



by Rita Bergstein

E d u c a t i o n
E d u c a t i o n
E d u c a t i o n
E d u c a t i o n
E d u c a t i o n
E d u c a t i o n
E d u c a t i o n
E d u c a t i o n
E d u c a t i o n

Does Youthpass help you to find a job???

When I was asked to write an article with the focus on answering this question, immediately a lot of aspects popped up in my mind. When starting to map the article it turned out that I want to tackle a lot of aspects and of course raise questions for you the reader. So let me take you on a journey to see what Youthpass is, how it contributes to the current developments in youth policy and education policy developments. Finally I would like to raise questions and find some answers for the sake of young people’s future.

► What is Youthpass?

In theory Youthpass is the official validation instrument to recognise non-formal learning within the Youth in Action programme. In practice it means a lot for the time being. The most important message is that Youthpass is much more than a certificate. Very clearly from the intention of the people involved in developing Youthpass, the process is the key for what we might call successful “Youthpassing”. The Youthpass process is a path from experience to recognition of what is gained; it is a reflection process as an integral part of an activity such as a Youth Exchange, European Voluntary Service project or a training course. Project organisers are dealing with learning in their individual projects – learning at different levels: at the individual, at the group and at the project level. And at the end of such a project including this reflection Youthpass invites participants and the project organisers to evaluate and describe the learning outcomes. This common description finds its place in the Youthpass. Finally the Youthpass Certificate is a document for participants which describes their learning outcome in an understandable way. The European Key Competences provide the framework for the description.

Is this a description you can link to your perception of Youthpass so far? Did you ever discuss it with anybody? Did you have a chance to talk to people who are already working with Youthpass pro-

cesses? What kind of further questions do you have?

► Who receives Youthpass Certificates?

Looking at the reality of Youth exchanges, European Voluntary Service and Training Courses the people who received a Youthpass Certificate so far are:

- Young people from various backgrounds who did or did not finish school, who are doing an apprenticeship, or engaged in another type of training measure...
- Youth workers and youth leaders in various professional or voluntary contexts as well as trainers being active at national and/or European level.

So far more than 45 000 (young) people already received it.

By the way do you know someone who received a Youthpass Certificate? Have you ever asked if he or she has used it already outside the youth field or how he or she thinks about it? Did it change their perception, for instance, in terms of looking at learning?

• Wide Angle



► **Why does Youthpass exist and what are the aims of Youthpass?**

The core idea of the Youthpass development can be clearly linked to the developments of the Lifelong Learning strategy at European level. You will find there a holistic view of learning; taking into account all different kinds of education and learning related to an individual: formal, non-formal and informal. With the Lifelong Learning strategy, the European Union made a clear shift from looking at systems to focus much more on individuals and their personal and professional development. Of course if you look deeper into the programmes and policy initiatives there is a very strong economic dimension behind it too. If you follow these thoughts of course Youthpass has potential to foster employability for the future of young people. Making young people aware of their potential and chances at the individual level, making learning opportunities much more obvious and strengthening their self-esteem, contributes very much to their growth. We turn to answer finally the question “Why then the Youthpass development?” For the initiators it turned out that the whole learning potential of activities within the Youth in Action Programme was not visible at all. This in some areas leads to the insight that not a lot of actors using the Youth in Action Programme were taking part in discussions linked with education policy development or even the development of social policies. But a lot of important and good things are happening in the international youth work field which need to be incorporated in policy discussions and not just at the individual level. So the idea was born to take care of the recognition of individual learning processes, of social recognition of the youth work field, of the contribution to active citizenship and to employability of young people. Obviously in the light of current Lifelong Learning policy, the main focus was given to the individual.

What do you identify as the major learning potential in (international) youth work? What is your experience with making it visible? To what extent do you have the feeling your work is recognised within society? Do you have experience with evaluating young peoples’ activities with a focus on employability?

Having read all this you can draw your attention to several aspects which need to be discussed when looking at Youthpass. Of course you can discuss the educational value of looking at learning in the context of youth work: one can discuss the shift from systems to individual in the policy developments and what this means economically; and you can discuss in general if youth work should anyway be seen in such a context. Here I focus more on the situation of young people and to the

question if Youthpass can help some to create jobs for themselves as entrepreneurs, some to develop their career path to something they really want to do in their life and some to find finally a job and to make a difference in the labour market with the experience and competences they gained?

