

International narratives of international youth work (2022-2023)

Report I: The professionalisation of European (global) norms
- Preliminary Version -

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Jena, 05.04.2024, on behalf of:

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funded by:



Bundesministerium
für Familie, Senioren, Frauen
und Jugend

Preliminary remark: Contract research 2022 & 2023

The empirical project "International Narratives of International Youth Work" aimed to better understand this European/global pedagogical practice in other countries in a comparative perspective. First, in the summer of 2022, experts in the field of international youth work from Turkey, the USA and Poland were identified. In a further step, a selection was requested, either to take part in oral interviews (online) or to answer an analogue, open-ended questionnaire (details below).

The interviews conducted in autumn 2022 consisted of an introductory professional biographical, narrative account of the life story (Part I) as well as open questions along seven dimensions on the pedagogical, political and socio-cultural embedding of international youth work in the respective countries (Part II). Ultimately, 8 (out of 9) oral interviews of 1.5 to 2.5 hours each took place. The response rate for the written interviews was low at 2 (out of 9). The interviews were then transcribed with the help of AI and around half of them were subsequently corrected. Johannes Eick was responsible for the project coordination, with active support from Rosaria Picone and Nina Festing. The interviews were generally conducted in English.

Building on this, the exploratory study in 2023 continued under the title "International Justification Narratives of International Youth Work". Following a similar approach and structure, an additional 4 interviews (conducted online) with experts from Portugal and Tanzania, lasting 1,5 to 2.5 hours each, were conducted and subsequently transcribed using AI support. Peter Menne was responsible for project coordination, again with the energetic support of Rosaria Picone and Nina Festing. Within the scope of the work of Research and Practice in Dialogue – International Youth Work (RPD), both projects represent a continuation of the expertise on "Systemic Effects of International Youth Work" (Helle Becker 2020, Danica Finger 2021, Oliver Dimbath & Michael Ernst-Heidenreich 2020, Wolfgang Ilg, 2020; available in German [here](#)). In addition to the conception or research design and data collection (interview organization and execution), the further processing of the data and especially their evaluation are my responsibility (Dr. Benjamin Bunk, postdoctoral researcher in the field of educational science with a focus on adolescent pedagogy at Justus Liebig University Giessen). The evaluation is ongoing.

The collected data is as extensive (the transcripts of the interviews comprise approximately 350 pages): professional biography interviews (based on oral autobiographic Interviews according to Schütze (1983) and expert interviews (hermeneutic-systematic evaluation based on Klafki (1985) as well as oriented towards qualitatively oriented content analysis according to Mayring (2015)). Compared with standards of grants funded scientific research, their evaluation would justify a full-time position for three years, thus exceeding the existing third-party funding by about 100 times. Therefore, hopefully, further evaluation of the collected data can be carried out in a funded research project to come. Or at least on a voluntary basis out of dedicated curiosity as part of seminars (thus occurred in the winter semester 2023–2024, JLU Giessen), or possibly through research-oriented internships and student-thesis (e.g. Master's degree in Extracurricular Education, JLU Giessen).

At the same time, the educational science qualitative research landscape on the phenomenon of international youth work is sparse and underrepresented given the prevalence of the phenomenon among young people and young adults, as well as its societal significance at the national, European, and global level. This is even more true for an internationally comparative approach. I am therefore very grateful to RPD and the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth

(BMFSFJ) for their appreciative accompaniment as well as for their support - and thus the opportunity to take further steps towards an adequate research landscape.

Thus, this 1. project report represents an interim status. Firstly, in the sense that the necessary focus subsequently lies on questions of professionalisation and of European norms. It contains a selection of the preliminary results. Secondly, in the sense that the very exciting interviews from Tanzania have not been included in the presentation so far, as they demand a much more fundamental reflection on the existing professional discourses, practices, and their societal significance (which in itself is a statement on the inadequate comparative perspective on international youth work). Six interviews are currently only available as audio files or as uncorrected AI translations. These have not yet been fully included in this report. Ultimately, the presentation of the results below is on a content-analytical level - the reconstruction of further layers of meaning and interpretation on additional comparison levels is not yet possible within this framework. A more in-depth analysis of the empirical data collected in the project, particularly the professional biography narratives and related to a social science professional discussion, is envisaged.

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1. Introduction & Research Question

Temporary international mobility is an increasing and diversifying pedagogical phenomenon. More and more mobility programs in Germany and Europe promote temporary experiences abroad for young people in different phases of life: as student exchanges within a class or individual years abroad, as extracurricular youth work or intercultural encounters, as optional European or global volunteer services, or as competence-related student mobility. But, this idea is also realized on an individual basis on personal initiative, by train or as backpackers in Southeast Asia.

Making 'experiences abroad' is considered a powerful pedagogical tool. Temporary international mobility for adolescents and young adults is financially supported by civil, municipal, national, and European institutions (Thimmel 2021: 709f) and promoted in small but diverse educational discourses: in the German-speaking world, sometimes as international youth work, sometimes as self-formation-journey or language trips, as global-citizenship education or intercultural learning, as competence-oriented internationalization, sometimes also within the framework of political education or new forms of learning.

The pedagogical intention — or rather, the many expectations associated with this very open, undetermined form—seems immediately plausible. Who wouldn't want to: get entangled in distant cultures in another place; curious to explore unfamiliar life worlds beyond familiar social relationships and the predetermined (school and career) biographical treadmill; test oneself in self-determination; experience European cohesion; voluntarily assume social responsibility in a global horizon; gather intense impressions, be irritated by experiences of difference, or simply enjoy encounters with other nice people? At least, that's the tone of the narratives in which temporary international mobility in Germany is embedded.

Such individual experiences abroad in this realm of possibility through temporary stays are today not only an integral part of youth work in Germany (JMK 2001, KJP 2016¹) and the European Union (EU 2018/C 456/01), but also a political instrument of foreign cultural policy and higher education policy, for example, as a means to strengthen European cohesion and shape globalization processes. Not to forget the older practices of fostering international solidarity through youth encounters across nation-states; for example, from the labor, women's, or ecumenical movements – established particularly after the devastating experiences of the First World War.

In a specific way, the horrors of the Second World War in Germany have significantly contributed to institutionalizing this practice as a state task for international understanding (e.g., DFJW 1963). This is closely linked, but not exclusively, to state-responsible social work or in the sense of extracurricular youth work focused on self-determination (Code of Social Law (SGB) VIII, § 11 and § 12, sometimes § 13). Other significant sources of institutionalization in Germany were civilian

¹International youth work has been part of the Federal Youth Plan since 1950. The pioneering (as the first) German-French Youth Office was founded in 1963 (DFJW 1963). The Center for International Youth Work of the Federal Republic of Germany e.V. (IJAB) has existed since 1967. The current legal basis for the approximately 50 million euros in the budget (BMFSFJ Web) is provided by the "Guidelines for International Youth Policy and Youth Work by the Federal Government and the States" (JMK 2011, May 17-18, 2001, Weimar) as well as the "Children and Youth Plan" (GMBI 2016 No. 41, 809-813). In addition, there are other funding opportunities, including through the Foreign Office (AA), the Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), and especially the European Union (EU), as well as foundations and private sources.

service, which currently (after the abolition of general military service) manifests in various forms of socio-ecological voluntary service – which sometimes is also aimed at as a kind of "gap year" between school and vocational training/studies. A business-oriented rationale based on language competencies is currently as relevant as the reference to traditions of political and intercultural education in parts of the field of action (e.g. further elaborated in Bunk 2024).

