

## Chapter 3

# The tradition of youth work in Hungary: the onion model

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### **Introduction**

Looking at the issues related to young people from a public policy approach, the results and recommendations of the 2008 report “Youth policy in Hungary” (Walther et al., 2008) still hold. After the regime change following the end of communist rule in 1989 the progress of youth policy was not a steady process in Hungary. Youth infrastructure has developed only partially, and roles and responsibilities of the actors are unclear in many cases. There is no common perception of youth, youth policy and youth work. Offering information to young people appears to be the most advanced area where there are uniform requirements and close networks. Youth policy is hardly regulated in many cases; there is an absence of written documents and legally binding agreements among different actors. Instead of comprehensive, coherent policy co-ordination there are several parallel processes and dysfunctions in the youth field.

The second European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe has been located in Budapest for more than 20 years. Since 2014, the EU Commissioner responsible for youth policies in Europe is Hungarian. These could be signs of a strong and well-co-ordinated youth policy in Hungary, but unfortunately this is not the case. Hungary needs to catch up with European processes and go beyond merely imitating results. The country report of the European Union (European Commission 2014) does not paint a rosy picture of the state of Hungarian youth work, particularly in comparison with other EU countries. The “soft” criteria of the White Paper “A New Impetus for European Youth” only had limited effects in bringing Hungary into line with Europe and achieved some minor results, but not real structural changes. There were no real changes concerning the relationship between citizens and the state. The state continued to be dominant in the field of youth affairs, and initiatives aimed at strengthening civil society failed.

The creation of the Youth Act is a long-desired ambition of different actors within the youth field but attempts by the Hungarian Parliament to accept the document have already ended in failure on three occasions (2000, 2006, 2009). Almost every major umbrella organisation of Hungarian youth (such as the Youth Professionals Co-operation Conference, and the National Youth Council) support the creation of the Youth Act, which could provide a legal framework for governmental and municipal functions and tasks related to young people.

Instead of giving an historical perspective on Hungarian youth and youth movements or focusing on what the Hungarian Government does (see Nagy 2010) and how youth policy has changed since 1989 (see Oross 2015), this chapter aims to explain where youth workers are coming from and how their tasks can be arranged into a complex model that connects youth work to related policy and practice. The chapter aims to contribute to a better understanding of youth work as a practice and a discipline in Europe by presenting the origins of youth work in Hungary. Beyond reflecting on those social, cultural and political histories that have shaped it, we also describe – through a presentation of the “onion model” – the response of Hungarian youth work to questions about how the community, society and the state should act in order to fulfil the needs of young people. As a theoretical model it explains how actors of youth work in Hungary have developed their own answers regarding the possibility of making Hungarian youth work practice part of a cross-sectoral, integrated approach to youth policy. By doing so, our arguments might add to the literature on the “magic triangle” model (Chisholm 2006: 27) and contribute to the debate on how youth work is heading towards a “magic pyramid” (Zentner 2016).

### **Three traditions of Hungarian youth work**

In this section we describe the origins of Hungarian youth work. Social work, social pedagogy and youth movements have existed in almost every European country (Coussée 2009; Coussée 2010, Mairesse 2009, Siurala 2012, Verschelden et al. 2009). Youth movements and youth NGOs have experienced a long-term evolution in different “welfare systems” (see Chapter 1), ranging from so-called social-democratic systems (Finland) through to countries typified as liberal (United Kingdom: Davies 2009) to more conservative welfare regimes (Germany, France and Flanders: Van Ewijk 2010). Unlike in the above-mentioned systems, however, the development of youth work in central and eastern Europe during the 20th century was stalled several times by the “history of interruption” (Wootsch 2010). Despite this interrupted development, three different traditions have left their mark on youth work in Hungary: pedagogy, social work and cultural public work. We will therefore describe the impact of these traditions on Hungarian youth work in detail.

### **Insufficient pedagogical practice**

From an evolutionary point of view the school is “a very important institution, we owe it the democratic apparatus of modern states. Without school there would be no modern society” (Csányi 2011: 7) – not only because school teaches us to read and write, but also because “incidentally” it also teaches us how to treat power relations (ibid.). Within Hungarian society, school also provided a platform for young

people to be together and many active participants of Hungarian youth work have educational, pedagogical backgrounds.

