to grow young people's involvement and participation in society. Young people are encouraged to make themselves heard so they can overcome their marginal presence and influence public decisions. In this sense, youth work is about empowering active citizenship. Second, youth workers are themselves advocates and representatives. When they speak for and on behalf of young people as clients, youth workers articulate legitimate interests and promote goals for youth policy and youth-connected issues and causes. They help organise and mobilise communities and constituencies. An interest group has higher capacity for external influence.

Third, youth workers represent their own vocation. Their professionalism includes a responsibility to weigh in on public policy-making on behalf of their own vocation and colleagues. Youth workers aim to be publicly recognised for their qualifications and responsible practice, to protect their values and job autonomy, and to shape public decisions that affect their jobs and budgets that pay for them.

In all three areas, it is necessary to find access and communication channels. Policy-makers should receive accurate, complete, valid, fair, and persuasive information about beneficial or adverse effects of a policy decision at the right time. Moreover, because most policy-makers are not experts, there is a need for continuous issue education and concrete advice on

youth issues. Working within the policy-making process, which is a competitive environment, requires a political mind-set, political skills, and strategy. When they are combined for an attempt to directly influence institutional decision-making on a certain project with persuasive communication, then this is what, generally speaking, constitutes 'lobbying'.

It seems that lobbying is only what interest groups do from the outside of government. But parts of governments also lobby each other. They, too, build networks, liaisons, and coalitions with like-minded offices and external groups. They, too, try to shape media and public perception in order to gain legitimacy for their claims and demands. They, too, want support for policy positions, projects, programmes, and budget requests for staff and money. They, too, rival with others for resources. Whether they call it lobbying or not, they pursue lobbying strategies.

Lobbying may work through various channels: inside or outside, more formal or more informal. Youth work may be represented on formal, institutionalised platforms, for example a youth council or youth policy advisory panel that works in partnership with executive agencies or legislative bodies. Form, format, and mission vary across Europe's jurisdictions: A council may have unclear functions, or be tasked with formal consultation and report-making, or it may co-direct and co-manage youth programmes from policy design to street-level implementation. It may be an ad-hoc board or loose caucus with floating membership, an appointed standing committee, or an elected par-

liamentary assembly with seats and votes allotted to certain groups. It may even be officially part of public administration, or exercise oversight over administrators.

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Such formal mandates can enable youth work representatives to place formal motions for resolutions, ordinances, or budget requests on the table for public debate. Any comment or recommendation on proposed budgets or laws goes on record before final action is taken. This can make it easy to engage in ‘inside’ lobbying, just as government departments or agencies lobby each other. Working a formal platform requires familiarity with institutional rules and procedures, of course; and the internal politics of such a body may be problematic. In any case, it does not guarantee success. More to the point, it is just one advocacy channel among others.

A formal platform can never substitute for the practice of informal influence. In an informal environment, it is purely the decision of the addressee whether to listen or not, get engaged in substantial dialogue or not, and be influenced or not. It is a buyer’s market: the supply of petition and information typically exceeds demand, and it is easy to rebuff a lobbyist and ignore the advice. In other words, more people want to influence than people want to let themselves be influenced. In this crowded room full of influence-seekers, lobbying must be competitive.

### Political management skills

Ideally, the addressee recognises a useful, helpful service and advice that serves the receiver. A lobbyist offers expert content knowledge as informational bene-

fits. However, such expertise must also be transported as practically useful advice to the right people at the right time and place, in the right format and context. The critical element is the perception of the political value proposition of the lobbyist’s offer.

Political players live in a universe of interests. Generally, they accept that any advice will push or pull them in a particular direction—that’s politics. Sorting out and balancing interests is the point of it all. Therefore, successful advice does not need to be interest-free, objective, and neutral. It is legitimate for the adviser to have ‘special interests’, but they must, for the policy-maker, be recognisable and compatible. ‘Compatible’ here means agreeable in terms of ideals and values, but also congruent with current work conditions, practical priorities, personal capacity, operational and political limits of the policy-maker’s daily practice. Can they deliver? Lobbyists better do their homework before they approach their addressees.

The lobbyist needs to build political management skills, i.e. a capacity to process political information, develop activity according to plan, get into the play of the policy-making process, and win access and trust as a policy-maker’s adviser. In order to grow professionally and make oneself (and one’s house or group) welcome as an adviser, a portfolio of four roles will need to be filled:

1. the role of analyst, who observes, analyses, and evaluates the policy discourse, decision procedures, and broader issues and constellations of policy-making;
2. the representative and advocate, who is not just a



‘technical’ expert with youth expertise and experience but an active mission promoter, spokesperson, and diplomat, who will translate, facilitate, and act as a group liaison;

3. the negotiator, who views any external communication as a potential arena for transaction of information, advice, and support, and political arbitration; and
4. the strategist, who spots any window of opportunity for a chance to engineer policy initiatives and resilience against threats and uncertain situations, and who is a creative, resourceful political thinker overall.

This portfolio reflects that all politics mixes substantial policy issues and power issues. Relevant advice accepts that there are political rationalities: the rationality of institutional, partisan, or personal competition; the rationality of bargaining for the price for a Yes or No or benevolent neutrality; and the rationality of signalling and symbolic communication. A truly political calculation will consider the balance of power, hierarchies, policy-makers’ and opinion leaders’ preferences and attention levels, process management and timing, public expectations, media agendas, and the necessities of political marketing (i.e. image-making and showmanship). The lobbyist is wise to pay attention to all of these factors because the policy-maker certainly will.

Obviously, the youth work lobbyist needs to be politically well-informed about ongoing proceedings and precedent cases, working agendas, the political calendar (including elections, legislative sessions, and terms of office), potential majorities, and predisposi-

tions of key players. In continuous conversation with officeholders and staff, the lobbyist will find out who and what is up or down, in or out, whose doors are open for new demands, and which windows of opportunity are opening or closing.

Lobbying policy-makers is an external activity, but the lobbyist also has an important internal assignment: advising his or her own organisation and its leadership about how policy-making works and what this means for internal planning. The lobbyist is the organisation’s go-to external political environment expert, who explains what is going on and acts as sounding board and feasibility checker for the organisation’s public strategy, development of policy positions, and its partnerships.

### Need help? Call a lobbyist

As stated before, the influence market is a buyer’s market. Representatives of interest groups or government offices compete for policy-makers’ time and attention. This means, first, that the lobbyist’s message must be comprehensible and precise. It must be easy to understand what the lobbyist wants the policy-maker to do (or not), and why. Amateurs often confuse policy-makers with muddly briefings and wishy-washy conversation. A vague request or proposal will only receive a vague echo, or none at all. It must be clear what ‘the ask’ is that the lobbyist brings up.

Second, it also means that their lobbying must consider and satisfy the addressee’s needs and expectations. Otherwise, the addressee will be unwilling to listen or take advice, or worse, listen to a rival lobbyist and take that other advice. As a practical matter, this means a

lobbyist should be useful, and lobbying should enable the policy-maker to do his or her job well. The lobbyist wants to develop a reputation as an extra resource or extended workbench. Yes, there are situations when the lobbyist must criticise, object, protest, be annoying, and apply pressure. There are good reasons why interest groups are also called ‘pressure groups’, and policy-makers may feel the heat in certain conflicts when group members mobilise the public (or certain publics), especially in election years. But complaining is a bad way to start a relationship. A better idea is to get friendly, interested policy-makers into the habit of calling the lobbyist for assistance and support. This requires trust, confidence, reliability, and speedy responsiveness. The constructive, supportive lobbyist will:

1. not just highlight problems but offer solutions, and identify factors, trends, and windows of opportunity, which help turn theoretical options into real policy options;
2. point to problems which promise visible political rewards for the policy-maker who invests time and energy in solving the problems;
3. be on call to supply facts, data, and background fast and reliably, and fill knowledge gaps without piling up a mountain of information, which is impossible to climb;
4. translate complex, abstract, dry policy material into clear, comprehensible, concrete cases and authentic stories that can be communicated in a plausible way;
5. educate the policy-makers with balanced persuasive argumentation but without any attempt to manipulate or coax him or her into a decision that can prove costly;

6. actively offer a network of contacts and introduce potential new supporters, opinion leaders, and partners.

It is obvious that a policy-maker will take the lobbyist’s advice, because expertise is a valuable medium of exchange in a relationship of exchange. The policy-maker will listen and allow influence, because he or she expects to gain competitive advantage. This benefit is exactly what the lobbyist wants the policy-maker to like.

But influence is, by definition, only a potential driver of changing attitudes or action. Lobbyists are normally petitioners rather than power holders, and they need to guarantee information service supply without any certainty that they will receive anything in return from the lobbied policy-maker. Productive partnerships with policy-makers will seldom start with an outright *‘do ut des’*. Instead, they require a venture capitalist’s patience and long-term investment. On the other hand, if a relationship simply does not work and yields no substantial gain over time, the lobbyist may re-evaluate the sunk investment, and then turn to farming more fertile fields.

### **Opportunities and restraints in local politics**

It has been said that “all politics is local”, but that is only partially true. There are differences in size and scope. State-wide, national, or European politics tends to be abstract, distant, and driven by often anonymous forces and large bureaucracies. There is also, by and large, a lower level of public trust in higher-up policy-makers. By contrast, local politics starts with

familiar faces at the front door and at the neighbours' fence. It is more personal and concrete, less partisan, less often played by career politicians, less mass media driven, and less polarised, competitive and rivalrous.