► **What is the situation of young people in Europe?**

If you have a look into the new “EU strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering” you can find statistical data that 80 % of young people between 25 and 29 have completed secondary education. At the same time one fifth of children do not have basic standards of literacy and numeracy and six million young people leave school without any qualifications. If you go deeper into the statistics – reported by the Member States – you will find much more data which are quite shocking, concerning the social situation of young people and children. But I guess you may have young people in your mind

- who are suffering from not finding any job after following a so-called “good educational path” or a lot of internships – key word «precarious», or
- who are suffering from missing education caused by social problems in the family, or
- who never had different opportunities during their educational path – caused by geographical or social disadvantages.

And at the same time you can find in some Member States that the demographics are seriously problematic as there will not be enough children born in future to stabilise the social systems. To me this is very strange and contradictory when looking at investments in education for all young people, in the effort Member States are making to develop education systems, or providing opportunities to overcome social problems in the countries – which are mainly linked to education policy and social services.

► **The contribution of the youth field to change the situation of young people and to current policy developments**

NGOs working with young people – no matter if they are working with disadvantaged young people or so called “normal” young people - are dealing with their social and educational situation. And young people organise themselves in youth groups and initiatives, no matter where they are coming from or where they are going – sometimes they do it just for fun, sometimes with a good reason for example to change something in society or sometimes even to learn something specific. In all different ways NGOs in the youth work field have a lot of knowledge about the situation of young people – I would say more than anyone else – and in a lot of cases they consciously or unconsciously contribute to the well-being of young people. The young people often know best what goes wrong and what



E d u c a t i o n
 E d u c a t i o n
 E d u c a t i o n
 E d u c a t i o n
 E d u c a t i o n
 E d u c a t i o n
 E d u c a t i o n
 E d u c a t i o n

they would like to change; and on different levels they try to do so. But of course one can ask here immediately if young people are consulted about or involved in changes in society? Are they involved in discussing, creating and developing future policies? Do they really have opportunities to contribute to changes in education policies – in youth policy?

► **One answer is recognition of youth work**

Of course to bring about change and to have influence on changes in society there are a lot of steps needed. We see the Youthpass strategy with its strong emphasis on recognition of non-formal learning and education as one important answer and field of influence within the Youth in Action programme. The different levels of aims focus and foster different levels of impact in society.

Young people taking part in a Youth in Action activity who have the chance to learn a lot, who take a big personal step forward in Europe and maybe in their life have the opportunity to hold a Youthpass Certificate in their hands, should get the opportunity for a conscious learning process and be enabled to talk about their learning. Organisations using the Youthpass process encourage and support young people to recognise and name what they gained in an activity, in a project.

For sure this will contribute to raising their self-confidence. The organisations which have used the Youthpass process in an international partnership have had the opportunity once more to reflect on their contribution to education and learning of young people. And at the same time they use Youthpass maybe in their environment to present their impact on young people's learning to others. They might use it to discuss about the situation of young people, their great work, the resources they need, the wish to contribute in developing a local/regional community further...

Youthpass provides at least an opportunity to look at young people's learning in a different way than the usual "schoolish" one – I am not saying that school is always bad but there are prejudices existing and it will still take a while to change education towards something much more flexible and open. Of course it needs an effort to follow the young person and to

motivate and support him or her to think about their learning, what they want in life and finally to describe their learning outcomes.

With this different approach – developed in the non-formal education context - a different approach to learning and education is available. This is present nowadays in education discussions – at the European level, more and more at national level and sometimes regional and local levels.

Which discussions about development of education policies are you involved in or aware of? How do they look on young people? How do they involve experience gained outside the formal system? How do you think one should make his/her learning in general visible?

So coming back now after this journey into the Youthpass world to the question "Does Youthpass help to find a job?" I guess you imagine that I will say "Yes, of course it does sometimes, but not always and it depends on the situation..." And so let me explain it a bit further here...

“Youthpass provides at least an opportunity to look at young people’s learning in a different way than the usual “schoolish” one”

Quality aspects of Youthpass are raising awareness about learning in an appropriate way, the competence-focus (especially on the Key Competences), the resource-orientation, the dialogue process, the open-result orientation and a focus on first ideas for the future. If these quality elements are realised in a Youth Exchange, EVS project or a Training Course I would say the Youthpass process could be very successful. The person who receives it will be very proud about it and

of course might use it to apply for a job. And then Youthpass might make a difference... So it might help, but it is not an assured effect! ■

• Wide Angle

Contact: 

Bergstein@jfemail.de 