

Acknowledgment and recognition of youth work's contribution to social entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has certainly received a lot of political attention in Europe in the past decade. One recent policy document, the “Conclusions on promoting youth entrepreneurship to foster social inclusion of young people”¹¹, adopted by the Council of the EU in May 2014 under the Greek Presidency, emphasizes the important role that enterprises, particularly social enterprises, play in contributing to the general good of society. They do this by giving young people, including those from vulnerable groups, the opportunity to find innovative solutions to the current economic, social and environmental challenges. It is considered that entrepreneurship education and learning should be reinforced, social entrepreneurship should be made more visible and structural barriers to entrepreneurship creation need to be removed by measures taken by both the European Commission and EU Member States. These Conclusions enhance what other important initiatives taken by the European Commission, namely the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan¹² (2013) and the Social Business

Initiative¹³ (2011) call for. The Council conclusions recognize the key role that youth work plays in developing entrepreneurial competences in young people. In the Erasmus+ programme (the main EU financial scheme supporting education, training, youth and sports) entrepreneurship is considered an important transversal competence useful to young people in all areas of life. The Programme aims to promote entrepreneurship education and learning to develop active citizenship, employability and new business creation (including social entrepreneurship).

Has entrepreneurship also gained momentum among youth workers? There is not any doubt that youth workers empower young people through fostering their active citizenship and employability, but can they assist them in setting up their ventures? Firstly, we can recognize that entrepreneurship, in the sense of new business creation, can scare people from the youth work field off. Many youth workers seem to believe that entrepreneurship has no connection with their daily work. They rather associate the term with profit-maximizing activities, incompatible with the principles of youth work, and deem they lack the capacity to help young people become entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship is one of

11 http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142702.pdf

12 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0795:FIN:EN:PDF>

13 http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/social_business/docs/COM2011_682_en.pdf

the most recurrent terms in recent youth-related policy documents and in some people's minds it is just a key word that should be used in project proposals in order to meet the expectations of evaluators to obtain the requested funds.

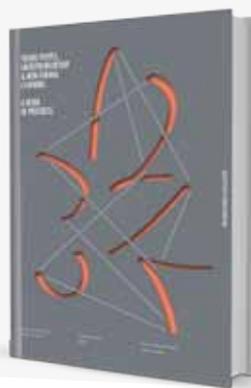
But is there more to entrepreneurship than meets the eye? SALTO-YOUTH Participation has tried to demystify the meaning of entrepreneurship and its connection to youth work and non-formal learning. Through training courses, reflection seminars and publications, the resource centre has contributed to the clarification of the concept and its characteristics and of the role played by youth work in supporting entrepreneurship. It has also assisted youth workers in developing coaching approaches to work on the personal and professional development to improve the employability prospects of young people and be aware of the entrepreneurial learning potential of their work.

The resource centre has identified social entrepreneurship as a way of doing business close to the ethical values of youth work. SALTO Participation now advocates the value of youth work in relation to social entrepreneurship to civil society and policy-makers, collects youth work practices, methods and tools supporting social entrepreneurship and explores the bridges that can be built with other social entrepreneurship support structures/programmes.

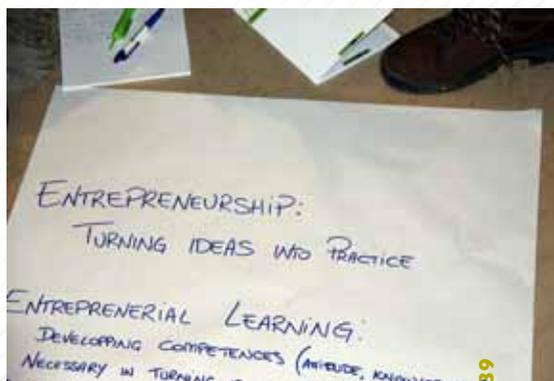
Youth workers cannot transform young people into successful entrepreneurs overnight through short-term activities. Youth workers have a role to play in fostering entrepreneurship, but not by blindly encouraging young people to start their own ventures, as entrepreneurship is certainly not for everyone. There are many ways in which youth work can support entrepreneurship, in addition to enhancing entrepreneurial skills in young people. A few ideas gleaned from the "Young people, entrepreneurship and non-formal learning: A work in progress"¹⁴ book, produced by SALTO Participation in 2014 are worth mentioning here. Youth work can help young people make informed decisions through shedding light on the risks of choosing

¹⁴ <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-2949/010>

SALTO_Participation.web_A%20work%20in%20progress%5B2%5D.pdf



an entrepreneurial career. It can enable more responsible economic behaviours by making young people reflect on the values and ethics of young people's enterprising ideas. Youth work may therefore encourage young people's participation in alternative business models – as actors in the social economy – such as associations, cooperatives, foundations, mutuals and social enterprises. These types of business are in line with the values, practices and attitudes promoted by youth work. They are based on European principles of cooperation, team-work and social impact awareness. These forms of entrepreneurship are of a collective nature, valuing democratic ownership and control of business and participative management.





The youth work field needs to be aware of its capacity to support social entrepreneurship, of its strengths and boundaries, and showcase its role in fostering social entrepreneurial learning with the ultimate goal to help young people and obtain recognition for it.

Youth workers can build entrepreneurial skills and attitudes in young people, design training courses to introduce young people to the social business model, its characteristics, values and factors for success and organise networking activities. They can guide young people to other services that can help them, complementing youth work services: employment offices, specialized training courses, local and regional administrations, funding programmes etc.

Young people engaged in entrepreneurship need to be supported over an extended period of time. They can benefit from being guided throughout the whole process most frequently through coaching and mentoring. Coaching does not require previous social entrepreneurship experience, but requires instead the capacity to motivate young people, enable them to set their goals, discover new possibilities and ways that will lead them there. Mentoring from social entrepreneurs is also beneficial; to inspire young people and share their knowledge and experience. Likewise, partnerships

can be established between local support structures and social entrepreneurs to ensure networking and exchange of information and practice.

Social entrepreneurial learning among young people is a long and thorny process in which many factors are at play. Youth work can certainly be one of them, in close synergy with other actors and young people themselves. Youth work has the privileged role of helping young people to discover their hidden potential and it may as well be that it is not related to entrepreneurship. Whatever that potential might be, youth work needs to be able to explore all possible routes to the personal and professional development of young people.

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SALTO PARTICIPATION RESOURCE CENTRE

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