Overall, local politics is more unmediated and unfiltered, and there are fewer access barriers. Therefore, it is often easier to step into a door and make voices heard instantly. But the opposite may also be true! In fact, it can be more difficult to break into a walled-off local policy-making arena than into a regional or national one.

Nevertheless, it is comparatively easy to make a connection with a region's prefect, county commissioner, city mayor, local government administrator, town council member, or borough alderman. Local policy-makers often want to prove that they are accessible and listen 'to the people'. In particular, the directly elected local executive may see value in making him- or herself more effective as an administrator, or in building an image as a big-tent communicator, family patron, and interest group moderator. Local clubs, church groups, chambers of commerce, trade unions, civic groups, charities, lodges, volunteer fire brigades, music or sports clubs—many of these are locally more important than political parties. The local pool of group activists and honorary officeholders may be quite limited. Political party work tends to be the extension of non-party work. Parties themselves tend to have less money and organisational resources for parliamentary and election projects than upper-level headquarters. Candidates must assemble their own resources if they want to win office. Local parliaments are filled with part-time amateur citizen-politicians,

who employ no staff. The number of locally influential people can be small. Competition and pluralism are limited. It is unsurprising that not every local community is a vibrant open marketplace of policy ideas and broad popular participation. Indeed, local political elites and political culture may discourage public confrontation over issues but prefer consensual, small-group, non-transparent, non-deliberative backroom deals as a routine standard mode of operation (not to mention nepotism, cronyism, and corruption).

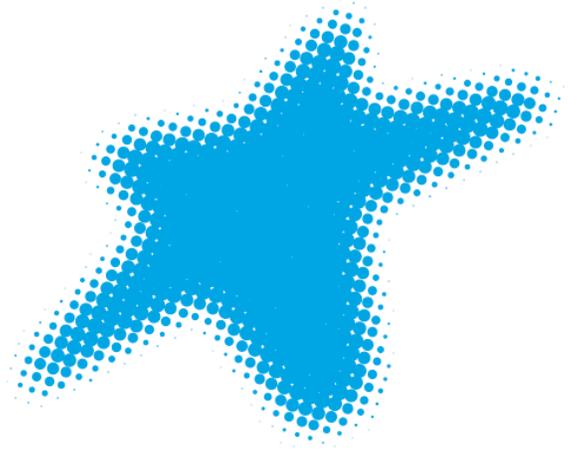
Closed-shop politics may also be a problem in youth councils and advisory boards. In some jurisdictions, a youth council or commission may be a prime example for what political scientists call 'corporatism': It incorporates the representatives of certain interest groups in a broader governance structure, gives them an official channel and visible legitimacy, and links it as a consultative body with elected or appointed officeholders. This constellation has clear advantages. It has problems, too, because it creates un- or underrepresented outsiders and amplifies any existing asymmetry of influence among youth organisations. Some, but not all, have a seat, or more seats, and direct access to municipal administrators, public monies, and staff. Some organisations may befriend certain parties, politicians, or agency heads, and reap the benefits of such favouritism and patronage. Others find that they are being cut off.

Institutionalised youth platforms are, however, practically never a political power centre in local governance. They have only indirect and limited authority, and its resonance and reach among the wider public may be very weak. Important budget and rules deci-

sions that affect youth will be made elsewhere in the city hall or county house. Even the legislature's youth committee or mayor's office for youth may not be the focus of what the youth work lobbyist may need to do at any given time.

20 Generally, he or she should never assume that their specialised 'policy ghetto' is what makes the political world go around. Seen realistically through the eyes of an ambitious, career-hungry politician or administrator, youth policy is a relatively minor policy field that lacks prestige, big budgets, media visibility, and other politically prized rewards and resources. It is rather unlikely that the city's or county's political

heavyweights, leaders, and powerbrokers command a reputation as youth policy experts and draw their political capital from this field. By contrast, officeholders, who are in charge of youth policy, are often minor figures, who can get easily thrown under the bus. Therefore, the youth work lobbyist will tend contacts among specialist circles where communication is easy (because everybody agrees that youth policy is important), but also build and maintain access to non-expert policy-makers, who can truly have an impact. The key challenge is to convince these 'movers and shakers' that youth issues are interesting and critical enough for investing their political capital.



## 2.2.

## The relevance of networking for the profiling of youth work

Herbert Schubert

### How networking helps raise the profile of youth work

An applied research project (*Praxisentwicklungsprojekt* or *PEP*) that ran between 2013 and 2015 in the German federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate explored how youth work can maintain a professional image in the public sphere and effectively represent young people's interests at the political level. *PEP* was motivated by the conviction that the youth work community needs strategies to ensure that its interests are represented. It hence sought to empower youth work stakeholders to engage with key local and regional decision-makers and representatives of administrations and relevant institutions in order to raise the profile of youth work. A key competence in this regard is networking. This article explores how youth work stakeholders can employ networking strategies to engage effectively in the political sphere and in doing so, represent the interests of youth work effectively. It also outlines the experience of projects and organisations in Rhineland-Palatinate that already engage in networking.

#### 1. Transmission and contagion pathways

Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler's book *Connected: The Amazing Power of Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives* (2010) explores the special forces at play in social networks. The authors refer to social relationships as conduits for both positive and negative norms and attitudes, illustrating this with the simple example of a bucket brigade or telephone list. The

sharing of e.g. information takes place within a certain network structure built around the principle of each individual unit having a tie to two others (one before, one after them in the sequence) in, say, a chain. From this, Christakis and Fowler derive two fundamental characteristics of social networks: one, the connection itself and two, that which is transmitted via this connection. The mechanism of transmission can be interpreted as a form of contagion within a network: everything an individual does affects their direct contacts, the contacts of their contacts, and the contacts of the contacts of their contacts. And whatever happens along these pathways will affect them, too.

On this basis, Christakis and Fowler propose a set of networking rules, such as "we shape our network" and "our network/friends affect us". They point to the anthropological principle that human beings have the tendency to influence, but also copy, one another. That said, this effect is not limited to one's direct contacts; rather, it ripples out far beyond them, leading the authors to propose another rule: "Our friends' friends' friends affect us". To describe this spread of influence in social networks, Christakis and Fowler use the phrase "Three Degrees of Influence". Everything that humans do or say ripples through their network, with the impact also felt by people who are not direct contacts and who maybe don't even know each other. In other words, that influence extends across three degrees of separation (reaching friends of friends of friends), although it ceases to have a noticeable effect

beyond that social frontier. This, they conclude, indicates that networks amplify everything that is fed into them. The authors try to measure the underlying contagion effect using loneliness as an example of such a cascade: “...you are about 52 percent more likely to be lonely if a person you are directly connected to (at one degree of separation) is lonely. The effect for people at two degrees of separation is 25 percent, and for people at three degrees of separation, it is about 15 percent. At four degrees of separation, the effect disappears (...).” Happiness and obesity, too, spread similarly throughout our networks; and here again the effect declines with increasing degrees of separation to a relatively low level.

Christakis and Fowler’s Network Architecture of Political Influence is particularly interesting in the context of the *PEP* in Rhineland-Palatinate. Quoting from studies on lobbyists’ networks, the authors suggest that while it certainly doesn’t hurt to maintain strong ties to high-ranking politicians, lobbyists are more likely to be granted access to key political players if they are connected to someone, who already has access. In other words, what matters more than reaching out to individual players is one’s networking strategy. Christakis and Fowler conclude that the traditional model involving *Homo economicus*, who is rational, self-interested, and self-directed, is not an appropriate framework of reference. Instead, they propose *Homo dictyous* (‘network man’, from the Latin *homo* for human and the Greek *dicty* for net), whose decisions are not directed by self-interest, but rather by his social relationships with those around him.

The transmission and contagion principle underlying social networks that Christakis and Fowler describe can serve as a blueprint for the networking strategies of the organisations participating in *PEP*. An organisation actively communicates its interests via a network (chain) to raise the profile of youth work; that message is carried and amplified by co-operation partners to reach other co-operation partners, including influential target players in politics and administration.

## **2. Requirements to be met by organisations according to the network logic**

The concept of a network is based on a collection of nodes (social units, such as people or organisations) that are linked by certain ties (relationships). It follows that a network is only constituted if the nodes therein are in a relationship. If the constituent parts are not connected, no information can flow across and between them. These connections can manifest in different ways, e.g. communication via e-mail; authority and power inside a hierarchical organisation; interaction within a team; economic exchange within a trading partnership; family ties; or social connections between friends.

