

Call for researchers

Study on the topic of innovation in youth work

MOVIT, Slovenian National Agency for Erasmus+, youth field, and the European Solidarity Corps, on behalf of the European Academy on Youth Work (EAYW) partnership, is looking for two consultants to carry out a study on innovation in youth work in the framework of the EAYW. The study will include a compilation of existing findings on the topic as well as research based on a sample of youth workers from different countries across Europe.

Context

The study should be developed and carried out in the framework of the European Academy on Youth Work (EAYW). The EAYW was initiated in 2018 by a group of National Agencies for Erasmus+, youth field, and the European Solidarity Corps with the aim to support innovation in youth work and youth work policy and to promote the development of quality youth work. It was created to offer a regular platform for reflection on hot European topics with relevance to the youth field, current developments and future trends, for exchange and knowledge gathering on creative and innovative youth work practices, tools and instruments, and for dissemination and exploitation of results of studies and research as well as youth work policies. The first edition of the EAYW took place in May 2019 in Slovenia; a second edition is planned for autumn 2021. More information: www.eayw.net

Intention of this study

Current knowledge about the meaning and role of innovation in youth work and its influencing factors is still relatively limited. Based on the assumption that innovative approaches and readiness to react to ongoing changes and developments are needed to respond effectively to young people's changing needs and interests in today's changing societies, the EAYW aims to produce evidence- and knowledge-based input into discussions among stakeholders in youth work coming from policy, research, practice and related fields, about how to stimulate further innovative developments in youth work and youth policy.

Based on a compilation of existing findings about innovation and current trends in youth work and youth workers' needs and challenges in this regard, including those coming from the 1st EAYW event in 2019, but also existing knowledge about innovation from other contexts, the study should explore further which factors stimulate or hinder innovation in the context of youth work.

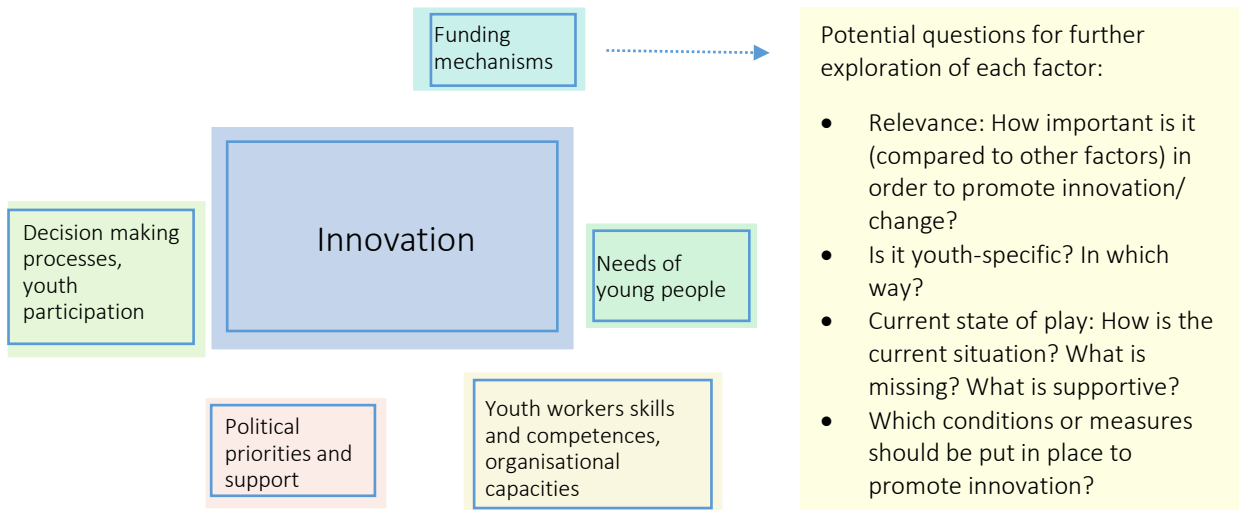
Research objectives and draft concept

The core of the research should be what is described under point a) below. It will be further defined with the research team to what extent it is feasible to include points b) and c) into the research at this stage.