In 1989-90 the Hungarian school system had to face new challenges and was expected to play new roles. However, intellectual, organisational, technical and financial resources were not provided to fulfil these additional roles and functions (e.g. offering childcare, providing equal opportunities, teaching democratic skills, considering labour market needs: Bessenyei 2007). The accumulation of these expected functions of the school system led to each task being given less and less attention. The performance of the Hungarian school system weakened as a result, and the increasing number of assigned functions held back the system from the bumpy road of rejuvenation. The proliferation of school controversies made it impossible for the school system to fulfil all its tasks. Radical school criticisms have appeared (see, for example, Karácsony 1946, 1999; Mihály 1999; Trencsényi 1995) and their content varied from overall alteration, revolutionary social changes in education and teaching (for example, Dewey 1938; Illich 1971) to the demolition of the panoptical traditional school institutions. Generally, the Hungarian school system is criticised for the following characteristics (Mihály 1999: 95):

- ▶ the overcrowded curricula, with few other services provided by schools;
- ▶ the organisation of knowledge: a compulsory curriculum for all students that is impersonal and alienating;
- ▶ the conditions and the context in which knowledge is being disseminated;
- ▶ the effects of education on students' personalities;
- ▶ the assumptions of schools with regard to the students;
- ▶ the internal atmosphere of schools;
- ▶ the relationship between teachers and students.

Hungarian schools find themselves in a difficult situation when they try to deal with these issues because internal structures and processes do not allow them to tackle the new situations and challenges that arose after the reforms. Although today the statement is generally accepted by Hungarian youth workers that "children need a place" somewhere between the family and society, there is little consensus around how that "place" should function. New generations need a place where they can receive input to help them understand our urbanised and globalised world. However, it is argued recurrently whether or not school is one (the only one?) place where these inputs can be provided. Critics of this concept argue that students need more than one forum to integrate the norms and values of society and to associate with their peers. Due to the criticised features of schools mentioned above (especially the overcrowded curricula and the internal atmosphere of schools) youth workers often find it difficult to co-operate with schools in Hungary.

The sphere of students' free-time activities is very different from that of the school context, because roles that individuals play in that context are chosen spontaneously (and not imposed by any power relations) and change according to the needs of the community that is being formed during free-time activities. This leads to contradictions between what young people learn in schools and what they learn through experience during activities organised by youth workers.

## The tradition of social work – The roots of youth work

During the development of modern societies there was a strong belief that education in school can solve all the problems of youth education (e.g. creating equal opportunities for everyone to start a career: Wrozynski 2000). However, the introduction of compulsory education alone was not able to handle the transition to modernity, so it was necessary to create socio-pedagogical institutions (Giesecke 2000). While the school has a top-down character (that came from the elite and became accessible to all social groups gradually) social pedagogy had a bottom-up development (ibid.). Social pedagogy became available for marginalised groups of society and the profession has evolved to become accessible to all young people.

In social work, a horizontal relationship and co-operation has always been the way to address problems, whereas pedagogy, because of its hierarchical student–teacher relationship, does not handle the challenges facing young people in the same way.

Social pedagogy has always been the stepchild of science education (ibid.). It happened mainly because “normal” socialisation was imagined to take place between the walls of the institutions (schools), and social pedagogy was available only for those on the margins and “at risk”, who were unable to become socialised in that context. However, by the end of the 20th century social pedagogy had been reinterpreted as relevant to all; after all, the “risk society” described by Ulrich Beck (1992) applied more or less to everyone. This has led to a widened customer base for the discipline, and the number of professionals and participants has correspondingly increased (Kozma and Tomasz 2000). Social pedagogy requires its own emancipation: social learning has to be considered as important as cognitive learning in the school system.

Since the tradition of social work stands very close to youth work, many actors of Hungarian youth work come from that context. Social work has always questioned the usefulness – or at least the primary role – of authoritarian teaching methods. Social pedagogy is “a unitary psychological and pedagogical concept of people left behind” (Niemeyer 2000) and is an opportunity to compensate disadvantages (Thiersch 2000). It aims to give opportunity to disadvantaged groups in society and to search for evidence to better understand those groups (Mollenhauer 2000).

Poverty and exclusion has hit young Hungarians particularly hard; in fact they have been the losers in the new democratic political system (Andorka 1996). Following the regime change dozens of local, spontaneous, semi-institutional services were created to solve that problem; they have defined their own tasks and in most cases were linked neither to each other nor to the central government (Beke, Ditzendy and Nagy 2004). This pro-social behaviour has developed both on an individual and a community level. At the individual level it is a reaction to help troubled fellow citizens. On a community level assistance can be understood as any activity that is carried out by an existing community that aims to handle the problems of its members. It supports people facing particular problems in order to be able to create and successfully operate their community to address their problems (Tóbiás 2011).