The definition of a network is quite distinct from that of a group. In a social group, the only thing that counts are direct relationships; in other words, a group presupposes a direct connection between each individual member. Every group member must go to great lengths to maintain these direct ties to their fellow members, and it is due to this major interaction effort that groups can only integrate a comparatively small number of members. It follows that groups

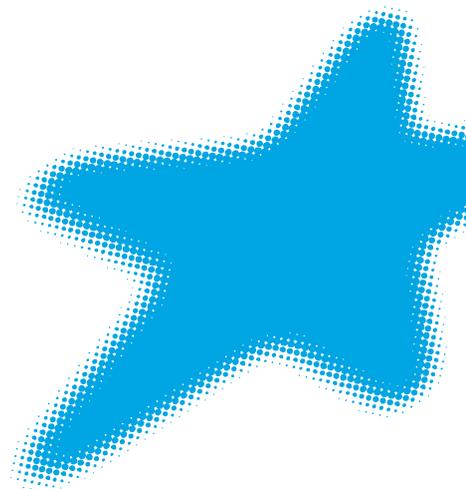
are oriented mainly inwards rather than outwardly. In networks, by contrast, both direct and indirect contacts have great value; network members are not expected to maintain a full connection, nor does that even make sense given the comparatively larger number of constituent parts. The special feature of a network is that its members are integrated indirectly as well as directly, with access playing a key role – that is, whether network members can access other members indirectly, namely via contacts who are direct contacts on either side. These connections between the constituent parts of a network can be considered pathways, with the length of a pathway corresponding to the number of direct connections between two indirectly connected members. Seen from this angle, networks are certainly the more efficient organisational form.

The special benefit of a network, then, is that its structure is open, allowing for the integration of a larger number of members, or nodes, via new connections. From the perspective of the youth work community, they can use networks to connect with key players in local and regional politics, administration and relevant institutions via a variety of pathways. Just like a traveller studies a map before starting out on a trip, youth work experts can search their network for potential transmission pathways to their targets.

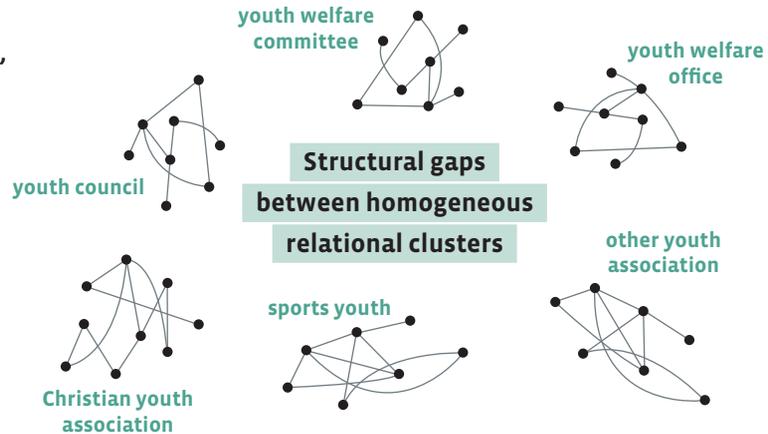
In the 1970s, the American sociologist Mark Granovetter suggested drawing a distinction between “strong” and “weak ties”. While strong ties are generally the hallmark of groups, weak ties exist, if they exist at all, largely between organisations and hierarchical levels and are typically based on individual, barely definable contacts. In youth work networks, weak ties

constitute the pathways that often lead to the key players, who, while they play an important role in youth work, are often difficult to reach.

In preparation for this practical ‘pathway analysis’, it is necessary to recall some of the basic principles behind networking.



**Figure 1:**  
Silos, insular positions,  
structural gaps

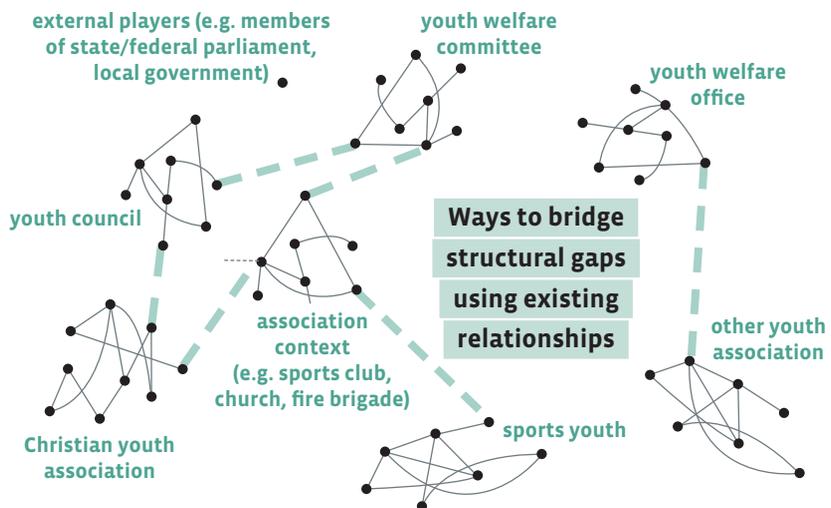


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Step one involves gaining an overview of the players that make up the organisational landscape. Often, these players will form relational clusters, between which there are no connections, resulting in what can be referred to as ‘structural gaps’ between

the clusters (cf. Figure 1). In these cases, using existing relational pathways will be difficult, so it makes sense to build new pathways, via which transmission and contagion can take place.

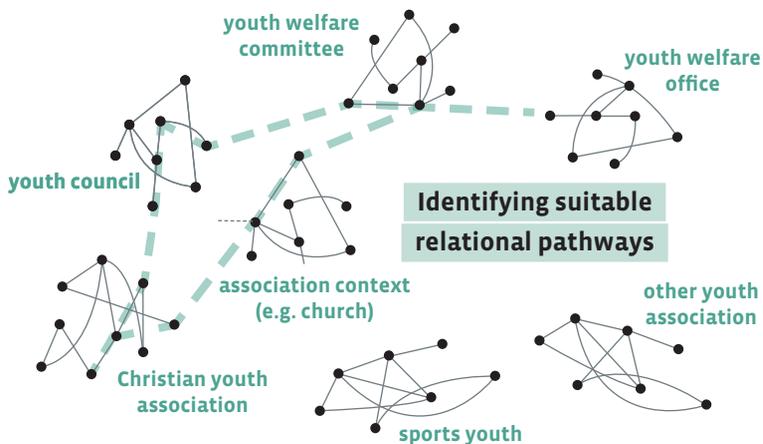
**Figure 2:**  
How to bridge  
structural gaps



In step two, those nodes should be identified that already tie two relational clusters together or which can be used to create new pathways (cf. Figure 2). To this end, the following questions need to be answered:

1. Which are the relevant players in the field (here, youth work)?
2. What relationships already exist between them?
3. To what extent do these bilateral relationships already constitute a network? Just like travellers consulting a map before they start a trip, youth work experts can perform an analysis of this kind to flag up ways for them to acquire new allies or share information with certain target players.

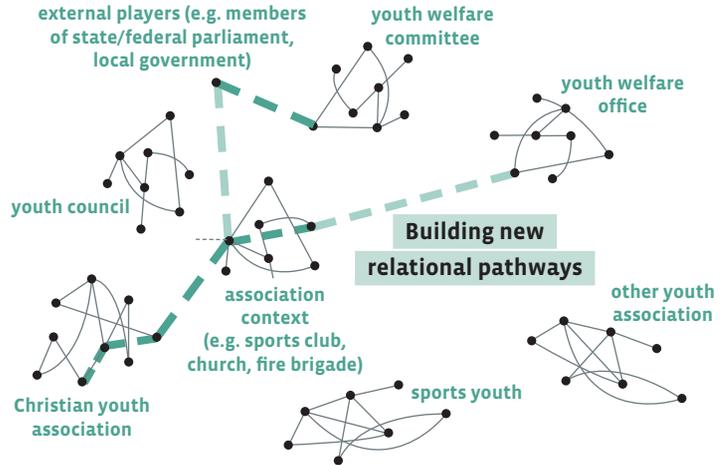
**Figure 3:**  
Identifying existing  
pathways to connect  
with key players



Third, suitable relational pathways need to be identified that enable access to key players in institutions that are relevant for youth work at the local level and, what is more, are especially promising in terms of transmission and contagion (cf. Figure 3). In this context, a pathway should not be seen as a direct line; rather, it is a tie within a network that is an effective conduit for contagious youth work information. Whether a given pathway is suitable or not can be decided on a quantitative or qualitative basis. In the former case, one could

opt for the shortest, i.e. most efficient pathway – the one with the fewest intermediaries between the sender and the receiver. In the latter case, one would rather opt for the most effective pathway, i.e. that, which involves intermediaries that are particularly supportive of one’s cause or which involves individuals that can amplify the message. This can produce a strategy for creating new relational pathways to bridge any missing connections (cf. Figure 4).

**Figure 4:**  
Creating new  
pathways to connect  
with key players

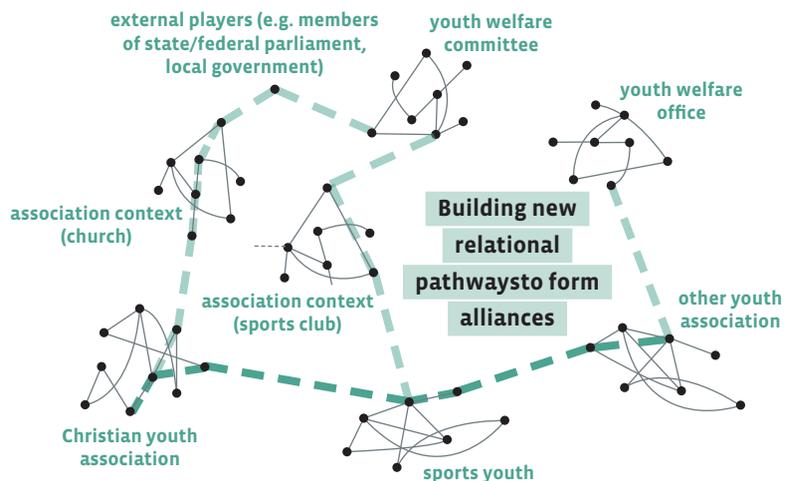


26 In this step, the youth work experts move from analysis to strategy. They need to reflect on the insights they have gained into the regional network 'landscape', so they can decide which target to reach out to via which intermediary; what they want to transmit via the chosen pathway (e.g. information); what communication method they can use; and what result they want to achieve/what would constitute success.

