

## **Youth Work and Erasmus+: Joining the dots....**

**A programme that connects all the key elements and puts you and your learning at the heart of it!**

### **Context**

For those who have been involved in both youth work and the 'Erasmus World' for several years will no doubt recall how the 'youth chapter' (as it became known) was introduced at beginning of the last cycle of Erasmus. This was designed to ensure that non-formal education be protected, or at least distinguishable from the rest of the programme due to a fear that youth work might be 'lost' or subsumed as the direct result of what was then nine existing programmes being 'rolled' into one, i.e., Erasmus+.

Youth in Action, its predecessor The YOUTH Programme, and Youth for Europe before that had of course focused specifically on youth work or as it is more often referred to in European circles, non-formal education. It retained a special significance among the wider youth work fraternity across Europe as it provided invaluable opportunities for 'the profession' to not only engage on a trans-national basis but to design, develop and implement a range of projects that were very much focused on youth work and youth work only.

### **Changing Environment**

As with any programme, and the political context it operates in, things change and thinking evolves. The expansion of the EU, social, economic, and political events across Europe and beyond, changes in the governments of member states, financial crises and more recently the global pandemic (that has affected all nations) often steer thinking. For example, three key words – Employment, Education and Enterprise dominated the focus of the last Erasmus cycle and was a direct response to the changing socio-economic, political environment and financial vortex that the EU found itself facing at the start of the last decade.

Notwithstanding these (particular) sets of issues, Youth Work has also evolved – the expansion of the EU saw a host of countries become part of a field where youth work practice was either non-existent or in its infancy or had a form of youth work that did not necessarily 'fit' with what is recognised as youth work, professionally speaking.

### **Challenge**

Like any other sector, Youth Work has evolved and if you have had the benefit of being involved in it for some time, but also frequenting 'the world of Erasmus' you will have most likely managed to keep somewhat up-to-speed on developments and so wouldn't necessarily need to take a 'crash-course' on all things Youth Work and / or Erasmus to at least have a foot-hold. But what if you are new to both non-formal education and Erasmus – how might you possibly be expected to grasp an understanding of it?

## **Patterns within Erasmus**

Most of the training within Erasmus focuses on a wide range of themes related to several priorities. There is of course training in youth work / non-formal education. But is there any training that connects both?

Since the beginning of 2021 and up to 12 April (time of writing) there have been no less than 104 initiatives advertised / promoted through SALTO of which 13 were calls for trainers / facilitators and similar. Not all are funded under Erasmus but by and large they tend to be.

Of the remaining ninety-one, these could be roughly categorised into 46 themes, such was the diversity of programmes offered. From these, Digital Learning / Competence was the most common (12), followed by Inclusion & ESC (7 each), Personal Development (6), Youth Exchange Good Practice/Quality (4), Peace (3) & Anti-Hate Work (3), Racism, BREXIT, Well Being, Comedy, Climate and Volunteering (all 2). Only three initiatives focused on (the new) Erasmus+ programmes and (that's of course because it is new and) one on NFE methods.

## **Responding to a growing need**

Whilst non-formal education is of course not limited to operating within Erasmus, bearing in mind how it is a significant conduit for much of the evolution of youth work practice, certainly within a wider European context in recent years, there is no doubting the influence that it exerts.

As Erasmus continues to evolve, and likewise non-formal education within it, not least of all because it has twice the budget of its predecessor, it will inevitably reach a much wider and more diverse audience and lead to mean many more partnerships and much more cross-sectoral working.

An inevitable consequence of this new reality is that the non-formal sector will continue to widen, and youth work stands to become all encompassing. As already pointed out, from a possible 91 programmes advertised on SALTO, 46 of these were made up of different themes and four of these, i.e., Digital, ESC, Inclusion and Personal Development accounted for 33 programmes, meaning that 43 themes were spread across the remaining 58 programmes.

## **Appropriate Training**

It is with that in mind, that the need for a Training Programme that encapsulates both youth work and Erasmus to 'join the dots' is proposed. Such a training course would of course be more than merely 'joining the dots,' i.e., knowing the history and development of non-formal education, and how it has evolved within the context of Erasmus. The multi-layered approach also focuses on the longer-term development of the individual, 'the journey' each individual travels, and the building of professional capacity.

The training aims to ensure that all participants emerge from it much better equipped so as to not only (i) apply themselves more effectively in their daily practice, (but at a very personal level) (ii) identify key learning to further enable their

evolution as a human being, (iii) understand the sector they work in so they can relate to it and contextualise it much better so they can serve it more effectively, and ensure they (iv) become more aware of 'the journey' they have undertaken so that they can understand and adapt to the changes that entail.

## Concept

The concept is a four-pathway six-stage process and uses the metaphor of scaling a mountain to demonstrate the progressive/accumulative process that participants go through. Rather than the archetypal image of a mountain, which normally illustrates the peak pointing skyward, in this case, it's in the shape of a funnel, where the higher you go, the more you take in.

In a typical mountain scenario, the peak of course becomes more pointed, but in reality (and in order for you to make it to the top), you will have experienced much more than when you started when at the bottom.

The six-stage process allows participants to join at specific points, so for example, where someone has been working for an organization for a number of years, he or she might locate his or herself at Basecamp. However, she might also re-visit different stages so as to check if they have accumulated evidence to support their competency in an area.