While in the past, social pedagogy considered its primary task to be that of working with marginalised groups of society and people at risk (Schlieper 2000), it is now a service for the entire social spectrum. It has been argued, however, that whereas

for “traditional” targets or clients, social pedagogy remains “hard” social pedagogy addressing social disadvantage and exclusion, for other young people it becomes a “soft” social pedagogy (Kozma and Tomasz 2000) that cares for their mental health (Niemeyer 2000).

Today, youth work that grew out of social work in Hungary can be perceived and interpreted very broadly. Its subject terrain covers exclusion, prevention, participation, empowerment – everything that is important from the aspect of young people’s social integration. The activity today covers not only crisis situations but aims to contribute to prevention. It is no longer responsible exclusively for the management of problem situations, but aims rather to help the development of skills that enable successful integration into society. Because of the proliferation of choices in life it is no longer possible to give young people universal personalised advice, but a helping attitude (supporting the perspective that “everyone’s an expert in his or her own life”) is needed (Thiersch 2000). The tradition of social work is important because since 1989, in addition to pedagogy, it has had a great impact on the evolution and practice of youth work in Hungary.

## **The tradition of cultural public work**

The third tradition of Hungarian youth work originates from the leisure-time activities of the cultural public sector. Independent school camps, youth governments, youth centres, youth clubs and community areas already belonged to the natural context of community development in Hungary before the regime change in 1989-90. These activities had French origins and were brought to Hungary by *animateurs* (public educators) who were responsible for the regional development of the villages. In search of a solution to out-migration and depopulation, their activities were carried out and co-ordinated during the 1980s by the Hungarian Institute for Culture. The heritage of cultural public work through youth work can be found today in vibrant communities beyond the walls of the school system. These communities give space to non-formal learning, independent activity and self-organisation of young people. The last quarter of a century has, of course, also transformed these spheres, especially due to the changing role of leisure space in socialisation during the postmodern era (Nagy 2013). This change is characterised by the way in which the youth of the Hungarian youth camps of the socialist era became the “youth of festivals” during the millennium and how young Hungarians became “screenagers” during the 2010s.

To sum up, many actors of Hungarian youth work were trained originally as teachers, social workers or cultural public workers. However, the basis for any distinct profession is provided by its distinctive training. Since 2003 there has been youth worker training in Hungary. Comparing the number of students in training (approximately 5 000) since the inception of the programme and the employment opportunities provided by the state (approximately 500) we see a striking difference. The solution of either downscaling the training or widening employment opportunities (e.g. by the counties, municipalities or by non-profits) needs to be considered. All in all, it seems that until today turning quantity into quality has not been successful (Nagy 2015: 110).

## The content of youth work in Hungary

Unlike the “magic triangle” model (Chisholm 2006: 27) and the “magic pyramid” (Zentner 2016) the “onion model” puts young people and their communities at the centre. By inventing this model Hungarian youth work responded to the question of how the community, society and the state should act in order to fulfil those needs of young people that are not covered by the school system (and by the family). The starting point of the model is that the life of the affected age groups during the process of becoming adults is indivisible: it cannot be treated as separated along different disciplines and professions. The onion model therefore enables an “over-arching” of approaches of the different sectors.

The basic concept of the onion model comes from a parliamentary resolution accepted in 2009. The so-called National Youth Strategy (National Youth Strategy 2009) declared:

We see them when they are at school – but we do not see them if they [are] outside; we see them when they are patients – but we do not see them when they risk their health; we see them when they become unemployed – but we do not see when they fail at the labour market in absence of skills; we help them if we are notified that they need help – but we do not care about them when they have no contact with the system, etc.

The onion model enables us to arrange different elements of youth work (such as camps, youth offices, virtual youth work, youth research) into a coherent concept that is comparable to other European models. In this model – and it is unique compared to other European models – all those areas (youth workers, professionals within the youth field and horizontal youth activities) are embodied in a way that can offer systematic answers to problems arising at individual or community level and that education alone cannot solve. It integrates those areas, topics and problems that cannot be addressed by the family or the school system either because they are not given sufficient attention, or because the power structure of those institutions (e.g. classrooms) do not allow appropriate management of those issues. Thus, the freedom of choice and social expectations can only be reconciled if supply-orientation of different services prevails over the obligation-based secondary socialisation sphere of the school system (and statutory regulator role of the state). In light of this and with regard to differences among different groups of youth the fundamental objectives of the model are:

- ▶ supporting young people in becoming responsible citizens of their communities and their society;
- ▶ supporting leisure activities;

And they are implemented:

- ▶ in a service-oriented manner;
- ▶ in case of an emergency;
- ▶ in all areas of socialisation.