The strategy may also involve bringing stakeholders on board that are potentially also competitors. However, this requires achieving a balance between loyalty to one's own organisation and the benefits of a potential alliance for the youth work field as a com-

munity with shared interests. As a result, the competition between the involved organisations and the agreed co-operation between the involved individuals transform into an ambivalent relationship, which Barry Nalebuff and Adam Brandenburger refer to as 'co-opetition'. Here, the alliance in question is a coalition of two or more currently or potentially competing associations or organisations that pursue a common network strategy, sometimes temporarily, with the aim of raising the profile of youth work *vis-à-vis* key players in the administrative and/or political sphere. Forming alliances helps compensate any strengths and weaknesses inside the network and can amplify the transmission effect.

**Figure 5:**  
New pathways  
as a basis for  
alliances



### 3. Organisations' networking strategies – an evaluation

Most of the organisations participating in *PEP* had chosen to start networking in their direct environment. In many cases the organisations' management were requested to initiate talks at higher levels, e.g. meetings with department heads and district councillors or press meetings with mayors and governors. However, in many cases no attention was paid to the internal structures of their own organisation vs. those of outside organisations or bodies. When this is not done, the risk is that there is too strong a focus on one's internal processes, with little attempt to think beyond the boundaries of the organisation.

In some cases, efforts were made to obtain a seat in formal decision-making bodies. These organisations put more emphasis on institutional structures than on networking. That said, from a strategic point of view it can be seen as a success if an organisation actually manages to obtain the desired formal position. For instance, in one case the organisation in question succeeded in obtaining a seat on the district's youth welfare committee and in turn, on the subcommittee for youth welfare planning. The goal was to present outcomes before the youth welfare committee and in doing so, to influence decisions in the long term. This strategy can be described as position-centred, with less regard given to the relational aspects of transmission. Greater attention should be paid to connecting with the right intermediaries and 'allies' in order to strengthen one's obtained position over the long term. What should not happen is for that representative to be just a 'bum on the seat' – in other words, someone who may serve on a committee but ulti-

mately has little genuine opportunity to sharpen the profile of youth work.

A further strategy involved creating opportunities for direct contact with influential individuals, for instance obtaining an invitation to a district councillor's annual 'fireside chat' event. From a networking point of view, however, getting together once a year for a conversation runs the risk of it remaining an annual one-off. Given the long intervals in between meetings, this is hardly an effective way to establish a process of contagion and in turn, continually raise awareness of youth work interests. It hence makes sense to carefully select one's target and consider how to reach out to them; in other words, to identify these influential individuals and contact them via existing intermediaries, akin to a spider spinning its web. In preparation for a meeting with a councillor, say, a strategy should be laid out incorporating the network, of which the councillor is a member (e.g. preparatory meetings with their personal assistant or staff members). That way, the subsequent fireside chat is embedded in a wider 'contagious' communication process.

A very common strategy is to reach out to key players directly to convince them of one's causes. Organisations engaging in this strategy pledge to conduct a defined number of (planning) meetings with key players within a certain space of time. However, those that did so spent little time reflecting on the relational pathways between the organisation and the target individuals. Mostly, the district councillor was targeted without considering whether this was actually the key person who had to be persuaded of one's cause, or rather an intermediary along the pathway to other

players who play a key role in safeguarding the interests of youth work.

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The *PEP* inspired many organisations to widen their perspective to include the entire system of decision-making, e.g. considering the interfaces to other areas of society and politics. A strategy of this kind needs to involve a plan for implementation that answers the following questions: Which relational pathways need to be leveraged? Who are the relevant target players, and what intermediaries can help us reach out to them? And what benefits will this strategy have for youth work? Some organisations have yet to undertake an analysis of this kind.

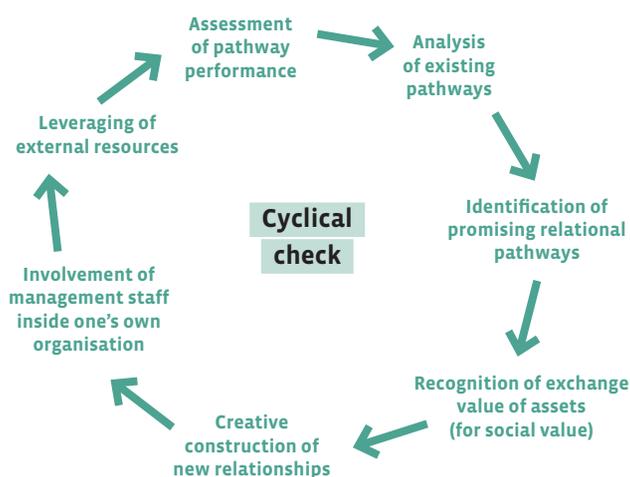
One interesting strategy is that of the *BDKJ*, the Federation of German Catholic Youth. They planned to invite the 51 members of the state parliament and 12 members of the federal parliament resident in the Diocese of Trier to attend talks. They set themselves a target: at least one member from each of the ten deaneries should attend the meeting, during which their respective political work would be assessed from a youth policy angle. The *BDKJ* approach is hence output-oriented, yet it ought to be extended to include outcome orientation, too, by defining the desired impact of the talks on youth policy. From a strategic point of view, this approach is a strong starting point. The *BDKJ* was advised to reshape their plans for the talks to ensure they would result in closer interpersonal relationships that in the medium term would generate political social capital. This strategy requires paying closer attention to the relational pathways between the organisation and the policy-makers, allowing the organisation to

identify intermediaries who can help build successful relationships.

The plan pursued by *Sportjugend Rheinland* (Rhine-land sports youth) shows clear signs of a well-thought-out networking strategy combined with an empirical approach. When the organisation took a good look at their situation, they considered in which youth welfare and sports committees their interests were already being represented. They hence knew who their representatives were, so they invited them to training sessions. These sessions, in turn, were an opportunity for the representatives to meet and find out how to better exercise their influence. The meetings also allowed participants to learn more about this kind of work and in turn, to increase the number of representatives in decision-making bodies. The outcome demonstrates that bridging the gap between sports youth and policy-makers is a challenge, given that sports youth representatives are more interested in sports than in local politics. Many of them appear to have little understanding of the benefits of local-level policy-making. Against this backdrop, the organisation was advised to undertake a screening exercise to identify individuals, who have an equal interest in both sports and youth policy and who can hence contribute effectively to building strong transmission pathways.

A further promising example is the strategy pursued by the youth department of the Diocese of Trier, which co-ordinates 102 parishes in three deaneries. The department took stock of all conferences, staff meetings, working groups, committees and assemblies that potentially play an intermediary role. The

**Figure 6:**  
**Elements of successful networking**



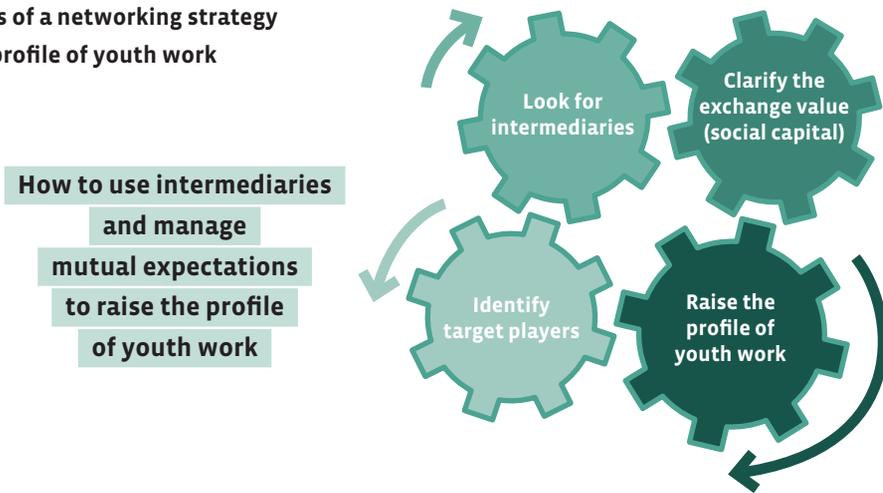
department’s networking strategy involves looking ahead to how its interests can be represented by youth association representatives in existing decision-making bodies by first identifying the intermediaries, who can help connect with the volunteers serving in the parishes and deaneries. The youth department is also considering forming an alliance between the Catholic youth associations and other youth associations that are members of the youth council – specifically, they plan to reach out to full-time staff members for greater leverage when it comes to raising awareness of youth policy issues.