This article does not aim to describe this 'mobility puzzle' in detail (e.g. [here](#)), partly because Germany represents an special case in international comparison. The implied heterogeneity (form, provider, life phase) as well as the characteristic ambiguity of this "distinctive field of work and discourse" (Thimmel 2021), which cuts across conventional, institution-based orders of the discipline, tempts one to further define the subject. If one emphasizes structures and institutional framework conditions, the term youth work is used in the German-speaking context for this effort. However, if one focuses on individual learning and biographical educational processes and their organizational framework conditions (among others Krogull/Scheunpflug 2013, Ernst-Heidenreich 2019), the broader term international youth work is rather applied.

Such delineations of the subject are important: for legitimizing financial support, or for problematizing unequal access (Thimmel 2018, Becker & Thimmel 2019, Ilg 2021). However, they also enable critical differentiation from educational science as well as social and cultural science perspectives, thus advancing necessary delimitation and consolidation of the disciplinary debate. Currently, new questions are being posed in Germany from a postcolonial perspective or from migration research (Kontzi 2015, König 2021, Ress et al. 2021, Krannich & Hunger 2021, Peters 2022), and a youth and educational theoretical perspective is emphasized (Bunk & Wiezorek 2024). The "student exchange" is also being researched as "familial self-imposition" (following Wernet 2020), or dilemmas of contradictory career-related and intercultural foreign experiences are problematized (Juul-Wiese 2023). Since this is a research report, further classification into the current state of research is omitted (for deepening the European professional discourse see, among others, Cairns et al. 2018; Cuzzocrea 2019a/b; Eick, Rakhochkine & Schäfer (forthcoming) 2024).

Following, in this interim report of this empirical research project, I aim to introduce an *international (especially European) comparative perspective in the dialogue between practice and research*. In this interim report, the methodological focus is on similarities, summarizing within one narrative. In order to do this comparative analysis, I deliberately conceptualize the phenomenon broadly, encompassing "temporary international mobility" on one hand and "experiences abroad" on the other hand, pragmatically choosing the term "international youth work" (therinafter: IYW) English, although this refers to institutional contexts that cannot be presupposed in the nation-states involved.²

Additionally, the focus is on the professional Self-Understanding *of the Educators/Organizers involved* and subsequently on the question of the local pedagogization *of European/Global Norms*. Essentially, two observations were decisive for this.

²In the letters addressed to the interviewees, the formulation "International Youth Work – oder auch Auslandsmobilität junger Erwachsener" was chosen. In Question IV, the formulation "We apply a very broad understanding of 'International Youth Work', being aware of the quite different circumstances in each country. Which kind of 'International Youth Work' are you involved in, and what other 'ways' or 'forms' do you see in your country?" was also used.

1.1 On the necessity of an internationally comparative approach

On the one hand, we know surprisingly little about IYW in other countries. This is paradoxical insofar as the exchange with other countries – getting to know the foreign and reflecting on the familiar – is at the core of this practice. Projects are often implemented together. But to which extent are the societal and youth-related interpretations or pedagogical intentions actually the same? In most European countries, international youth work essentially emerges with the process of EU enlargement or financial support through Erasmus+. 'Our' German tradition and funding landscape are thus exceptional cases. What role or function does international youth work fulfil in other nations? Within which narratives is it perceived? To what extent does it connect to existing socio-cultural practices and therefore appear plausible – and not alien to everyday life? Therefore the question arises: *In what way this practice is embedded in local pedagogical and political contexts, expressed in narratives of local experts?*

In this respect, the subject itself calls for an international comparative perspective as well as an analysis of how IYW is socially discussed in other countries. In order to make different structures and action logics visible and debatable. At the same time, such a comparison, starting from this practice, enables researchers and practitioners to engage with each other, even in all their diversity, to understand commonalities.

1.2 The question of professionalization

On the other hand, it is advertised in a multifaceted manner in all programme lines, provider presentations and offers what a powerful pedagogical tool IJB is. In the data analysis of the I-EVAL survey 2021, for example, the responses of the participants are juxtaposed with those of the staff to doubly emphasize "how" international youth encounters "work." However, reading this survey broadly, the truly astonishing aspect is that the young people and supervisors agree in their assessment - whereas in formal settings such as school, the discrepancy between what is conveyed on one hand, and what is acquired on the other hand, is significant.

Is this because the situation of being abroad is so extraordinary and disconcerting that young people gratefully accept any orientation (or alternatively rely on basic cultural stereotypes and tend to stabilize rather than deconstruct them)? Or is it because the dynamic group interaction is so intense that it promotes depth of processing and thus the adoption of offered orientations? Or is it because forms of extracurricular education (informal learning) benefit precisely from being temporary, so that learning-inhibiting processes do not come into play (among others Parson 1968)? IJB is indeed only temporary mobility and not a socializing institution - it moderates or intervenes in youth development, but it does not shape it.

Without being able to answer all these questions here, they do focus attention on the professionals in the field: *What professional self-understanding, what pedagogical attitudes, and societal diagnoses do those who work in this wide field, who organize events and whose orientations are adopted by the participants, maintain?*

Whether International Youth Work already constitutes a profession is more than questionable (e.g. still under discussion in Social Work). Undoubtedly, however, some kind of professionalisation is taking place where a field of work is growing and diversifying. Professionalisation, which also needs

to be scientifically accompanied. The professionalisation in the field of International Youth Work is currently being promoted especially through ERASMUS+, the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, and the YouthPass initiative - albeit rather exclusively for the Erasmus world. There are unspecific trainings and further education courses, whether in the fields of youth work, cultural education, education for sustainable development - or in project management and accounting, available locally in many places. However, the field is still far from having uniform quality standards, certified training courses, or a unified professional profile; especially on a European or international level. After all, these individuals and projects are active in very different national and local contexts. To what extent standardisation is even possible or necessary is another question? Should there be a separately certified further training course for every field of action? But would everyone agree on Social Work as the overarching reference discipline? In this field of action, there is no clear educational path and those responsible in the field come from different academic disciplines (my subjective impression: more language and cultural studies than educational science, social work). Is it fundamentally a pedagogical work? Perhaps professionalisation also takes place through the field itself, mediated by the nature of the activity? But could professionalisation not also mean less intervention and more accompaniment? Additionally, the concrete projects (at least in Germany) are often implemented by young volunteers. So far, training has mainly taken place through one's own experiences as a participant. To what extent does this have to do with professionalization? Neither can I answer these questions alone, nor can they be answered alone. But I would like to approach the question of whether a common or shared understanding of the profession can be found in the field?

Without wanting to delve into the multifaceted professionalisation debate - especially in Social Work - within this framework, Helsper, Krüger & Kleberg (2000: 8) refer to three characteristics that characterize the "corestructures of professional action" in various professional theories. Hereinafter I orient myself on these to compare and summarize the statements from the interviews:

- legitimization patterns and the *embeddedness in societal (macrosocial) contexts*
- Paths into the profession and the *constitutive structural logic of professional action*
- Challenges and *contradictory professional requirements*

2. Research Design: Exploratory Study "International Narratives"

As noted in the preamble, within the framework of the empirical project "International Narratives of International Youth Work - Internationale Narrative der Internationalen Jugendarbeit" (2022) and "International Justification Narratives of International Youth Work - Internationale Begründungsnarrative Internationaler Jugendarbeit" (2023), written, but primarily online interviews were conducted with experts from the professional field of international youth work from Turkey, the USA, Poland, Portugal, and Tanzania. *The main aim was to understand the societal significance of IYW in a contrasting and comparative manner, based on their narrative contextualization within the respective historical, youth theoretical, pedagogical, institutional, social, cultural, and political contexts.*³ Quoted references from these interviews refer to the acronym as well as the line number of the transcripts, or possibly the number of the question in written interviews. Place names were omitted as well as names of organizations.