The onion model combines the so-called vertical and horizontal approaches. The model does not contain methods, for example non-formal learning, fun activities or games (although they are an important part of youth work). Neither does it narrow down youth policy to the sphere of decision making, convert issues related to youth to mere sociological issues nor over-emphasise the role of non-formal pedagogy.

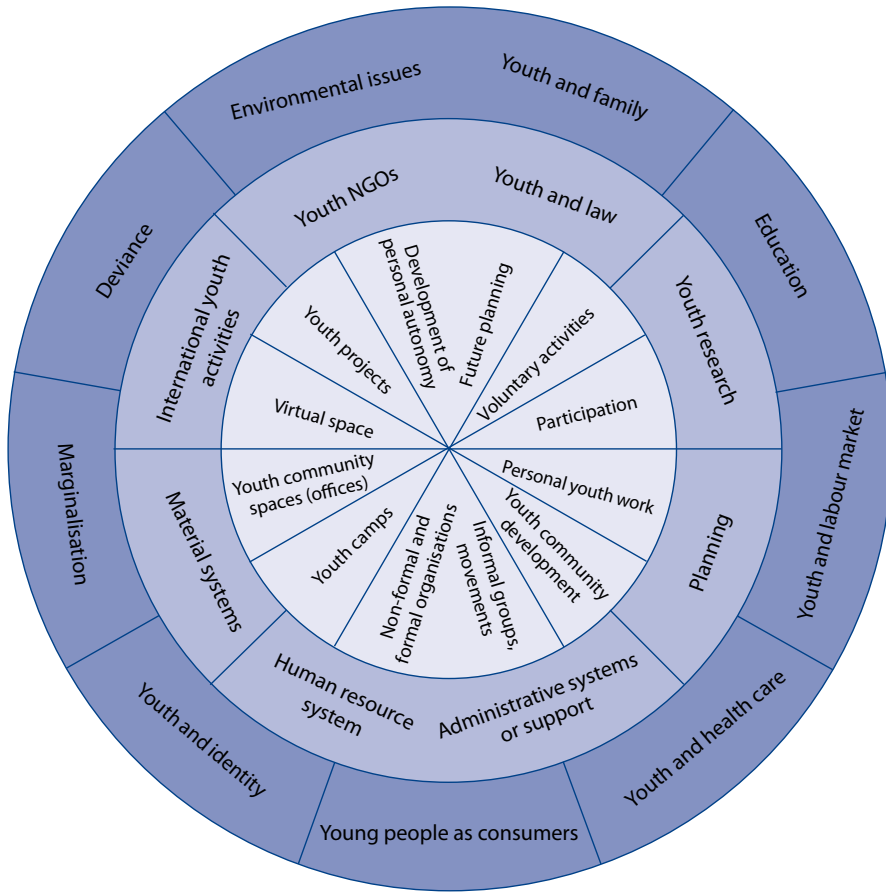
Rather, the model seeks to interpret and integrate the stock of tasks in connection with young people, using a different approach from that elaborated by the “magic triangle” (Chisholm et al. 2011; Milmeister and Williamson 2006; Williamson 2002, 2007). It includes, *inter alia*, support for youth initiatives, creation of opportunities for participation, involvement of the affected age groups in decision-making processes, community support systems for youth research, support for youth organisations, and the analysis of the relationship between young people and the legal system. The onion model consolidates into a unified framework those elements and issues that are important for the practice of youth work but are often interpreted in a fragmented manner such as, for example, drug prevention, camps and festivals, youth offices, participation and involvement.

The onion model (see Figure 3.1.) includes all areas of Hungarian youth work that are in many cases not supported by the school or the family, although they are necessary activities for young people. It is based on the immediate (specific) and the indirect (abstract) nature of the activities related to the individual and the community. At the centre of the model there is the individual (or community) itself, with whom the activities take place. In our case, youth activity is understood as all those activities related to young people that happen in leisure time, on a voluntary basis.

