

Welcome to the 2nd blog post on the effects of international volunteering projects that are being written regularly by the researcher Jonathan Robertson from Scotland in the frame of the research, which has started in March 2017 and will continue until November 2018. In the frame of his research, Jonathan is following volunteers participating in different volunteering activities all over Europe and finding out how volunteering is changing their lives and helping them in building a career and in personal development. Apart from volunteers, we are also following the work of their hosting organisations. We are interested in how they see the added value of volunteering projects for their organisation and how international youth work has changed their local communities.

Reading this blog will take you: 5 minutes

BLOG #2

I see you – you are here

Innovative Partnerships: A collaboration between the youth centre and the Employment Office in Trbovlje, Slovenia.

In the cafe at Mladinski Center Trbovlje, Aneta Kovačič, Project Worker at the local Employment Office, is drinking a mid-morning espresso and reflecting on the past 3 years. “At the beginning there were around 40 of us - young people who got employed to work in the the Employment Offices across Slovenia, contracted until 2022. The ambition was for the Employment Offices to become closer to young people and their mentality, and, as a result, to better help young people find employment.”

Increasing the employability of the young people of Europe is a big aim of the Erasmus+ programme. How can youth organisations active in Erasmus+ best work to realise this aim? One way is collaborations between youth organisations and Employment Offices. As part of an ongoing research project around Volunteering Activities, a range of youth organisations across Europe are sharing their experiences of partnerships with Employment Offices. One such innovative example comes from the town of Trbovlje, in Slovenia.

Aneta continues: “This generation of young staff has had an impact on how the Employment Offices work. Before you only had 15 minutess with the young unemployed people. Now we have more time with the young people. Now we are inviting them to more events, making it more personal and also, we started to have more workshops for the young people. The whole approach changed. It started with us and now it is spreading to other staff members and offices.”

Upstairs at Mladinski Center Trbovlje (MCT), the change is apparent to Mitja, one of the youth workers here. “Now it is much easier – they understand really what we are trying to do. Before, there was more focus on the formality of the whole thing, they didn't really understand what we did. But now it is much easier – now it is like speaking with a youth worker from the neighbourhood.”

Aneta and Mitja are now closely collaborating. The Employment Office in the area and MCT have developed a mutually beneficial partnership, working together to improve the employability of the young people. Through this the Employment Office and MCT have helped

bring opportunities such as EVS closer to the young people of the area. At the core of this has been the authentic willingness of both the youth centre and the Employment Office to learn from each other and put that learning into action.

WHAT HAS THE EMPLOYMENT OFFICE LEARNED FROM MCT?

ANETA: “It is the way they approach the young people. With our generation this formal way was not working. These informal, 'soft' ways are a lot better for the young people to feel that you understand them. I like the way MCT have their meetings at when they came to our office – how they were presenting everything. It wasn't like 'sit there and listen to me'. It was like starting in the circle and involving everyone - 'I see you, you are here, so what do you want to do?’”

MITJA: “Years ago when we invited the Employment Office staff to come here it was a very classical presentation – PowerPoint, half an hour speech, a bit boring for the young people. But now they see there are different methods. When we go there, we never do this – never you just sit and listen. It's always different. And then they started thinking 'maybe this is better – they are not bored, they are not sad'. And then you already see that the Employment Office staff are starting to change something. It is really important for their brand, because usually they do not have a good image in the public.”

WHAT HAS MCT GAINED OR LEARNED FROM THE EMPLOYMENT OFFICE?

MITJA: “We as youth workers are acquiring some of their methods and implementing some of their methods in our work, which means that we don't just see young people as person-to-person, but as a group. So, we are also following the trends within the group. It is now easier for me to say, OK, we will include 10% of unemployed young people into our activities. This is really important, you can operate from the macro perspective and not just the micro perspective. This is something that is lacking in a lot of youth centres – they are only working from the micro perspective.”

ANETA: “We have around 600 young people on our books in Zasavje, it is easier for us to contact them than it is for MCT. They also learned that it is not so easy working in employability. MCT have more of a sense of the challenges involved and by working together we can start to come up with new ideas.”

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT HOW VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS EMPLOYABILITY?

ANETA: “This links with employment a lot. With young people a lot of problems are with their self-esteem, they say they don't have enough experience or knowledge or anything to show employers in a job interview. But when you're outside your comfort zone, you can be searching for your true you.”

MITJA: “Volunteering Activities are understood in terms of employability more and more. One month ago we had a big business meet-up. The key message coming from all the entrepreneurs was that every young person should go abroad. If you do it it won't guarantee you a job, but if you do it will improve your competences really, really a lot. Also the staff from the Employment Office know that too – it is a good opportunity.”



Erasmus+

eurodesk



EVROPSKA
SOLIDARNOSTNA
ENOTA



REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
MINISTRSTVO ZA IZOBRAŽEVANJE,
ZNANOST IN ŠPORT

URAD REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE ZA MLADINO

ANETA: “What is really good, also, with this generation they sometimes struggle with their commitments, being tired and having too much to do. And through Volunteering Activities they can develop a work ethos and an attitude for work. OK, it is fun, but there is a schedule and they get some discipline as a result and I think that is very important, and can be shown to them in a ‘soft’ way.”

Although it is still quite early in the collaboration, what can we conclude about this partnership? So often young people with fewer opportunities fall through ‘the gaps’ of society. One of the successes of this story is how it has worked to reduce some of these gaps. Firstly, the Employment Offices have moved themselves closer to the young people by employing and putting faith in young staff members who better understand the realities that the young people face. Secondly, the Employment Office has worked tightly with the youth centre in Trbovlje and learned from them how to get closer with young people. Thirdly, the youth centre is becoming more united with the Employment Office, working more strategically in building youth employability and developing how youth work and Volunteering Activities is understood by different groups in society. The aim of all this ultimately is to close the gap between young people and employment and have less young people falling down the damaging hole of long-term unemployment.

—

Written by Jonathan Robertson, freelance researcher and youth work trainer, currently working on a research project on how Erasmus+ volunteering activities contribute to the employability of young people.



Erasmus+

eurodesk



EVROPSKA
SOLIDARNOSTNA
ENOTA



REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
MINISTRSTVO ZA IZOBRAŽEVANJE,
ZNANOST IN ŠPORT

URAD REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE ZA MLADINO