The planned reconstruction based on the professional biographical narratives follows the narrative analysis (Narrationsanalyse) according to Fritz Schütze (Schütze 1983, Kleemann et al. 2009). The previous evaluation of the open expert interviews follows a hermeneutic-systematic interest in knowledge in accordance with Wolfgang Klafki (1971) and the qualitatively oriented content analysis according to Philipp Mayring (2015). All names were anonymized, and in quoted passages, references to locations and (if possible) countries were omitted.

The interviews each consisted of a narrative, professionally related story of life history as well as inherent follow-up questions: *"Please tell me the story of your life. What brought you to 'international youth work' and the place XXX you're now?"* The second part followed with open questions along an interview guide to seven dimensions of the pedagogical, political, and socio-cultural embedding of international youth work in the respective countries⁴.

- I. In Germany, there are different traditions, justifications, and aims. Why does "international youth work" exist in your country? And furthermore, have these reasons changed in the light of current challenges?
- II. What role does international youth work play for young people growing up? And from the point of view of the young people, what is it about?
- III. What are your expectations, what should young people learn, or what experiences should be made possible through "international youth work"?

³ The procedure and the questions were discussed in advance as part of FPD. I would particularly like to thank Michael Ernst-Heidenreich, Helle Becker, Andreas Thimmel, Johannes Eick and Nina Festing for their important feedback from the Systemic Effects Working Group.

⁴ All interviews were conducted online (via Zoom), which had previously triggered skepticism (on my part) but turned out to be unproblematic. All participants were familiar with online-based international exchange in the aftermath of the Corona pandemic. Communicative skills as well as openness to unfamiliar situations are likely part of the professional toolkit in this field. What stands out in reflecting on the interview situations (but should not be elaborated on here) is that these interviews all went well and were characterized by a 'sympathetic', mostly 'personal' atmosphere. I cannot report the same from other interview-based research projects. Moreover, I had expected more institutional, formal response patterns, which were only present in one case. In retrospect, the questions invited more abstract responses and generated fewer narratives.

- IV. We apply a very broad understanding of "international youth work", being aware of the quite different circumstances in each country. Which kind of "international youth work" are you involved in, and what other "ways" or "forms" do you see in your country? How is it founded?
- V. To be pragmatic: What challenges do you see? If you could change something about "international youth work", how should it look like?
- VI. And rather general: To what extent is mobility of adolescents and young adults discussed beyond the field of work "international youth work"? What other debates are involved?
- VII. Towards the end, a perhaps curious question: Where do you see international youth work in 30 years?

Not all of these question dimensions were fruitful in the different contexts (especially II and VI) and were sometimes adapted. Especially in the interviews with Tanzania, it became clear that despite all attempted openness to various forms of "temporary mobility", the guideline ultimately focuses on a very European-Anglo-American practice, or ultimately, this is a contribution to a "Northern Theory" (Connell 2006)⁵. In fact, except for Tanzania, post-colonialism or migration plays no role in any of the interviews as a relevant narrative for IJB; in the case of Portugal, for example, this is surprising.

3. Summary of Results: Professionalisation of European/Global Norms

As soon as different countries come into play, not only do different contexts emerge, but usually also different forms of temporary foreign experiences. This is due, for example, to historical establishment in certain countries or current special promotion: the Family Stay (USA), group outings from existing extracurricular sports clubs (Poland), individual stays at meeting places or participation in project weeks abroad (Portugal; Turkey). However, the organizational framework conditions that significantly influence the possible (difference) experiences during stays abroad are not of interest here. But a comparative view would be enlightening: For example, the exchange in the Polish-German border region is framed by labor migration, a cross-border real estate market, or transnational family relationships. The bilateral German-Polish youth organization thus supports an already existing, close interconnection, which is shaping for a cross-border region (cf. PPI: 44f.). Which is why experiences of young people, e.g. in Portugal, cannot be easily compared with those who travel abroad for the first time and break with family tradition. Even though the didactic concept of a week-long project might be similar.

In this research report, what can potentially be learned is only indirectly of interest. The focus is on the professional self-understandings of the experts, which indirectly refer to national traditions or are narratively located in local justifications. Nevertheless, these aspects fade into the background. My aim is rather to show commonalities - rather than differences - in an understanding of the

⁵Also consider the fact that the very intriguing interviews from Tanzania have not been included in the presentation so far, as they require a much more fundamental reflection on the existing professional discourses, practices, and their societal significance (which in itself is a statement on the inadequate comparative perspective on international youth work).

profession in this shared field of action. Statements from different contexts are intertwined into a common narrative.

3.1 Legitimation patterns and the embeddedness in societal (macrosocial) contexts

In the German-speaking context, there is often reference to the historical traditions of international youth work (see: international solidarity, international/intercultural understanding, extracurricular youth work, voluntary social year, political education, or global and intercultural learning). In which traditions or current macro-social contexts (including temporal diagnoses) is this practice elsewhere categorized?

International Understanding and Societal Change in the Context of Global Inequalities

The reference to the idea of international understanding is evident in all interviews and contexts. However, upon closer examination, the associated implications vary. For the institutionalization of international youth work in the USA, the concept of international understanding is primarily shaped by a "Post-World-War-II" sense of "efforts towards reconciliation" (albeit differently from Germany). Interestingly, this field largely operates without state funding or is not considered a governmental responsibility. Instead of being framed as a form of social work or a strategy of foreign policy (e.g., EU/Erasmus+), the interviews refer to it as an "exchange industry." The "Family Stay" program is seen as an economic enterprise⁶. Nevertheless, this practice is driven by willing and engaged families, thus enjoying high plausibility and acceptance, at least in certain population segments.

"I do think that the, the motivations for exchanges, in many ways grow out of, you know, World War Two, as well in the United States. That's, in the nineteen fifties, that's when high school exchange programs the, you know, if you want to call them the original programs, the first programs, really began with an idea that we need to repair our relationships." [NU: 358]

With this idea, at least there, there is also a certain Western sense of mission (more progressive in terms of technology, democracy, etc.).

"(...) sharing what we know, there's definitely a, you know, sort of a, one could always call it, you know, patriarchal mindset that we have skills and ideas that we want to bring to your country //Mhh// and what can we do to help with the skills that we have." [NU: 407]

It's noteworthy that exchanges are predominantly organized "Inbound" rather than "Outgoing," implicitly reinforcing and transmitting this difference in progress⁷. Paradoxically, the idea of

⁶Note: This economic landscape of exchange organizations also exists in Germany, as evidenced by events such as the "Youth Education Fairs," where 171 (!) providers and offerings are represented [<https://jugendbildungsmesse.de/ausstellerverzeichnis/>; April 4, 2024]. However, this economic significance is not reflected in the discourse.

⁷For example, Thilde Juul-Wiese, in the Danish professional context (pre-service teachers going abroad), points out that negative experiences with a profession perceived as 'inferior' can also lead to a general devaluation of the other cultural context (Juul-Wiese, 2023).

learning about another culture is deeply ingrained in this form, compared to others, but it remains one-sided (one way).

"So, while they're doing that to make it feasible for students of all different, you know focus areas and interests in exchange, those students are not all getting a fully immersive experience. You know, most, many of them are having still more sort of a touristy experience, but it's something. It's better than nothing, I think. But I do think that the high school experience where you live with the family, you have that day-to-day routine and you're part of that community, is different than the university experience where you might be surrounded by a bunch of other American students in a program that is sort of superimposed (...)." [YU: 513]

Representative of most European countries, Turkey's EU accession marked the beginning of IYW:

"So, in Turkey, we have international youth work because somehow, we became the part of Erasmus plus program, actually." [CT:373]. Similarly, in Portugal: "But for me, at least, it came a lot with all these Erasmus fundings (...)." [AP:557].