- a) **The main purpose of the research is to develop a proposal for model that explores conditions and measures that youth workers need in order to be able to develop innovative approaches in their work.**

Which conditions or measures drive youth workers to develop something new, creative, innovative? Which elements hinder innovation? What kinds of conditions do youth workers and youth organisations need to have in order to be better able to make changes in their organisation or environment?

As visualised by the image below, the idea is to compile a list of potential influencing factors as a basis for further study (while being open for other factors to be added on during the study), asking what role they are playing and what makes them specific or not in the context of youth work.



Picture: Idea of a model of innovation in youth work with examples of influencing factors

b) Taking a look at innovation in relation to ethics/values

For stakeholders in youth work, being able to act as change-makers, create something new, or create conditions for doing so is important in order to react to changing needs of young people and society and to develop more quality in youth work. At the same time, not every innovation is necessarily leading to positive change as such. (E.g. the current corona crisis is promoting digitalisation that might potentially replace, to some extent, physical meetings also after the end of the crisis. This development responds to a current need, but has upsides and downsides, depending on the perspective taken and the underlying objectives and interests to support this development.) Asking when innovation is positive and worth supporting is a question that is presumably context-specific, political and value-based. (Should innovative approaches lead to ... more inclusion, youth participation, cost-effectiveness, green youth work, digital youth work...?)

In the context of this study, a first step to approaching this issue could be taken by including the question of why, the need and motivation for stimulating or supporting change: What is the motivation of the youth workers participating in the study to develop innovative approaches? What is the need they see for innovation of their work, or their context of youth work? What kind of change would they like to see, and why?

- c) Drawing on existing literature and research also from other fields should be important to see if there is a need for a **specific definition of what is innovation in the context of youth work** (or maybe a few)¹.

¹ According to first tentative outcomes of a study currently carried out by RAY, for many youth workers, innovation as a concept or term is not clear (more often, they seem to be talking about “promoting change”).

The youth workers that will take part in the study, should be asked to explain, if/how their work, particular project or approach is innovative, what they understand by “innovation”, and what, in their opinion, makes their work innovative for this context. This could also be the starting point for creating a framework for reflection that helps to identify if/when something is innovative or not for a certain (e.g. geographical or social) context.

- d) Finding out more about **how innovation is spread**, and suggesting how it can be spread more effectively (in the youth work community of practice) is a related question, which can probably only be tackled in a very limited way inside this study. However, it is important as a follow up question. Which mechanisms need to be put in place to support dissemination of innovative practices, approaches, developments etc.? ²

Target group for the study are stakeholders in youth work and related fields. (It remains to be seen if this needs to be defined more clearly).

Considerations regarding methodology

1. **Desk research**, reviewing existing literature on the topic, will be an important first step in order to build on already existing findings about innovation also in other fields in order to find out what is specific for the youth work context. Connections with current studies about related issues could be further explored. On this basis, a **model of factors influencing innovation** (hypothesis) should be drafted.
2. Further research should **verify and further explore the model based the responses of a selected sample of youth workers**, asking them what is helping and what is hindering them to be change makers. The sample will include youth workers from approximately 10 different countries (around 50 youth workers in total). The sample will not be representative, but the selection of youth workers to be included should be based on a series of criteria (such as interest in innovative practices, inclusivity/involvement of marginalised groups in the overall sample, practice-research-policy links etc., to be defined by the research project team).

The youth workers that will be taking part in this research will be identified (according to the defined criteria) by the participating National Agencies in their country. The research itself should be carried out centrally. Countries covered by the research: Belgium (FL), Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy (tbc), Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, E+ Partner countries of the Western Balkans (specific WB countries tbc).