- ▶ The activities located in the inner ring are directly linked to the individual or to the community (**youth work**). Youth work is defined as a concept that is closely related to youth generations and their members, activities integrating all those activities that arise from the direct interaction of young people and the actors related to them. These activities offer professional services to solve particular problems arising from specific life events and circumstances. They aim to assist young people’s social involvement, personal development, and participation. Youth work is mostly linked to development-oriented activities (developing personalities, communities, groups, areas, settlements) and supporting innovation. It includes solidarity, tolerance and, as part of that, the development of empathy. Important are the settings in which the activities take place and also the list of objectives for the activity concerned.
- ▶ The middle ring (**youth professionals**) includes all activities that have indirect contact with the individuals (and their communities). The areas occupied by youth professionals are those segments where indirect services (organisation, framework) are provided for young people at a higher level of abstraction. This includes all activities that can provide methodological support to those actors who have direct interaction with young people. These activities provide the “background” for youth work.
- ▶ The outer ring (**youth and society**) contains the horizontal approach where interdisciplinary linkages to other professions are located. Horizontal youth activities include any activity related to youth age groups that has strong links to another discipline or profession (such as education, social work, culture or the economy) as well. Through these linkages competences can be provided that are necessary to young people (e.g. family planning, labour market position, developing entrepreneurial skills, child benefit system, supporting youth media and youth culture).

As mentioned above, the approach of the onion model is a professional, issues-based one that is organised in line with individual and community needs. It differs from the top-down (social, societal and generational) approach of youth policy. This bottom-up system is based on the individual and collective needs of young people. The starting point of the approach is that while the impact of traditional institutions of socialisation (the family and the school) is weakening, the weight of leisure time (and media) activities is increasing.

**Figure 3.1. The onion model**



(Source: own data)

The onion model contains 12 activities related to youth work (inner ring), eight activities related to youth professionals (middle ring) and nine horizontal activities related to youth and society (outer ring)(Table 3.1.). The onion model has three layers. There is no hierarchy among the elements, however: the model is built up from the inside out. The distance from the centre of the “onion” expresses how far an element is from young people and their communities.



**Table 3.1. The system of youth policies in Hungary**

Activities related to youth work	Activities related to youth professionals	Horizontal activities related to youth and society
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of personal autonomy</li> <li>2. Future planning</li> <li>3. Voluntary activities</li> <li>4. Participation</li> <li>5. Personal youth work</li> <li>6. Youth community development</li> <li>7. Informal groups, movements</li> <li>8. Non-formal and formal organisations</li> <li>9. Youth camps</li> <li>10. Youth community spaces (offices)</li> <li>11. Virtual space</li> <li>12. Youth projects</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Youth and law</li> <li>2. Youth research</li> <li>3. Planning</li> <li>4. System of tasks</li> <li>5. Human resource system</li> <li>6. Material systems</li> <li>7. International youth activities</li> <li>8. Youth NGOs</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Youth and family</li> <li>2. Education</li> <li>3. Youth and labour market</li> <li>4. Youth and health care</li> <li>5. Young people as consumers</li> <li>6. Youth and identity</li> <li>7. Marginalisation</li> <li>8. Deviance</li> <li>9. Environmental issues</li> </ol>

(Source: own data)

Different actors of Hungarian youth policy have focused, as described above, on developing an integrated model to respond to the multiple challenges that the school system was no longer able to solve. However, the state (the government) continues to ignore stakeholders' perspectives and has instead followed its own imaginary and self-delusory road since at least 2010. Both the history of youth-worker training and the history of youth policy institutions are eloquent examples of that. In Hungary, theoretical developments and research ideas are not transformed into policy solutions (which could be executed in practice by youth work). Instead, half-solutions, not real resolutions, are offered, and persisting problems are conveniently swept under the carpet.

## **Conclusion**

The tradition of Hungarian youth work has been shaped by the pedagogical practice of teachers, by the social work practice of building horizontal relationships and co-operation with young people and by the leisure-time activities of cultural public work. Since 2003, the basis for the distinct profession is provided by youth-worker training. But as we have described above, youth work has continued to be a complementary, ancillary area in Hungary, and has less prestige than related professions.

However, the onion model shows that different actors of youth work in Hungary have embraced a cross-sectoral and integrated approach to youth policy and have developed their own answers as to how it is possible to make this approach part of

Hungarian youth work practice. Unlike the “magic triangle” or the “magic pyramid” (Zentner 2016) model that aims to describe the dialogue and co-operation between main actors in the field of youth, the onion model puts young people and their communities at the centre and incorporates all those activities related to young people that happen in leisure time, on a voluntary basis. The onion model contains 12 activities related to youth work, eight activities related to youth professionals and nine horizontal activities. By presenting the model we aim to contribute to a better understanding of youth work’s multifaceted and multilayered identity, and we hope that it can stimulate discussion about connections, disconnections and reconnections in the youth field.

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