#### 4. Recommendations for future activities inside the organisations

For future projects, we advise organisations to consider the following checklist (cf. Figure 6):

1. The network that stakeholders wish to leverage in order to raise the profile of youth work must be subjected to continued analysis and reflection;
2. Attention should be paid to the connections between the players that are considered relevant when it comes to representing the interests of the youth work community;
3. Organisations should identify which of these connections are potentially effective transmission pathways;
4. They should also reflect on how to make use of these pathways (who to ‘infect’, how to communicate, how to argue, etc.);
5. Organisations should work out what assets they can offer their contacts and targets in return. Following the ‘you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours’ principle, the benefits the organisations hope to achieve should be matched by similar benefits for the contacts and targets along the transmission chain;
6. Any existing relationships that appear or are ineffective should be replaced by newly created relationships;
7. This exercise, too, requires allies, so that the contagion effect can ripple out to contacts of the first, second and third degree. For instance, decision-makers inside one’s own organisation can be brought on board as door-openers;
8. These individuals often have a connection to external resources that can be leveraged to build new bridges.

**Figure 7:**  
**Cornerstones of a networking strategy**  
**to raise the profile of youth work**



Altogether, there are four success factors when it comes to networking strategies in youth work (cf. Figure 7):

- Identifying target players with whom to connect in order to raise the profile of youth work and put it on a stronger institutional footing;
- Identifying intermediaries, that is contacts, who can facilitate access to said target players;
- Gaining a clear picture of what an organisation can offer in order to win over the target players (in other words, build social capital by offering assets that are of interest to the other side);

- Raising the profile of youth work can be a success, provided organisations undertake a systematic analysis to identify key players and the mutual expectations at play and use the results as the basis for an effective plan of action.

### **Reference**

Christakis, Nicholas A.; Fowler, James H. (2009): *Connected: The Amazing Power of Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*. London: HarperCollins.



3.

# *In-country perspectives on lobbying*

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## 3.1.

## ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ – a Swiss perspective

*Silja Ramseier*

In Switzerland, youth workers who engage in lobbying seem to benefit from a low-threshold approach towards politicians and the two pillars of the Swiss political system: direct democracy and federalism. Under the Swiss system, only the legal framework and a limited number of regulations are dealt with on the national level, while many relevant decisions are taken by cantons and municipalities independently. As the concept, roles and tasks of youth work differs across Switzerland, youth workers from Italian-speaking Ticino and the French- and German-speaking parts of the country need to use different lobbying approaches.

### Low-Threshold Approach towards Politicians

As said above, in Switzerland there seems to be a low-threshold relationship between youth workers and politicians. The participating youth workers hence reported that they did not experience a lot of hierarchy. One youth worker from a small German-speaking municipality reported she was able to engage in lobbying easily and was on first-name terms with politicians. This may reflect a difference between rural and urban areas as the other youth worker from Geneva was not able to report the same. Alternatively, there may well be a difference between the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland; alternatively, party affiliation may play a role.

### Direct Democracy

The participating youth workers argued that due to the Swiss system of direct democracy, the Swiss youth workers may enjoy this low-threshold access towards politicians. Thanks to the two instruments of direct democracy, popular initiative and optional referendum, Swiss citizens have more power and other tools than citizens of other countries. Popular initiatives allow citizens to propose an amendment or addition to the Constitution. Although only just over 10% of these proposals are ultimately accepted, each initiative creates a political debate about the issue at hand. Optional referenda give citizens the right to vote on any bill approved by the Federal Assembly. In addition, anybody regardless of age, gender or nationality has the right to address a written petition to an authority at local, cantonal or federal level.

Switzerland’s umbrella association of open child and youth work (*DOJ/AFAJ*) and umbrella association of youth organisations (*SAJV/CSAJ*) engage in professional youth lobbying at national level (e.g. to keep youth centres open during Covid-19). Youth workers at local level use information from the municipalities and cantons for these national lobbying efforts. They can build on the outcomes of national lobbying for their lobbying efforts at municipal or cantonal level and also engage in local lobbying on their own. Switzerland’s federal system means that local lobbying is important.

### Federalism

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As Switzerland has a federal system, the cantons and municipalities have extensive powers and a lot of autonomy. Responsibility for youth work, for instance, lies with municipalities and cantons. Thus, most issues related to youth work need to be addressed at municipal or cantonal level, and it is important for youth workers at the local level to engage in lobbying. In Geneva, youth work is a shared cantonal and municipal responsibility and youth workers from there have to lobby within this supra-structure. Thanks to federalism, citizens and youth workers from Switzerland have greater direct influence on more local-level decisions than in other countries, where more issues are handled at national level. However, again due to federalism, the cantons and municipalities operate under different political conditions and processes when it comes to youth work (e.g. political structures and central figures; for instance, in Geneva there is no youth delegate for non-professional youth work, who could support this field). In these cases, lobbying approaches need to be adapted.

### Different Concept of Youth Work

The concept of youth work varies between the German-, French-, and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland.

In German-speaking Switzerland, the term ‘open child and youth work’ is used, while in French-speaking regions and Italian-speaking Ticino youth work is referred to as ‘socio-cultural animation.’ The type of activities, too, differs between the regions and depends on how the target group(s) are defined. In the French-speaking cantons, socio-cultural animation is

offered to people of all ages, resulting in a broad variety of activities. In Ticino, the target group is often limited to adolescents, increasingly also including children. This is also true for the German-speaking region. The activities on offer here reflect this narrowly defined target group. Youth workers from Ticino and the French- and German-speaking part of Switzerland have different lobbying approaches because the concept of youth work and the roles and tasks vary. The youth worker from the German-speaking region felt it was more useful to talk about lobbying with her colleagues from Germany and Austria, since their lobbying approach is more similar to that experienced by her colleague from the French-speaking region. It would also have been beneficial for her to discuss the issue with other colleagues from the German-speaking cantons. That said, for the French-speaking colleagues it would probably be beneficial to talk about lobbying with colleagues from other French-speaking cantons than with counterparts from France, because in France lobbying may take place under very different circumstances given France’s centralised system of government.

## 3.2.

# ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ – a Flemish perspective

*Geert Boutsen / Inez Adriaensen*

**W**hen our colleagues from the German National Agency asked us to be a partner in the ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ project, at first we hesitated. Would we find the right participants, and would they commit to an intensive learning journey? Would an advanced training course on lobbying skills resonate in the youth sector? In fact, we needn’t have worried. Yes, we did find the right participants and yes, lobbying for youth work and for impactful youth policy is necessary!

Here is a brief insight into how Team Belgium implemented and experienced ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ in Flanders.

### Lobbying for strong local youth work

“The stronger the people,  
the stronger the youth  
policy!”  
Coach Geert

It is clear that lobbying for strong, high-quality youth work at municipal level is essential throughout Europe, and that includes Flanders. By 2016 each Flemish municipality had developed a sectoral youth policy plan with defined aims, objectives, and actions as well as a dedicated budget. Following a political decision in 2016 to give more autonomy directly to municipalities to develop an integrated and more ‘generic’ municipal policy, stand-alone youth policy is now a thing of the past.

This has meant there is a risk that municipalities will invest less in youth policy and take insufficient account of the voices and needs of children and young people in different policy domains. On top of that, as in many European countries, the current Minister of Youth is the second consecutive minister to have to deal with budget cuts in his domain.

Reasons enough to prepare local youth officers and youth workers to lobby on behalf of the youth work community and to engage in and influence youth policy development and implementation.

### Five times a clear big ask

“For the first time in my  
career, I had a plan.”  
Evy

Five Flemish municipal youth officers delved into the project with much eagerness to learn and share – in fact, they are committed to the project to this day. Each of them started with a clear big ask stemming from a local need, namely the ability to support young people and youth (work) policy within their municipalities.

To illustrate the diversity of each of these big asks, a very short summary follows, in the knowledge that it does no justice to the richness and multi-perspective of the participants’ respective projects:

- Evy, who works in youth services in the small municipality of Keerbergen, wanted her local council to hire an extra full-time team member, so they would have all the resources they need to create a child-friendly municipality. By the way: you can read her full story in this brochure;
- Laura’s ambition was to achieve a child-friendly reflex in each of the policy domains in the city of Sint-Niklaas, supported by the ‘Friends of the Youth’ network;
- When Karen changed position within the municipal administration of the city of Mechelen, she wanted to ensure that her legacy and years of expertise in child-friendliness would be preserved and embedded within the youth service department;
- Leen wanted to establish a strong youth participation scheme for vulnerable youngsters in the city of Leuven under a policy that would go beyond organising a one-off project with politicians talking to youngsters;
- Bruno’s municipality of Evergem is part of a regional network of municipalities. He wanted to secure the financial future of the regional youth service and the continuation of its ‘child-friendly’ label.

During the project, all participants worked hard towards their goals, supported by all the insights they obtained during the modules and from their peers. Some of them clearly achieved their big ask, others had to revise their plans – but all of them achieved really tangible results and sustainable changes within their municipality.

### A mix of national and international learning

“The power of international co-operation strongly supported my own project within this project.”

Leen

Bringing youth work professionals together on a long-term journey delivered a clear added value – they developed together and learned in an international context, starting, as said above, from a clear personal ‘big ask’.

The international modules gave them space to learn, away from their daily routine, allowing them to focus fully on developing their own ambition, step by step. Being able to reflect on their big asks with others was inspiring. While collaboration with the other Flemish participants often takes place in familiar contexts – which is certainly handy – an exchange with international participants allowed them to explore the diversity of youth work in Europe and helped put their own stories into perspective.