However, the EU-funded practice, which serves as a strategic and subsidized tool for advancing both cohesion and youth policy, is perceived as a well-intentioned but sometimes foreign and distant practice (e.g., Portugal, Turkey). The understandings of youth (participation) and European identity to be conveyed seem (still) incompatible.

Furthermore, this opening, or the idea of interculturality, is intertwined with different forms of societal change (past and ongoing) (unlike the perception in the USA/Germany). It is also considered a phenomenon of prosperity, increasingly accessible to a broader population—its spread thus having an egalitarian dimension. Moreover, this idea must contend with various fears associated with an "opening to the world."

"(...) when I was a child, in my primary school process, which is early nineties, what I knew the, the meaning of the world, geopolitical importance of the country, which was in the first grade. Can you imagine that? Bec- we [Turkey] have the enemy in the West, the enemy in the east. So, we were raised like that. So, we just thought that everybody wants to kill us." [CT: 446]

"I think that the first voluntary service in Portugal started in ninety-six like the first people working going like to do voluntary work outside. So, I think it's quite new, this idea of interculturality because Portugal is still it's a very, it's a very poor country, you know like that's it. Everyone, the most, most of the people that are now in big cities, all their grandfathers and fathers came from villages like this one. So, like the, the social context is changed very much in a very fast movement. (...) before only like the wealthy, wealthiest people could think about this." [AP:562]

„Wir waren immer ängstlich, dass die Deutschen nach Polen kommen und unsere Grundstücke kaufen. Aber es hat sich herausgestellt, dass die Mehrheit von Polen nach Deutschland umgesiedelt ist und dort Grundstücke gekauft hat und Häuser bewohnt. Und in diesen Grenzregionen, in den kleinen Orten, da sind fast die Hälfte Polen, die dort entweder leben und in Polen arbeiten oder hier leben und dort arbeiten. Auch wenn wir solche Projekte und Teilnehmerlisten prüfen, stehen auf den deutschen Teilnehmerlisten polnische Namen und die Nationalität wird als deutsch-polnisch bezeichnet. Also das hat sich wirklich in diesen 20 Jahren sehr geändert.“ [PPi:44]

In these contexts, a notion of progress is repeatedly associated with this practice, albeit more as a narrative of inferiority of the periphery. Exchange aims less at "encounters with other cultures on an equal footing" (as seen in the discourse in Germany). Instead, it is seen as an opportunity to learn from more progressive places "for home" (various aspects: economic ideas, cultural techniques, educational offerings, democracy, youth participation, sustainable development). The societal change in which this practice is nationally embedded is seen as needing careful management: through international work as a strategic instrument of a progressive civil society in these supply structures. This points to the idea of shaping "the social" through educational offerings—an idea that is closely associated with the field of "social work" in Germany (not just imparting knowledge). While those active in the field welcome this change (which should not be generalized to entire societies), there is a recurring negative aspect of such societal change that is problematized by the interviewees alike.

With these processes of change comes a migration from rural to urban areas (or to other countries), especially among the younger generation. However, to counteract this, "learning abroad" can open up new perspectives on home: the work of progress in the social realm. Internationalisation is not the cause but the response to this development; this unobstructed opportunity gives the younger generation the chance to learn new things, gather experiences with other young people, and consciously decide on staying at home.

"I think it's more like this idea that's that you really you can go outside and I think learn from other places what they are doing wrong or they are doing right and bring back and try to put it in practice, you know and also be amazed and surprised on how things that you do are doing are being done in other places and, and, and how they work." [AP: 634]

"Today, I would add one more thing – young people need to learn how to develop their local communities and local youth work by the experiences, networks and inspirations coming from the international youth work." [MPi: F4]

"And it is also very often that young people go abroad for a few years and then come consciously home or to their own country. They gain experiences, they like to travel. Earlier, they were not allowed to, and it is still conscious with us that the parents were not allowed or could not afford it." [PPi: 701]

Especially in the "periphery," there is (the other side of the missionary zeal) the idea of regional, often rural development, which can be promoted (also) through participatory learning formats, youth exchange, and generally openness to new things. It is noteworthy that the discourse of counter-internationalisation in Germany, which is also not characterized by that narrative of progress and inferiority, is conducted the other way around: internationalisation seduces youth to leave their homeland (see the background of question dimension VI).

Youth in the Context of New Learning Formats, Educational Critique, and Social Pedagogy

Another nearly ubiquitous narrative links IYW to new learning formats (reform pedagogy, non-formal education, extracurricular youth education). At the interface with the previously outlined claim of managing societal change in the (global/European) periphery well, both the connection to new learning formats and to youth-related justifications are established.

"We were very curious about all which comes from the West. Inspired by all non-formal education formats and activities." [MPi: F2]

"Young people should expect to learn more about themselves and how they can affect change in the world around them." [CU: F2]

"Wie sie sich selbst gestalten als Menschen, vielleicht ist es so eine Rolle, also die Leute sind neugierig. Sie wollen sich treffen. Sie wollen entdecken, wie die Anderen leben. Wie die Anderen arbeiten, was für eine Musik sie hören, wie Konzerte aussehen. Also die Neugier bleibt. Und ich glaube, unsere Rolle ist diese Dinge einfach zu ermöglichen und sowas zu machen oder entdecken." [PPI:728]

The strategic goal of the EU is, among other things through Erasmus+, to initiate both an explicit youth policy and an idea of youth work and democracy education in the EU countries: "a focus on young people, personal development and voluntary participation" (European Commission 2014: 4). Surprisingly, however, in the interviews, the inherent connection between youth as a life phase, self-determined learning formats, and democratic participation was not explicitly formulated. Youth-theoretical justification narratives seem not to be widely spread (evident) everywhere⁸. In some cases, the question II regarding this matter was difficult to understand ("What do you mean?") or evasively answered. In few cases, there was an interpretation of youth as a life phase, which also implied an awareness of a generational difference:

"I have a fourteen year old brother and, but I think that's an answer that could only come from a younger young person. But what I see, normally, it's a very big eagerness to travel." [SP: 468]

This interpretation 'of' youth as determined by curiosity is also placed in the context of an increasingly globalized understanding 'as' youth:

"(...) this desire to, to travel and see, see other countries, knowing that we were not going to do it alone." [SP: 478]

Only in one case was there an answer that explicitly articulated this practice of IYW as a pedagogical response to dilemmas of 'youthful growing up':

"So, I see it's very connected to self-esteem to increase confidence in because I I don't think anyone is ever completely comfortable when they are many of us not even comfortable at home. As young people, we always, there's always something about ourselves that's not good enough. And I think when you go abroad, everyone, regardless of where, but either you don't think you speak good enough English or you don't fit with the group or this or that. There's always these fears. And once you are abroad and you actually experience things and you are able to conquer these fears or see that you could do it." [SP: 510]

⁸[1] In Germany, this argument has found its way into the social legislation of SGB VIII. The extent to which this is also manifest in other countries cannot be explained here. (see also Walther et Al 2019 & 2021).

At times, the experience abroad is also seen as a challenge that promotes independence, reflexivity, or resilience (coping skills)—which is an desirable pedagogical goal 'towards' youth, among others:

"It's led to amazing connections, wonderful world perspectives, a lot of I think developing of, you know, independence and coping skills, open-mindedness and and the ability, I think, one of the most important things for me, about being an exchange student, is being able to see the country, the community, the world that I grew up in a little bit from the outside." [YU: 84]

"I think that's, you know, I think that's a really important point, that it- it can be really challenging. It can be really hard. And yes, there are families, and this is something I was sensitive to, there are families who send their children on exchange, either because they they had such an amazing experience or they think their child needs it and it's not. I actua-, I don't think that's an appropriate motivation, but but ultimately, I think in many, many situations where there are a lot of challenges, the lessons are not necessarily learned then, but they do come later in life." [YU: 330]

At this point, many different pedagogical intentions associated with this open, fuzzy practice of temporary foreign mobility could be cited. However, the focus here is on the national or local justification contexts in which they are intertwined. In relation to youth, temporary foreign mobility—in the form of accompanied, non-formal educational offerings—is primarily linked to a reform pedagogical idea of other learning goals and new learning formats. Consequently, a critique of formal education is often associated with this. Initially embedded in the idea of learning from better practices. Subsequently, with regard to youth work and the dominance of formalized education compared to other countries.

