



Brief description

Youth work and Youth Centers are new phenomena in (and in Turkey in general) and very few researches exist on the subject. Among other things, with this particular youth Center it has been possible to observe the European touch on youth work. There are two main sites. The first one is on the ground floor of a building; the other, a medium-size 4 floor building. Resources: local municipality and EU resources. The first site has been established in 2011, the second one in 2014. The local municipality in Eskişehir is known for providing youth-specific services for years. However, the particular decision of the local municipality to establish a youth Center seems to be influenced on the one hand by EU-funded youth policies and activities in Turkey and on the other, by the youth-oriented activities of the Turkish ministry of youth and sport. All activities and services provided by the Center are free.

Youth workers (almost all under 30 years old, regularly trained by EU programs and hired by the municipality), voluntary trainers (university students or recently graduated), professional trainers (very few), participants who can also be distinguished as volunteers, “users” and “service takers” (almost all, university students). Moreover, it seems that the Center’s popularity among young people, especially the number of users, determines how much interest local politicians show to the setting. Youth workers criticize the municipality for being too much focused on numbers instead of contents.

What we learned about participation

Participation can be a political football...

We observed that the more the Centre was popular among young people, the more the municipality tend to use it for political purposes. A recent meeting was quite telling. The Centre has made a tradition to organising a breakfast at the beginning of each academic semester; at the latest one, the mayor as well as the Eskişehir deputy of the same political party have attended the breakfast and gave a speech about the up coming referendum (Municipality Youth Centre, Eskişehir, FN).

Besides, at the entrance of the Centre there is a big Turkish flag and the poster of Atatürk, which might seem invisible according to some people, especially since it is quite common for official buildings, but they are may be excluding some young people. Anyway, there is a high probability that there is a political self-selection on the decision of being part of the setting. From the group discussions and interviews we realized with young people at the Centre, we understood that they find politics “boring”, “inefficient”, “corrupted”, that they are “not interested” (Municipality Youth Centre, Eskişehir, GD; Municipality Youth Centre, Eskişehir, FN).

Universities can offer an important starting point...

The location of the In terms of physical space, there are two major sites, both close to Anadolu University and to each other. The first one is located at the ground of a building on one of the most popular avenue of Eskişehir.

Even if this site is also use for classes, this is more like the “face” of the Centre or the “meeting place”. The second site is much larger with offices and activity rooms. The first one is on the ground floor of a building, but a large one and with a very large basement as well. There are tables which are used for study, hang out or wait for classes. On the right hand, there are two desks, which belong to youth workers, but which are used very easily by regular volunteers as well. There is no door and a very egalitarian relationship between youth workers and participants. On the back, there is an open kitchen. Tea and coffee is free. There is free soup in the morning as well. In the basement there are activity rooms and toilets. The walls are full of posters of social and cultural activities in Eskişehir, and pictures from class activities. It is quite colourful but especially gives the sense that it is a youth-led or youth-organized setting.

Participation aligned with key liberal post-materialist values:

- Anti-authoritarianism: the relationship between youth workers and young people as well as the relationship among youth workers can be defined as such. Some space-related features reveal this value as well.
- Environmentalism: they organize barter market, promote bicycle in the city,
- Have a say: they not only organize workshop on youth rights but work for the creation of a youth council.

Key Challenges Identified

Navigating the challenges of being non-political in a highly charged political situation. Enabling the emergent role of volunteer/trainer to be supported without abandoning aspirations for inclusion, according to key liberal values of ‘European-style’ youth work.