The four pathways run simultaneously but are also flexible enough to take account of the varying places upon which an employee or volunteer might locate her or himself, for example, an experienced employee might be quite knowledgeable about Erasmus+ but know very little about Youth Work. Likewise, a new employee might be a qualified Youth Worker, but know extraordinarily little about Erasmus+ or ESC.

Therefore, going through the process itself and documenting the learning will bring benefits - in effect, wherever the participant locates his or herself on each pathway, there is an opportunity to build an evidence base.

## Process

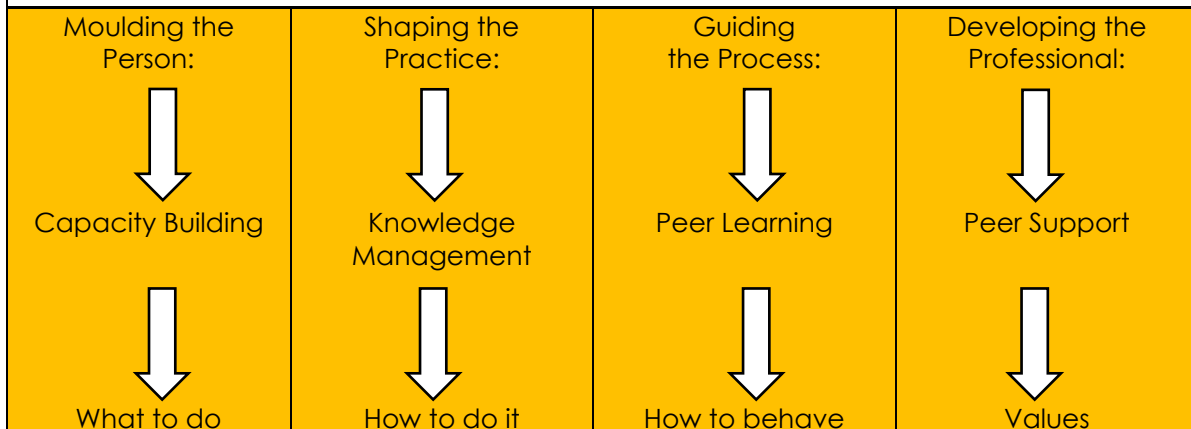
Each pathway has six stages; therefore, each participant will complete 24 'steps' in total. Each pathway has 21 competences. Each competence comprises of a range of statements, similar in respects to the Competence Model for Trainers, or for EuroDesk Ambassadors.

Each participant will complete several self-assessments that provides an overview on their strengths and weaknesses. Following completion, agreement is reached on areas of development that a participant needs to focus on and these form the basis of 'the journey' a participant will embark upon post-training.

In summary, 'the journey' is as follows:



Each of the four pathways have a range of competences assigned to them. They are interchangeable but designed to give each pathway structure and direction.



### Thinking underpinning each pathway

Personal Development	Practice	Process	Developing the Professional
Participants grow in stature and maturity, and are able to exhibit a progressive and accumulative 'evolution' in the manner with which they conduct themselves	Participants demonstrate steady increase in their understanding of what is required to fulfill their role and this evidenced in how they apply themselves in their work setting	Participants grow in understanding of the process they are participating in, and subject too, and how it is influencing their decisions and conclusions in addition to the change it is generating with them	Participants are able to reach a stage in their development where they have credibility, their reputation is 'second to none,' they are respected among their peers and are 'prized' by their organisation
Techniques, Expressions, Situations	Insight, Reflection, Context	Expectations, Standards, Ethics	People, Approach, Personality
Skills: What to do	Knowledge: How to do it	Behaviour: How to behave	Attitude: Values
Capacity Building	Knowledge Management	Peer Learning	Peer Support

### Theory

There are two simultaneous processes – one of course at an individual level (based on Lewin's Change Model), and a second within the wider context of the group / team / work setting (based on Tuckman's Group Development Model)

Both contribute to the building of individual capacity which, 'helps them transition from passive participant (that perhaps only 'turns up' to do their work), to pro-active participant' (one who not only 'turns up' to do their work, but also has a pro-active interest in what they are doing and views their contribution as an investment with clear returns).

## **Objectives of the training**

1. Provide a better understanding of the Youth Work 'field' and the 'world of Erasmus'
2. Build 'a picture' of where participants are at in relation to their own development and support their identifying learning goals to work on post-programme
3. Provide space and time to compare and contrast practice at local, regional, national and international level and in doing so share and exchange information whilst raising the profile of participant's organisations and its practice to other colleagues including practitioners, decision-makers and academics
4. Instil confidence and knowledge as to how to be more pro-active at local level in order to bring about positive change
5. Nurture and support the development of programmes, projects, initiatives, resources and materials that might not have come about without direct involvement in programme
6. Ensure interaction with and between individuals from diverse backgrounds (religion, nationality, identity, ethnicity, political, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, etc) promotes learning about and experience in a range of diverse practice, language, customs and tradition
7. Increase understanding of communities from within respective jurisdictions and also jurisdictions not recognised internationally
8. Provide experience of 'new and/or more diverse' situations where perception and understanding of how things are or have been, is challenged.
9. Provide space and time for conversation and discussion, both formal and informal, and as a result critically reflect on own practice and consider the impact of that practice as against the thoughts, ideas and opinion of others
10. Ensure greater appreciation for the value, benefits and importance of engagement in international youth work/learning opportunities