"Bei uns gibt es sehr selten solche Strukturen. Meistens sind da schon organisierte Gruppen. (...) Es gibt, es gibt keine Jugendtreffen, wo kann man sich frei einfach treffen. Bei uns muss man sich eintragen. Entweder diesen Kreis besuchst du (Schach, ein Orchester, den Ballettkurs oder Gitarrenkurs). Es gibt keinen, ja... offene, offene Treffpunkt... deswegen wegen sich in diese Jugendeinrichtungen."⁹ [PPi: 438]

"No, we do not have institutions that are specifically dedicated to international exchange or that. (...) We don't have such things in XXX. The [individual] participants have the freedom of choice (...). With us, yes, they register as a fixed group." [PPi: 516]

The fact that these pedagogical formats also constitute a different space for youthful growing up is deliberate—which in turn is a learning opportunity for the 'local' youth to learn from other young people or to develop a specific shared understanding of youth.

"Die deutschen Schüler funktionieren ganz anders als bei uns in XXX. Noch. Dort ist es viel wert, wenn du eigene Stimme hast. Wenn du eigene Meinung hast und du darfst dich äußern. Bei uns ist es nicht so üblich //Hmm//. Und wenn die sich in solchen Projekten treffen und dann sehen, dass die deutschen Jugendlichen eine Meinung äußern, den Mut haben, so was zu sagen, dann lernen sie auch, so was selbst zu machen." [PPi: 557]

⁹ This is in contrast to the 'open youth work' format in Germany. Essentially, these are organisations that are places where young people can meet and then decide for themselves, as young people, what they want to do together.

This educational periphery is often more strongly linked to societal change. However, the practice promoted by the EU is perceived as "too" foreign, not only regarding the plausibility of ideas such as "participation" in local sociocultural contexts but also concerning the involved state institutions. Initially, it may sound like a critique of one's own "backward" society, but it also implies criticism of EU formats developed "from above". For professionals working in this field with the aim of positively shaping society, this can be frustrating.

"We created lots of solutions according, I mean, between young people, and how much of them reached the real authorities? I don't think that much. And then this activity didn't mean anything." [CT: 668]

"In XXX, we still don't have a youth policy, which is created by participatory approach. So that's a huge shame. We are in the program for fifteen years and we had, we, we hosted thousands of young people in the projects and we made thousands of solutions, we provided thousands of creations in those projects. How many of those have been adopted by the national government? None. So, then why did we do that?" [CT: 686]

Less frequently but still explicitly present is the understanding that through international youth work, social youth work is being conducted:

"(...) because I realized that my place was in social work." [AP: 234] or: *"So, it's also a social work because suddenly I'm sending two youngsters from here, but I have to talk with their mother, their sister, their grandmother, just to convince them that it's okay, that it's free because it's from the European funding and he's not going to die."* [AP: 279]

A more temporal diagnostic connection is made where these new forms of learning are either not yet recognized as self-evident or where the developmental narrative is not discursively engaged, and the critique of education rather relates to a negative societal change process, such as an increasing neo-liberalisation of education. While in the affluent modern era, opportunities for individuation increase (for example, one doesn't have to become what their parents were but can ask what they want to become), paradoxically, the standardisation of educational and life paths also increases:

"(...) because (XXX) schools want the students to finish this particular academic track, to strengthen their chances to go, to be accepted into university and, which I think is a shame, and I think it's a trend that may change, but that (was a) frustration for me, seeing how my children and their peers... in some ways it's easier to be accepted into an exchange program these days, than it was in the nineteen, you know, seventies and eighties, but it's also more challenging to step away from t- the very vigorous and very predictable academic track that the you- that the (XXX) schools are setting for the students. It's harder to step away from that and say, I'm going to do something different, because I see the benefits in doing something different for me, and I will be fine in the end. (...) I will achieve, you know, my university or (XXX) program that I want to achieve, and I will be, you know, better for it by having done this exchange." [YU: 69]

The motivation of young people to participate in such temporary stays abroad is often language acquisition (this is found in most interviews). However, it is initially questionable whether this says more about youth or points to the family-mediated interpretation patterns that invoke this economically career-oriented justification context:

"And so, I think while that motivation to learn another language is part of why some students go on exchange, they're generally going on exchange without a lot of those skills, you know, already under their belt." [YU: 430]

This legitimisation pattern for exchange formats does not play a significant role among the interviewed experts, even though their own interest in other languages was often a path into the profession.

3.2 Paths into the profession and the constitutive structural logic of professional action

Whether IYW constitutes a profession is rather questionable. However, professionalisation of the field is taking place - typically mediated through a diverse practice, where experts have been acting professionally for years. Therefore, the question arises: which biographical experiences are influential for the understanding of the profession? Does this field attract a specific type of person? Or are there similar biographical dispositions and prior experiences shared by participants in the field that lead them to feel called to this work and field of action?

Various facets emerge from the conducted interviews, particularly from the professional biographical narratives, which are cited as reasons why someone is active in this field. A case-related reconstruction (of the case itself) in the sense of narrative analysis is not conducted here. I also do not explicitly elaborate on aspects that generally apply to project work in civil society organizations.

However, I interpret these facets as references to the structural logic of this professional field of action. At the same time, I am aware that this list does not constitute a comprehensive professional theoretical analysis, for example from a systems theory perspective. Furthermore, in a subsequent step, the paradoxical demands and contradictory mediation requirements that are constitutive for this professional practice would need to be elaborated, as they are unavoidable but must be handled reflexively.

Social commitment

The narrative of one's own socio-political engagement [12] essentially appears prominently in every biographical narrative - in variation:

"Since I remember I was a very participative creature, active already in the village and in the primary school either by supporting other students or representing us in different 'school bodies'" [MPi: F1]

"And on the local level, also around the country, I used to engage in these volunteering activities in the summer where we would go and work with groups of young people, although I was of course very young myself." [SP: 25]

"I did some voluntary work, and I was quite active also in the university itself. We had like what's called a students' nucleus, that would be, I don't know, the student, not council, but group of students of my, my degree. (...) We were like ten and so we started doing some activities, I don't

know, so movie, movie clubs and some book clubs and, well, some parties. So, I started getting involved in, in the, all these, you know, like cultural movement and cultural organization." [AP: 96]

"And I have started to be interested in youth work when I was eighteen or seventeen, because I was always kind of leader characteristic in school. So when there is a social work to do I was always volunteered and I was always in different (lines) and like, I had a spirit of activism and I was always, li-, in talk and tell people something to get in action, so, after that when I was in the college, I was a member of some groups, in school groups, and that was mostly about right-based activities, social work." [CT: 10]

(In)-Justice

What is also often mentioned in the context of engagement is a "sense of justice" or a sensitivity to "injustice." On one hand, this is linked to one's own experiences of exclusion (culture, race, class, gender): This is closely related to IYW because experiences of cultural differences are a core aspect of experiences abroad, which opens up the possibility space to problematize forms of inclusion and exclusion in general.

"So I was very interested in this kind of things since I was born, let's say, because I was also very interested in intercultural learning, discovering different cultures, discovering different languages, so I had lots of friends from different countries, I was always, let's say, an international person." [CT: 16]

And on the other hand, due to the societal inequality of opportunities (traveling or participation as a phenomenon of prosperity): Here, organizing exchange formats offers the opportunity to address societal inequality concretely.