In parallel to the international process, the Belgian National Agency JINT decided to ask an external coach with the right expertise to come on board and support the Flemish participants throughout the project. We were lucky to find Geert Boutsen, a man with the right background: he has been working for years as a lecturer in social work at UC Leuven Limburg. In a previous life he was a municipal youth officer and coach in several organisations. So he offered

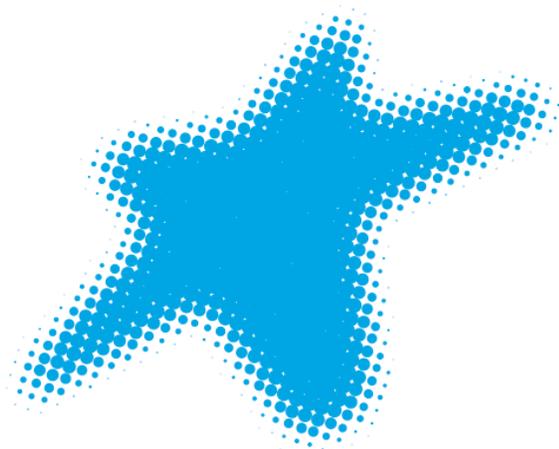
the ideal combination of practical and theoretical experience as a researcher in youth work and youth (work) policy and coaching.

As our ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ coach, Geert provided much appreciated group support and personal coaching to each of the five Flemish participants. The group met in between each module to prepare their ‘homework’ together and share positive developments as well as obstacles within their own projects. This intensive peer support allowed them to become (and remain) each other’s sounding boards, fierce supporters, and ... friends.

### Sharing is caring

This strong supportive national process also helped communicate the outcomes of ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ to a wider audience of municipal youth officers and local youth workers. Bataljong, the Flemish umbrella organisation of youth officers, youth policy-makers and youth councils at local level, closely monitored the project, providing us with a platform to present the project and the power of lobbying at various events for network members. We also published a long article in their spring 2021 magazine on the project outcomes and lobbying essentials. In other words, this was a perfect way to raise awareness of the fact that the youth sector, too, needs lobbying (which is not a dirty word).

And yes, this first edition of ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ convinced us completely that we will again find the right participants for the next international edition of ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’, which starts in autumn 2021. And it will definitely once again be an extremely valuable learning journey for all of us.



### 3.3.

## ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ – a Latvian perspective

*Nils Mosejonoks*

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Youth work in Latvia has been changing over the past few years. Developing youth work at the local level has become a core priority for the Latvian Agency for International Programmes for Youth (Latvian NA), with the help of the long-term strategic partnership project ‘Europe Goes Local’. Thanks to ‘Europe Goes Local’, over the past few years several municipalities have produced high-quality planning documents for local youth policy, participated in international activities, and received support from mentors and supervisors in their day-to-day work.

The Latvian National Agency joined the ‘Lobbying for Youth work’ project together with two partners - the municipality of Aluksne and the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments. This helped highlight the role of lobbyists at both local and national level.

Eva Aizupe, director of the Centre for Children and Youth, and youth specialist Una Tomina share here how Aluksne municipality experienced the project.

“The municipality of Aluksne, population 14,000, is located about 200 km from the capital Riga. By participating in the project, the municipality intended to renew and reorganise the district’s youth council in a move to encourage more young people to take part in decision-making. It was important to develop a plan and establish a communication

network, since the youth council format had been attempted several times but without success. While there was little resistance to its re-establishment, it was also clear that such a council was needed in Aluksne county. We learned a great deal about how to build a communication network, how to carry out feasibility studies, and how important fact-based communication is. Over the course of the project, we realised that the previous council had consisted of young people from several municipalities in the county, who had difficulty getting into town for appointments, and that the decision-making process had not been carried out, although the policy planning documents and development objectives stipulated its creation and operation. In our strategy, we also included communication with young people as well as deputies, by creating an interested group of young people from the two largest municipal schools. The aim was to popularise the idea among young people and set up informal meetings between young people and decision-makers to break stereotypes and remove their fear of speaking. Indeed, informal coffee breaks between decision-makers and young people have played an important role.

The main outcome of the project is that meetings have taken place with the young people concerned and their views on the functioning

of the youth council. Two face-to-face meetings have been held with young people and decision-makers. The main setbacks are clearly the Covid-19 pandemic, which interrupted the examination of the appointments and necessary corrections to the rules, as well as the further development of the council's activities. Nevertheless, additional meetings were organised outside, and we also plan to organise a youth forum after the project concludes, inviting young people interested in the activities of the youth council to join a working group, allowing the council to operate on a regular basis in the future.”

Despite the important role played by the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, which communicates the views of local governments to the national level, the Latvian National Agency had not yet co-operated with this organisation. The ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ project led to the creation of a co-operation platform, which in turn helped initiate a long-standing project – the establishment of the Latvian Youth Workers Association.

Zane Zvaigzne, the youth specialist of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, shares her project experience here:

“The Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) aimed to establish a Youth Workers Association within the framework of this project. To achieve this goal, it wanted to explore the nature and functioning of existing LALRG associations, to obtain

data on the youth field from the Ministry of Education and to analyse it, to identify the most active Latvian municipalities, and to call for involvement. Although the tasks were defined quite clearly, not everything went according to plan.

In pursuing the above aims, the first obstacle was the realisation that an association like this cannot be formed within the framework of the LALRG. There is a potential for conflict of interest, since the opinions of the municipal leadership do not always coincide with the views of young people. Any association would have to be established as an independent body; a fact that required thinking about additional organisational aspects, such as funding, location, administration, etc. LALRG conducted a survey on the need for a youth workers association (with one third of municipalities responding).

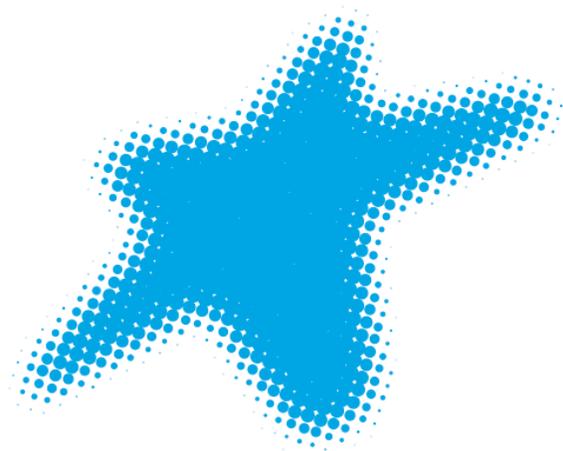
The survey clearly demonstrated that there were common potential objectives and challenges that should be addressed by the new association. The survey had just been finalised in the spring when the Covid-19 pandemic began. Originally, there was the idea that online appointments could be organised, but it seemed more useful to wait because meetings face-to-face seemed more valuable.

The first working group for youth specialists was organised in September 2020, in which potential leaders of the new association

met. They started to discuss the need for the association to be open to all those involved in working with young people. Further meetings were held in remote mode and are still ongoing. Participants actively engage in discussions and share ideas developed in an on-line environment. The association itself is still in the formation stage, but we are sure it will eventually be established.

In general, the project has been a major challenge but also a very valuable training process for the LALRG staff. It is hoped that the outcomes will be valuable for youth workers and young people in general, helping lobbying and advocacy in the youth field in Latvia improve.”

The Latvian NA’s participation in ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ also helped select the theme of the annual national conference, entitled ‘Next Step of Youth Work’, in 2020. The conference focused on lobbying and how it can help develop youth work at local and national level. Around 140 participants attended the conference, including the Minister of Education of Latvia, who also participated in the discussion session, which gave an important impulse for youth policy at the national level. The Latvian NA looks forward to further strengthening youth work interests at local and national level with a variety of lobbying strategies.



## 3.4.

## ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ – a German perspective

*Claudius Siebel*

The initiative for the European training course ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ came from Germany. Between 2013 and 2015, the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate had carried out a first regional pilot project that yielded exceptionally promising results. To JUGEND für Europa, Germany’s National Agency for the EU’s Erasmus+ Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes, it made sense to transfer the experience made with the German project to the European level. The opportunity came in connection with ‘Europe Goes Local’, a European project with almost 200 partners and over 120 participating towns and cities that serves to improve the quality of local youth work. The issue of training experts and of the role they play in raising the profile and improving the position of youth work in the policy debate is key in this context. The German participants in ‘Europe Goes Local’ were hence invited to join the ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ course, too.

The participants were motivated to embark on the course in particular because they recognised the significance of lobbying in the context of youth work (especially open youth work). Amongst other things, they wanted to learn how to communicate youth work issues and concerns more effectively towards local decision-making bodies. Given its European setting, the training course was also an opportunity for them to look beyond their own national contexts and connect with their European counterparts. However, possibly the strongest motivation was the opportunity to step

out of their routines to question existing practices, discuss them with their European peers, and then draw up local action plans.