3. The concrete research questions and methodological approach will be defined by the research project team. Following desk research, a **survey** covering the whole sample **of study participants** should be envisaged as a next step to create a basis for further investigation. This should be followed by **interviews or focus groups to gain more in-depth insights**.
4. **Verification of outcomes**: It might be expected that the perspectives and reflections of the participants of the study are influenced by the exceptional current situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic and their estimation of the impact this situation might have on youth work in the future. In order to

² Recent findings suggest that wider dissemination of innovative outcomes is not much happening in the framework of KA2 projects, at least partially due to lack of funding for this purpose.

give some stability to the findings of the study beyond this momentary situation, a second interaction with the same sample of persons should be envisaged to take place in early summer 2021 (to find out if they would answer the questions in the same way or if their reflections have changed due to ongoing developments etc.).

5. Conclusions of this research are expected to further develop existing knowledge about the role of identified factors influencing innovation in the context of youth work and about measures and conditions that (could more effectively) promote innovation. The research outcomes should further be reflected in the light of potentially discernible differences between regions/countries in Europe or other relevant geographical or social environments.

Use of the study

Following the purpose of the EAYW to support innovation in youth work, the research findings should serve as a basis for further discussion and reflection during the 2nd EAYW event planned for autumn 2021. The research should further be a tool for supporting innovation in different youth work and youth policy contexts. A model of factors influencing innovation would be helpful and offer an easy point of access in different contexts and environments (e.g. at national level, in the context of KA2 projects, etc.). It could also be developed further. It will be important that the research outcomes can be used flexibly (e.g. in view of what kinds of developments in youth work are we exploring).

Profile of Consultants and Submission of Expressions of Interest

Researchers/consultants with experience in European youth work related research as well as researchers/consultants with experience in topics related to innovation, current trends and developments in other fields are welcome to submit an Expression of Interest.

The study should be carried out and written in English.

Expressions of Interest should be submitted at [this link](#) at the latest by 30th June 2020 and include the following information:

- motivation / interest in this project
- professional profile, highlighting expertise and experience of relevance for this study (connected to the nature of the tasks and the topic and context of the call).
- example(s) of former studies, work products or projects related to the nature and topic of this call, including links to relevant publications
- availability during the summer and autumn months (please indicate longer periods of absence)
- additional comments or reflections about the research project, your approach or anything else you would like to let us know

Tasks and payment

Payment per consultant: **5.000 – 6.000 EUR** for the first part of the study (process covered until end 2020 as indicated in the draft time frame below), depending on the final concept of the research and distribution of tasks. Remuneration for the second phase of the research will be negotiated on the basis of agreed process and tasks.

The implementation of the study is coordinated by the EAYW project coordinator in close communication with the EAYW Steering Group (National Agencies that are partners in the EAYW project).

Tasks should be shared between the two consultants recruited for this project on an equal basis, unless otherwise agreed in the team.

Tentative time frame

By when	What
Mid-July	1st meeting of research project team (online): definition of research objectives, questions, methodology and criteria for identification of study participants, definition and division of tasks
Mid-August	Desk research (literature review), report of findings, drafting model of innovation in youth work (hypothesis) Drafting of research concept and outline and draft survey questions
August	2nd meeting of research team (confirming research concept and model on the basis of desk research and participants identified so far, preparation of next steps (esp. survey questions)
Mid-July till end-August	Identification and recruitment of study participants (by National Agencies and EAYW coordinator)
	Research phase 1 (further team meetings/communication to be decided)
September	Survey implementation
Beginning Oct	Survey report
October	Interviews/focus groups (preparation of questions, implementation)
Beginning Nov	Report of interviews / focus groups
End Nov	Combined report of findings of phase 1
2021	Research phase 2 (verification of findings)
April 2021	Meeting of research team - planning phase 2 of the research
June 2021	Research phase 2 (second round of survey, interviews or focus groups)
July 2021	Report of phase 2
beg Sept 2021	Combined draft report of findings
end Sept 2021	Final report

All applicants will be informed about the results of the selection by 6 July 2020.

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