"And for me it's very clear that the lack of opportunities that I experienced as a teenager." [SP: 172]

This experienced inequality of opportunities does not necessarily go hand in hand with one's own experiences of exclusion. Sometimes it is also the perceived inequality of opportunities of others that drives one, while oneself had the luck to grow up privileged.

"So, I never experienced like an exclusive situation because of the color of my skin or because of... I mean, of course there were things that I would have liked to have done if my parents were richer, but I never experienced like individual exclusion per se, but yeah, just the fact that I was there, it doesn't... ." [SP: 195]

"I felt a strong need to shape the reality around me, be active, engaged and have an impact on my life and the life of others, especially of those who had a more challenging start in life." [MPi: F1]

Intercultural encounters and the personal experience between cultures

Early intercultural experiences - whether with strangers as guests in the parental home, parents moving abroad, growing up with (separated) parents from different cultural backgrounds, or through own travels and organized stays abroad during the school career - are positive experiences that significantly shape such an intercultural professional biography. This curiosity, the relationship with the foreign, or even the dilemma of feeling belonging to different cultures (or to none at all),

becomes the defining orientation for further biography. Importantly, not all young people and young adults experience their stay abroad positively (sometimes even as traumatic), which simply leads to not pursuing this international orientation or direction further. Only individuals who have been socialized through positive experiences abroad end up in the field.

"It really started with my parents when I was about twelve years old. My parents decided to host an exchange student, and that began a long series of many different exchange students who, you know, entered our family as family members. And my parents did this, you know. I thought it was sort of a bold move with the first student that they hosted because they were curious and they wanted to, they saw this as a way to bring the world to our family. We didn't have the means to travel outside of the country." [YU: 3]

"So well, when I was five, I moved to Spain, so when I moved to Spain with my parents and then I only, I was in Mallorca and then in Galicia. And when I was thirteen, I moved back to Portugal with my parents, and we, I was living near to Porto in a city called XXX." [AP: 58]

"So, actually, I think it is the story of my life. As a kid, I was going from time to time abroad, mostly to the Netherlands when I was like six, seven years old, and I really liked from the very beginning this international setting and another country, and of course, it was a bit obvious at that time because XXX was, you know, this grey country that you couldn't actually cross. But still, I was feeling very well, even though I had to communicate in another language or in other ways, and this is, I think, when I had this feeling that my life would be somehow connected with this international experience. (...) And when I was in high school, I was very lucky because we were the first class learning French, and every year for four years, we had two weeks exchange, actually a month exchange, because two weeks the French people were coming to XXX and were hosted by us, and then I was going to France and this first French guy that came to my family, and we had really challenges to communicate (...) but still, we managed to become friends and so. (...) I went when I was sixteen, I think my parents sent me for one month to be in his village, with his family, and this is where I really learnt French very well and I was feeling so great." [JP: 8]

Cultural organization and youthful togetherness

However, social engagement is not only directed outwardly towards shaping society. The enjoyment of planning and implementing public, cultural activities together with others is another frequently mentioned source of this field, which provides a path to be followed into the profession. For example:

"So, I started getting involved in all these, you know, like cultural movement and cultural organization." (AP: 102) Or: "We were around seven, and we also helped with the cultural organization. So, you paid like a lower price and then you also could create some events, so you could help with the events that were happening in the organization. So that was already another work. I don't know in the world of the cultural organization. And while I was living there, I got my first job paid in the, in a youth organization (XXX), and I did an internship, and I was basically working as an Erasmus, in the Erasmus world." [AP: 140]

In this sense, these forms of project work also build on vividly experienced forms of youthful interaction in peer groups, where curiosity, the mutual stabilization of values, as well as collective group dynamics play a role, as well as working with other people.

"It was so extraordinary to sit in the circle, to have all energizers, to meet people from all over the world and to feel a part of a bigger and highly motivated community. To create projects together."
[MPi: F2]

Sometimes, the personal significance of this form of youthful action is also based on reconnecting with one's own youth and extending the feeling of life of this phase.

"So, I start going with these mobilities, the youth exchanges, training courses, and, well, as, because of financial needs that was a way to travel also and to get to know the world, you know, and to get to know like for a week a whole country like good eating their foods, knowing the people from there. So, I was very interested in this international work, this working with the youngsters, being one myself." [AP: 89]

New forms of learning and the joy of language and other ways of working

This communal experience is accompanied by the experience of non-formal learning methods. Even though one comes into contact with this source only in the field, it is a significant reason for all interviewees to stay there and pursue this path further - despite adversities or even though something is missed now that one has taken on more overarching management tasks in the field.

"So that it already gave me contact with non-formal education, so how to learn about a topic without being seated down in the classroom, you know, learning from the teacher. And so I went to several weeks of that with different topics and then, very influenced by my sister, because she also studied English and Spanish, I went to the university to have a degree in the foreign language." [AP: 70]

"I was a teacher but I was not a teacher and I got to use non-formal education methods to work with young people on skills and more than the skills, maybe the life hacks and the trust that they needed to have on themselves to engage in such experiences." [SP: 49]

Ability to create and self-realization

With these new learning methods comes the experience of being able to shape pedagogical processes for people. As described, there is no clear training path into this vague field of action, so no one finds themselves with a straightforward career biography, having planned international youth work as education, career goal, or strategic career path. One rather slips into this work accidentally, comes into contact, and stays. On the other hand, this means that career biographies in this field are usually unsteady, even broken, and the decision for this line of work is formulated as a conscious decision for meaningful work. Sometimes it is also seen as an alternative to a less meaningful profession beyond the civil society sector or to the formalized pedagogical field of schools. Occasionally, the possibility of creatively shaping the learning processes of others and developing new project concepts together, which are also linked to the normative claim of positively shaping society, is presented as a form of self-realization. This practice of constantly educating and further educating oneself in this field, whether in terms of new topics or other forms of learning, is also part of a reform pedagogical tradition. Good work in this field is associated with freedom of design. This is also indicated by the consistently high job satisfaction in the interviews, despite precarious project work or financial cuts - although no empirically representative statement can be made based on the interviews. Only where this work is difficult to reconcile with family life, this is different. Exemplary, even if this interpretation is based on longer narrative passages:

"I am very satisfied with it. I am a teacher by profession. I taught for five years at high school, but it was Polish language. I am Polish. But I had two passions in addition. One of them is sports, and the other was the German language. And there was an opportunity to further educate myself, and I acquired German language skills. And then it was just chance. It was suggested to me to work in the organization. I had no knowledge about international youth cooperation. About structures at all. I only had language skills, and that was 20 years ago, 23 years ago." [PPi: 6]

"I was working for a market research company and started a volunteer initiative for the company and found that I really wanted to work in the nonprofit sector." [DU: F1]

"So, I went to see the international relations and very soon I found out that the kind of international cooperation that I was interested in was not the one that happens in the private secret rooms of people in positions of power. But I was really more interested in the human aspect of it." [SP: 12]

"So, there's a lot of things to do. So, that was also exciting. So, we started doing some social projects like direct interaction with the, what is, what were our neighbors and bring in a lot of the artistic world that we wanted to bring here." [AP: 202]

"(...) because we are all working in with the objective of doing something that we like." [AP: 266]

"So, there's a lot of, there's a lot of nice work to do here, like, and really nice impact to do around here that you see it happening." [AP: 316]

In this regard, the normative claim and the open, designable pedagogical form of IJB are reflected in a high sense of meaning and a strong career identification of those professionally active in the field.