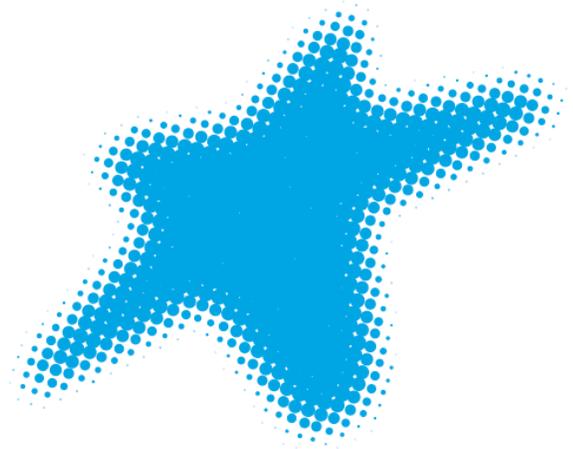
The projects that the German participants brought to the table reflect the diversity of youth work. They ranged from plans to influence the design and use of public spaces surrounding a youth centre or the integration of international youth work in local child and youth support plans to the setup of a long-term local youth participation scheme as well as, more generally, activities to strengthen and sharpen the profile of (open) youth work at the local level.

Looking at the German context, it became clear that designing concrete and feasible lobbying projects is no easy task, not least given a lack of time. The participants realised that applying and integrating the course curriculum (in)to their daily work would require extensive resources, to which not all of them have consistent and sufficient access.

That being said, all participants felt the training course had been enormously helpful. For one, all of them said they were more aware of the necessity of turning lobbying into an integral part of their work. While some felt that “intuitively, we probably already have been doing mostly the right thing”, they all planned to take a more reflected and deliberate approach to lobbying from now on. In addition, the course helped address the negative connotations of lobbying to some

extent. Participants said that in future, they would plan and apply activities and strategies in a more deliberate and considered manner. Now, they benefit from a set of methods that help them act more strategically, such as the structured collection and analysis of data or the production of a network map etc. Participants' enhanced confidence in their own skills and competences will allow them to demonstrate more confidence in their day-to-day work and defend their opinions, ideas and positions.

All things considered, the German participants felt their expectations had been met. While the backing they received from the project organisers and the National Agency was a success factor, future training courses should benefit from more sustained and sustainable organisational support (e.g. from a project coach). For a large country, such as Germany, organising regular national meetings was a challenge, so in future consideration should be given to the use of digital meeting and communication technologies.



4.

*Stories about  
successful lobbying*

## 4.1.

# How lobbying saved my career

*Evvy Huybrechts*

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**A**t the start of the ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ training programme I was a close to being burnt out youth servant working for the small municipality of Keerbergen, Belgium. For years I spent my days doing too much for not enough results, rushing from the organisation of one event to the next without having a moment to spare to set real goals or achieve anything meaningful for the young people in my municipality. No matter how hard I worked, I always felt like I could never really get to the essence of my job: to make our community as child-friendly as possible.

I knew something was wrong, but I had no idea how to fix it. So in an attempt to solve this problem, I turned to various team leaders and decision-makers for guidance. Long story short: I ended up wasting many years complaining that they needed to change something instead of changing it myself. By the end of 2018 I wasn’t just a little frustrated that I was stuck in a job that had more to do with the event business than with youth policy, I was downright questioning myself as a youth servant and whether or not I was the right person in the right place to begin with.

But then I received an e-mail.

From the moment I read the call for this training course I knew I had to enrol, even if back then I couldn’t define the term ‘lobbying’ to save my life. I instinctively knew this was going to be the game changer I so desperately needed to turn things around. At the very least it was my last attempt before

giving up completely. Little did I know it would turn out to be the greatest thing I have ever done for my career as a youth servant.

One of the many things I learnt during this course is that preparation is key. I therefore left the first international meeting with a game plan that would lead me to my dream goal: getting my local council to hire an extra team member to work full-time for team youth. That way, one of us would be able to focus on the activities and the other could focus on strategy and lead the way to a child-friendly municipality.

The game plan consisted of three major steps:

1. To transform the youth council from a non-efficient sleeping entity to a meaningful one that could function as a partner in crime for team youth (which was at this point still a one-woman team) and help me perform steps 2 and 3;
2. To conduct a perception study among the children and adolescents in the municipality to get an overview of their needs (in co-operation with the new and improved youth council);
3. To present the results of this perception study as a set of new goals to the local council and convince them that we needed an extra team member to achieve these goals.

The first step would be relatively easy, but given my busy schedule step 2 would be a challenge. I would really have to figure out a way to squeeze this big project in and therefore had very high hopes for the new and improved youth council.

Looking back at my lobbying project and this game plan, I now realise that the steps in themselves were not necessarily the most important part of my plan. The most important part was the fact that for the first time in my career I actually had a plan. And it showed. As I worked through the steps, not only did key people in my network start to notice me, they also complimented me on my work on many occasions and started inviting me to important meetings.

I was well on my way to completing step 1 when the COVID-19 pandemic brought everything to a standstill. From one day to the next I was organising emergency childcare and face mask distribution while volunteering at a medical test centre. Lobbying had disappeared into the background – or so I thought.

Not long after the first lockdown I received another e-mail. Our director-general wanted to see me and discuss my ‘vision for youth policy in our municipality’. The old I would have gone into that talk with zero preparation. The new me would not be caught dead in that meeting without being fully prepared. The result was as wonderful as it was astonishing: the organisation chart would be modified in the near future, and I was asked to give my expert opinion on how the youth department would be structured. I was the first person he consulted on this matter. Not my team leader, not my alderman. Me. He wanted my expert opinion. Thank god for preparation!

The old I would have called this luck. But the old me also would not have thought it through and still would have ended up with a result she would not truly be satisfied with. Enter that burnout I mentioned further up. The new I, however, knows that when it comes to lobbying, timing is everything, and I see opportunity when it presents itself. This time, the opportunity was a progressive new director-general combined with the departure of a key colleague. I grabbed it with both hands and did not let go.

I may have skipped some steps in my original game plan, but that does not mean I did not put in the work. Every step I took over the past two years brought me back to that meeting with the director-general. I believe that I paved a way by planting certain seeds, while knowing what I needed to say or do and when to say or do it. That path made it easier for key figures to accept my vision when it mattered most.

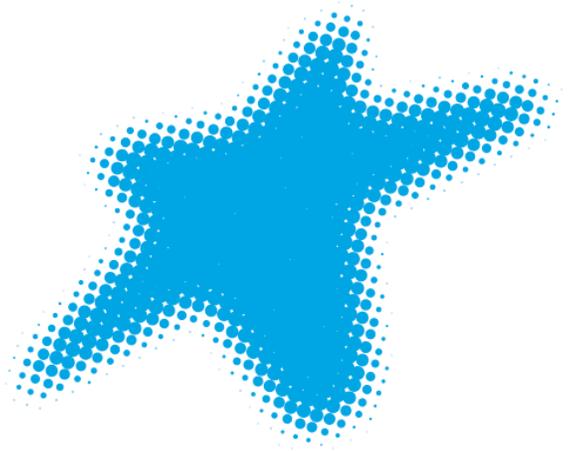
As I have mentioned in this essay, there are many things I learnt during this lobbying course: the importance of defining goals and planning, of speaking up, but also of knowing when to stay silent, of doing research and finding key data, of preparation and communication. I have also benefited a lot from the connection and exchange with other youth servants during the training course. They helped me put things in perspective, gave me valuable feedback and advice on my game plan and steps taken, and continue to inspire me every day.

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But above all, the single most important thing I learnt during this programme and the one thing that got me to where I am today is to once again believe in myself. Spending time with colleagues and experts, who I look up to, helped me regain the confidence I lost somewhere along the way. Today, I no longer doubt my position as a youth servant and I strongly believe that I am fully capable of doing this beautiful job. That is by far the number one thing I take home from this course and the achievement that I cherish most. Everything else is a bonus.

On 14 December 2020 my local council agreed to hire the extra team member I wanted.

I already have the next game plan in mind. And thanks to this training programme, I now know I got this.



## 4.2.

# How international youth work in Tyrol can be developed and professionalised

*Kadri Villem and Martina Steiner*

In preparation for the first ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ training module in February 2019 we considered which lobbying project we could implement at the local level during the training course. As the two non-profit organisations *POJAT* and *komm!unity* are both active in the field of open youth work, it was clear from the start that we wanted to work together. We decided to focus on international youth work, specifically ESC volunteering projects, because we wanted to strengthen co-operation in this area across Tyrol, learn from each other, and join forces to improve the quality of volunteering projects in the context of open youth work in our region. *komm!unity*, which is based in the city of Wörgl, has organised projects under the EU’s youth programmes Erasmus+ Youth in Action and European Solidary Corps and hosted volunteers since 2008. In 2019, *POJAT* took over the co-ordination of five ESC volunteers placed in various youth centres in and around Innsbruck.

In the beginning it was not easy to define an actual lobbying project and set precise aims. However, thanks to feedback from the course instructors, our team coaches and other participants, we were able to firm up our plans and define so-called SMART aims in three dimensions: youth participation, youth work, and local youth policy. The methodological approach of the training course, thorough expertise, and a good introduction to lobbying in the youth work context meant we were well prepared for implementing the project in its three dimensions.

### Youth participation

We set out to develop and organise a workshop for incoming ESC volunteers in Tyrol to introduce them to the methods and principles of professional open youth work and discuss the role of the volunteers in this context. Over the years, a recurring theme at the beginning of the *komm!unity* volunteering projects was the difficulty for volunteers to find their place in the youth centres and understand professional open youth work. This was often because their expectations and experience of youth work in their home countries was different from what they saw here in Austria.