3.3 Challenges and contradictory professional requirements

Finally, I would like to address the challenges that were mentioned in the interviews. Here, a second step would be to derive antinomic action requirements from them. These are requirements that are inherent to the field of action under varying conditions and must be professionally addressed or endured, demanding professional action and not being absorbed into routine administrative acts or resolved through better organization, new technologies, or management. However, in this project report, I will only be able to name challenges for the time being - thus only taking the first step towards identifying antinomic, contradictory, or paradoxical tensions that characterize professional action in the field of international youth work.

The dimension of *Challenges* was addressed in the interviews through two open questions. Firstly, in a question about concrete, everyday challenges (Question IV) and secondly, in a more abstract way (Question VI), through the 'curious' question of where international youth work will be in 30 years according to the respondents. This form of question superficially aims at a distant future. A period of 30 years is essentially too abstract and not concretely imaginable (five or ten years would be familiar, tangible categories in political processes; 30 years might be conceivable with regard to family images). Formulated in a working context, this ungraspable timeframe opens up space for abstract, deliberative, speculative problematisations that nonetheless refer to the immediate present. The answers articulate an implicit depth level of current challenges, which are located

beyond practical, everyday discourses. What currently concerns those professionally active in the field, apart from everyday adversities? In these considerations, I draw on the work of Cuzzocrea and Mandich (2016).

The named challenges are listed below. A systematic plausibility check based on transcript quotations would exceed the scope of this project report (even more so the necessary interpretation of the specific contexts in local contexts). Some challenges that apply to project-funded fields of action or civil society structures in general have been omitted. Perhaps these can also be expanded. This list serves initially as a basis for dialogue between research and practice - possibly to prepare for the second step (antinomic action requirements).

- *Unequal/exclusive access to educational opportunities.* How can a just, status-group-based diversity of participants in international youth work be ensured, in view of heterogeneity and societal inequality structures (and with limited state funding, due to the coupling to unequal education systems, urban-rural dichotomies, parental educational background, etc.)? This debate is also intensively conducted scientifically in the German-speaking region; it is beginning on a European level. Equal educational opportunities for all can never be achieved; it remains a continuing benchmark of this process.
- *The social and family dimension of inclusion or participation.* Access to opportunities plays a role especially at the carrier level. An area that is funded significantly through program lines, projects, and applications presupposes information and access to these, thereby excluding other regions or areas (see below). This challenge is also expressed in the debate about project vs. structural funding. Unequal access to educational opportunities is not purely a financial question. Even where participants have access to resources, there are other personal and social barriers preventing them from making use of these offers (educational climbers, socio-psychological problems in the family, parental status, lack of self-confidence). Working on these boundaries and enabling access in individual as well as group-related cases, however, presupposes an understanding of IYW as 'social work'. How do I reach the people who are not already included? How in rural areas? How in urban areas? Educational offers reproduce all forms of structural inequality, but these can also be worked on. This also raises the question of how such offers, which are often financed through the EU beyond Germany, can be integrated into local youth work and create synergies? The other side of this are norms (standardizations) of youth growing up, such as the expectation (from others or even from oneself) of having to undergo such a stay abroad. Not participating in this and not being able to prove it in the resume leads from a career perspective to a double exclusion.
- *The recognition of non-formal education compared to established formal educational offers.* Here, lack of resources (governmental, private) plays a role as well as socio-cultural (non-)acceptance of 'alternative' forms of learning, for example in families, the paradoxical normative processes of adolescence, the neo-liberalisation of education systems, or societal developments such as individual optimization. This is also accompanied by the fact that extracurricular educational offerings cannot be thought of independently of developments in the formal education system. Changes there, such as an increasing neo-liberalisation in terms of competency orientation and focus on educational qualifications, significantly shape the perception and possibilities of 'alternative' offers.
- *Competition with other alternative leisure and educational offerings.* It's not just international youth work itself that is becoming increasingly differentiated. Even beyond

formal settings, the opportunities for individuation for adolescents and young adults are increasing, for example through an increasing range of other leisure activities (informal learning, music, sport) or through new social spaces through social media (new media).

- *Financing and organizational deficit.* International youth work struggles with a structural financing and organisational deficit. It can only be provided to a limited extent on a voluntary basis but always requires sufficient financial resources to realize temporary mobility from place to place. This initially entails a bureaucratization of complex procedures as well as a funding structure-related professionalisation. However, the latter is again in conflict with access to educational opportunities (see above) and prevents professionalisation in pedagogical terms - either because standards shift or non-pedagogical standards come to the fore, or because administration and organization take up more time than pedagogical support. However, in most interviews, it is expressed that the application procedures are becoming increasingly cumbersome. The ability to write and account for projects according to third-party funding requirements only partially reflects the quality of organized educational opportunities and is associated with exclusions of local providers and regions that are less professionalised in this aspect.
- *Discrepancy between educational formats and everyday life.* State-funded educational offers that aim to shape society or strategically solve problems always face the challenge of how much they can connect to everyday practices that they also want to promote. For a mutually enriching process, this discrepancy must not be too great. This is especially a challenge for EU youth policies. A related problem is the discrepancy between official decisions and their implementation. While the EU Youth Work Strategy may lead to youth policies being formally introduced in countries (via Erasmus+), the implementation of these decisions or the ability of youth parliaments to actually exert influence is not guaranteed.
- *Incompatibility of individual and structure.* The conception and implementation of good international youth work offerings require an interplay of individual knowledge, (mostly person-related) relationship networks, and the continuous development of offering structures. At the same time, project financing fosters precarious employment conditions and frequent turnover of responsible persons. This always entails a loss of knowledge and networks. Professionalisation therefore requires structural funding. The demand for equal educational opportunities also requires the continuous development of offerings in institutions and milieus that are remote from offerings - an attempt to reach those who have not been reached so far, instead of satisfying funding quotas where demand already exists.
- *Event (structure) and biography.* A subspect of this also refers to the event participants. Generally, funding agencies, carriers, and organizers have individual events in mind. From a biographical perspective, however, these events build on each other, with the experience of the first event preventing or promoting further participation. International orientation or a cosmopolitan attitude is usually a self- and world relationship that influences the biographies of youth and career paths.
The constant dilemma of how to create *good offers for and with youth* - and then to adequately consider them in political processes or the design of funding guidelines.
- *Learning organizations and funding structures.* A first step is to recognize problems. A second is to address them. Especially in a field that is organized and financed as pluralistically and internationally as this one, and is predominantly output-oriented, there

has been little development of reflexive structures in the field of international youth work, which are able to adequately feed local justifications and challenges into a policy process. The question of possible reflexivity (and its consideration) also manifests itself in the problem that this area is constantly occupied with its self-promotion and legitimation. International youth work needs to be justified, to donors, in political processes, as well as to participants and their parents. The field (like others) is therefore characterized by a tone of positive self-presentation, which prevents it from dealing with ambiguities and paradoxes. Not every stay abroad is 'great' - so what?

- *Opportunities and risks of pedagogization.* Experiences abroad thrive on chance, irritations, challenges. An increasing pedagogisation, which tries to orient in pre- and post-preparations or in accompanying experiences with difference, restricts that aspect, the intensity and impressiveness of experiencing the other/foreign and thus entering into a relationship. At the same time, such an experience without guidance carries the risk of solidifying stereotypes or being rejected as too burdensome and shocking. Also, in many countries (where the format is not yet so established), 'security' is a big aspect, especially towards parents. How can one convince someone to 'let their child go' if not through comprehensive care and support (see also above, justification patterns)? This dilemma requires professional handling.

4. Summary and outlook: The local pedagogization of European/global norms

[State of the art, April 15, 2024: A final revision will take place after the joint discussion with interview partners, practitioners and colleagues at the "1st Digital and International Networking Event 2024" of "FPD - Research and Practice in Dialogue International Youth Work" under the title "International Justification Narratives for International Youth Work", on April 19, 2024].