The first workshop took place in November 2019 in Innsbruck. All six volunteers currently volunteering in youth centres in Tyrol took part. The feedback from the volunteers was positive; they found it helpful personally and for their volunteering work. A long-term outcome of this project was that we now have a workshop concept that can be used as a kick-off event at the beginning of every volunteering year.

The main challenge in this regard was the COVID-19 pandemic. As volunteering project co-ordinators, we had to figure out how to keep the projects running during lockdown (spring 2020) when many youth centres had to close. In this crisis we were happy to have the co-operation and the group spirit among the volunteers that was already tangible at the kick-off workshop and subsequent in-person meetings. In this situation, *komm!unity* and *POJAT* were able to sup-



port each other better thanks to the ongoing lobbying project. We organised weekly Zoom meetings with the volunteers and put up an international volunteers blog.

### Youth work

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In the field of youth work, our original goal was to conduct a survey among the youth workers from hosting organisations in Tyrol to get to know their needs and challenges as well as the benefits and opportunities for youth workers / organisations hosting ESC volunteers. Working towards that goal, we consulted colleagues from our organisations and concluded that rather than a survey or written research, a face-to-face meeting with youth workers to discuss these topics would be a more suitable way to achieve the goal. In January 2020, we hosted a meeting with representatives of all five hosting organisations (*komm!unity* & four organisations co-ordinated by *POJAT*) to evaluate the volunteering projects and share experiences. We performed a collaborative analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the volunteering projects in youth centres at the organisational level. This delivered many insights and sparked a fruitful discussion among the youth workers, who also shared practical tips and ways to tackle possible problems. We found the discussion to be urgently necessary, and it was a beneficial experience for all participants to get together. Generally, while European volunteers meet often and network with each other to discuss their experiences, there are not many formal opportunities for youth workers and organisations to exchange experiences at the local level. The main outcome was a stronger network of ESC hosting and co-ordinating organisations in Tyrol.

### Local youth policy

This field was most challenging for us to tackle regarding our lobbying project. Our concrete goal was to present and discuss the results of the youth workers meeting in a *POJAT* youth conference to stimulate interest from other organisations about EU youth projects and start to develop criteria for hosting ESC volunteers in youth centres. We realised that in addition to the European Solidarity Corps handbook, concrete standards and guidelines are needed in open youth work to encourage local institutions to host European volunteers, take part in European Solidarity Corps programmes, receive funding, and gain international experience.

### Summary

This training provided us the framework for our project and enabled us to:

- Co-operate and learn from each other at an organisational level between *komm!unity* and *POJAT*;
- Improve the support for European volunteers in open youth work in Tyrol and in turn enhance the quality of ESC volunteering projects in open youth work in general;
- Evaluate the position of the hosts at youth centres and create tools for them to use;
- Make ESC visible to other youth workers and youth organisations and show them that joining the programme is not as hard as they might have thought.

# 5. *Reflection and outlook*

*Werner Lindner and Claudius Siebel*

As already mentioned (see Lindner: ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ – some conceptual approaches underlying the project), the EU lobbying project was modelled on two similar German projects in Rhineland-Palatinate and Thuringia, a comparison of which reveals both similarities (section I) and new insights (section II).

## 50 I. Similar experiences from German projects on policy development that were made with the EU project:

1. The first insight that is comparable to one from the German projects is that there is a certain amount of staff turnover (in the EU project both among the participants and the National Agencies) that impacts negatively on the continuity of project work. This fluctuation is for the most part due to the generally fairly fragile working situation in child and youth work and will probably have to be considered when planning future projects;
2. Another similarity is the difficulty that practitioners consistently have in incorporating the project into their own typically busy schedules and in setting aside enough time and attention for it;
3. It was very obvious that the success of a project like this depends heavily on the direct support from local structures (networks, willingness to co-operate, administrative and political backing), and the quality thereof;
4. Also, it was clear that given the intended, ideally well integrated target levels of a) young people, b) youth work, and c) (local) youth policy-makers, the level involving young people and youth participation was occasionally overlooked; certainly their relevance to the project was barely given explicit attention;

5. Finally, neither project type convincingly succeeded in creating strong and direct communication channels for supporting, analysing and evaluating lobbying with politicians and decision-makers.

## II. New insights from the EU project and recommendations for potential follow-up projects

It should be said that the EU pilot project was largely influenced by the expertise generated by the German projects and the experts, who participated in them; when preparing the EU project, it turned out that identifying potential experts with comparable expertise was a challenge. For instance, it was a challenge to identify individuals from the EU partner countries, who offered expertise in strategic lobbying, networking, and communication.

A potential follow-up project would benefit from the involvement of selected participants from the pilot project as well as local (youth) policy-makers.

As regards these matters, agreement should be sought with the partner countries as early as possible concerning which experts to involve; where possible, they should be experienced individuals, who have already been involved in similar projects.

The roles and responsibilities of the participating National Agencies should be even better defined, and the Agencies should demonstrate greater commitment and continuity when it comes to fulfilling them.

As regards item 3 above, it is necessary to provide support and advice to the projects locally, too. Ideal-

ly, project participants should already have, or be able to create, a local network that can optimise and support their work on the ground and, if staff turnover is an issue (see item 1), can fill any gaps.

The (involuntary) experiences made during the Coronavirus pandemic can be leveraged to organise online meetings in addition to on-site working group meetings and workshops, which would help participants communicate more effectively and consistently. A follow-up project could generally be more effective if online tools and online communication were incorporated as a way to get participants more involved in scheduling and the division of tasks.

Aspects that did not receive sufficient attention included youth policy and youth work debates and structures in participants' home countries and a discussion of how these influence their attempts to adapt their lobbying activities to local/regional circumstances.

Of major consequence for the quality of the project (and in turn, for its sustainability) was the comparatively long project term of approximately two years, with alternating theoretical, practical, and reflection/evaluation phases. That being said, the long overall duration of the project and the lengthy intervals between the in-person meetings were a challenge for the participants. Consideration should be given to shortening the total project length and reducing the amount of time between the modules.

What should not be forgotten is the fundamentally experimental character of this project, which is marked by a strong tolerance for errors and a pronounced capacity for reflection.

Another important consideration is to ensure a minimum level of consistency inside the group of participants as regards their training and professionalism (e.g. a shared understanding of youth work based on the European Charter on Local Youth Work) as well as a certain level of English language skills. The way the group of learners is composed is another quality and success factor that can boost motivation.

It is strongly advised that the aspects mentioned in the last paragraph, in particular, be considered.

On balance, regardless of the widely varying circumstances and differing realities in the participating countries, the European character of the training course can be said to have been exceptionally beneficial. It was a highly promising opportunity to compare and contrast youth work situations and practices across countries. Plus, having a European group of learners is a major motivational factor. Stepping out of one's working environment and comparing colleagues' situations to one's own is an inspiring exercise that opens up new horizons. All this is taking place against the backdrop of a vibrant and, recently, highly dynamic European debate around youth work that is grounded on the European Youth Strategies (2009-2018 and 2019-2027), the European Youth Work Conventions (2010, 2015, and 2020), and the recently adopted European Youth Work Agenda. The debate has generated a great deal of political tailwind for youth work in Europe, which now needs to be applied to the national and local levels.

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# Annex

## ‘Lobbying for Youth Work’ – European Advanced Training

### Overview of activities

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#### January / February 2019

##### **National PREP MEETINGS (online or face-to-face):**

- Getting to know each other
- Exchanging on local realities
- National objectives and motivation for this training (by the NA and the participants)
- Discussing homework/prep for MODULE 1

#### 25–28/02/2019 – Bonn, Germany

##### **MODULE 1**

- Introduction
- Political aspects of youth work
- Youth work in Europe
- SWOT analysis
- Lobbying for youth work
- Objectives for the local projects

#### October 2019

##### **WEBINAR 2**

##### **IMPLEMENTATION**

- Project check: Participants send their project plans in beforehand, an expert gives structured feedback during the webinar
- Q&A to expert(s) and among peers

#### March 2020

##### **WEBINAR 3**

##### **IMPLEMENTATION**

- Project check: Participants prepare a progress report and send it in beforehand, an expert gives structured feedback
- Q&A to expert(s) and among peers

**April 2019**

**WEBINAR 1**

Input from practice – participants in the first pilot training in Germany share their concrete experiences and discuss them with the new participants

**26–29/05/2019 – Vienna, Austria**

**MODULE 2**

- Expert input on networking
- Communication with politicians and decision-makers
- Network analysis
- Action plans

**29–30/10/2020 – online**

**MODULE 3**

**HARVESTING**

- sharing results and lessons learnt
- Transferring knowledge gained into daily practice
- Dissemination plan and follow-up
- Evaluation of process/project

**Autumn 2021 (optional)**

**FOLLOW-UP MEETING**

Exchange and reflection on the lobbying projects (one year later)







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As in all areas where decisions are taken that have an impact on people, it pays off to actively intervene, represent target groups' interests and influence political decisions, especially at the local level – an activity commonly referred to as lobbying. That said, the youth work community often seems unaware of the importance of lobbying; another common issue is the lack of necessary resources and expertise on the part of youth work experts. A pilot project set out to change that. The contributions in this publication tell its story of sharpening the profile of youth work, improving its position and visibility at the political level, and empowering the youth work community to engage in lobbying.

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