Methodologically, this first report from the project International Narratives of International Youth Work 2022-2023 brings together the interviews conducted to form a shared narrative on this field of work. This movement of thought aims to identify commonalities, interfaces and facets of the interviews with experts from the USA, Turkey, Portugal and Poland with a view to a necessary professional debate.

One starting point was the assumption that the ongoing professionalization needs to be reflected. Even more, particularly in the field of international youth work this seems relevant, as the influence of the professionals (facilitators, multipliers) is more significant in these unusual, irritating, open educational practices than in formal, routinized settings. In order to avoid misunderstandings: professionalism does not necessarily demand more education. Through further preparation and follow-up supervision, more energizers, didactic games, thematic input as well as higher normative expectations. Within social work, for example, professionalism might mean more self-restriction, patient guidance and reflexive moderation.

At least in my view, the fundamental self-formation experiences through which IYW affects teenagers and young adults take place casually, incidentally or by chance. In other words, on the one hand as experiences abroad - whether through encounters or differences, and on the other hand temporary mobility - far from the usual norms and beyond formalized settings. Nevertheless, it is precisely this international, space of self-formation opportunities that must be financed,

organized, structured, accompanied, moderated or reflected upon through professional action in first place. This already points out to one antinomy of professionalization within this particular field of work.

If we focus on the professionals, the first question that arises is *in what pedagogical and political narratives is this practice embedded from their perspective?* Sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, these Narratives are transmitted through informal learning and are subtly effective in non-everyday practices. But first of all: Is there actually a common professional understanding of 'our' international practice? Or are these only particular alien practices which are supposedly subsumed under a common framework? And if so, to what extent can a common understanding be methodologically derived from the individual narratives of experts from different countries? As the one person who conducted all the different interviews, I can give a preliminary answer: All the interviews were carried by an engaging, even congenial atmosphere - there was no sense of alienness and it is worth doing research and explicit in dialogue what connects 'us'. Thus, this article can't give an answer on it's one, but it might provide impulses for a debate on professional action necessary in international youth work.

Following a (german) debate on professionalization, I framed the field through three dimensions: Society (horizontal), biography (vertical) and action (deep).

Basically there are two legitimacy patterns for IYW relevant, by means of which this practice is narratively embedded *in social contexts*. On the one hand, there is a political frame in which understanding across national borders becomes entangled with the development of the nation state. In the light of global inequalities, e.g. the (perceived) peripheral position and diagnosis calling for the transformation of one's own country, the relevance of this legitimization pattern changes. As does the focus of what is the aim of temporary international mobility. Secondly, there is a pedagogical legitimation pattern parting from new forms of learning, and alternative educational spaces. Depending on the circumstances, this pedagogical argumentation is rather linked to youth, a critique of the educational system or - rarely - to social work or education in democracy. However, this pedagogical justification seems less present (important) and differentiated than the political frame.

If we look at the *professional biographies* and paths into the profession of those involved, various sources echo across different countries. They seem to be central to the *professional logic of action*, as they are listed by those who have obviously allocated themselves within the field for a longer period. In summary, four closely interlinked sources can be identified: a) Social: The emphasis on personal commitment and (in)justice actually suggests that this practice is located within the discipline of social work - yet hardly acknowledged by those involved. b) Culture: Intercultural encounters, sometimes also coping with one's own biographical, multiple (non-)belongings, go hand in hand with a fundamental interest in engaging with culture, as well as curiosity about foreign things and joy with other languages. c) Openness: Youthful interaction can be characterized by indeterminacy, ambivalence and a collective struggle for self-determination, and is reflected within the field in dynamic group interactions and project like forms of working. d) Shaping: Ultimately, talking about IJB is always linked to normativity, meaningfulness or significance. This is why the participants' own creative freedom, the opportunity to contribute new ideas or the constant personal development should not be underestimated.

Ultimately, there are *challenges* shared in this field of work, despite different forms and contexts. These refer to tensions, contradictions and paradoxes inherent to the field under varying conditions. They must be dealt with or endured professionally. These challenges don't disappear through routine, better management or new 'technologies'. Still, to derive to comderiving antinomies of professional action from these challenges, is a step yet to accomplish. . The following challenges were identified: a) Inclusion in an unequal world (whereby access is not a purely financial issue, but requires a complex interplay of family, local and social conditions); b) Recognition and distinction from formal education ; c) Competition with other opportunities for young people to individuate themselves (leisure, sport, media); d) funding deficit and organizational surplus for international mobility. e) Shaping of society vs. bureaucratization; f) Funding structures vs. learning organizations; g) Discrepancy between strategic intervention (e.g. youth policy) and lifeworld; h) Complexity of practices vs. fragile conditions to succeed (networks structures by NGOs; biographies of participants); h) Opportunities and risks of pedagogization.

Instead of summarizing similarities, a comparative approach could contrast differences. However, this would be a different report and shall only be formulated here as an outlook.

The quotes from the interviews show the extent, to which this practice of international youth work is embedded in local contexts - which must be taken into account in order to understand the professional self-image and the societal effects. The local implementation of this European/global norms becomes plausible within different circumstances and might be more fragile than elsewhere. While the last question about the future of IYW in 30 years' time is usually met with abstract answers, very concrete formulations are given with regard to Turkey, for example:

"I cannot imagine. (...) Yeah, yeah. I cannot imagine two years from now in this country. @(.)@ (...) Anything can happen. Thirty years from now, if this country would still exist, @(.)@ @we can still talk about, if we can still talk about international youth work in the country@. Well, actually, that's a very very tough question, really, because latest development of the country, I mean, latest () of the country is very tense." [u.a. CT.: 844]

The current, highly practice-oriented professional debate is shaped by the program-objectives in the field. The debate attempts to justify why IYW is "good" and to prove that the proclaimed intention is successful. In doing so, the focus lies on the practice in itself. A skeptical, social studies would be appropriate here, which question the impact in different pedagogical, cultural and political contexts (in order to improve them). Well- intentions are not always good - and the answers to 'how' European/global norm are pedagogized and politicized locally may vary greatly. IYW needs perspectives from 'outside' the field.

"So what I what I've seen and this is also being very analytical in the I'd say the past at least for the past five years I've been looking very closely at what kind of discussions are promoted around actually and people in general, youth policies, youth participation, youth exchange, whatever. And what I see is that the the dialogues are very it's again the bubble. You know we have people who do youth work. Talking to the people who want to promote youth work or promote want to promote youth work might be a strong a strong image." [SP:755].

Finally, it should be pointed out once again that IYW, due to its tradition as a foreign policy strategy (WW II; European Union), is discussed rather in a political context than in a pedagogical one (you also don't need to be a pedagogue to become an expert in the field). Sure, the political remains

relevant, especially in view of nationalist tendencies all over the place. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the professional debate should move away from the political, fundingstructure-related narratives and focus more on pedagogical patterns. The answers given are generally much less clear when it comes to the pedagogical and youth patterns, for example:

„You know, I don't, I don't have a clear vision of that and I think, because of sort of, you know, where we are now, as I said, I think both figuring out what does it mean, for example, what (has) the pandemic done to our educational system? Is it going to make us more open to different opportunities, different ways to learn, moving forward, is it going to push us back to no, there's only one way to do it.” [YU: 928]

In conclusion, I would therefore like to make a small plea to reflect more strongly on the local pedagogization of European/global norms. How does IYW intervene: in interaction with national education systems, especially where informal learning has a different status; where the structure of extracurricular leisure activities is different; where the view on youth is different (in urban and rural areas); where there are more opinions about youth than discussions with youth; where migration plays a greater role... Of course there are pedagogical reflections, without question, but in my opinion, they are too reflectet as systematic correlation.

5. Literature

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