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Youth Work in Tallinn: the Positive Impact on Young People

Marti Taru*

Abstract

The article looks into youth work participation in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. While the focus is on describing the link between participation in different activities and some characteristics of youth development, the article also describes youth work in Tallinn.

The article looks at the link between participation in five distinct youth work activities (youth centres, hobby education, youth projects, youth organisations, counseling) and three outcome variables: labor market orientation, multiculturalism and youth voting.

The empirical analysis is based on a database of 1061 elementary and secondary school pupils that was collected in Tallinn in spring 2010.

Analysis results indicate a positive relationship between youth work participation and levels of the outcome variables. Thought not all regression coefficients were statistically significant, they consistently pointed in the same direction. The findings are interpreted as supporting the hypothesis that youth work participation does have a positive influence on youth development.

Keywords: youth, effects of youth work, integration

Introduction

The integration of young people in a society is a task every society has to fulfill. The European Commission and the Council of Europe have continuously developed a framework in response to the evolving expectations of young people, notably to integrate young people socially and professionally (EC ECDG 2009). Youth work has been given a new role with the adoption of a new European youth strategy called 'Investing and Empowering youth' in 2009. In this document, for the first time youth work was given a distinct role amongst other policy measures aimed at supporting young people.

Contemporary understandings of the role of the universal provision of youth work service conceptualise it as a means for supporting the development of general competencies. The European youth policy conceptualises youth work as a non-formal learning process that is complementary to formal education. It is expected to support the development of key competencies that are necessary for full integration into society (EC 2009: 4-11).

In Estonia, the goals, values and principles of youth work are spelled out in the National Youth Work Strategy 2006-2013. The strategy foresees youth work having a major role in providing young people with environments that bear positive consequences for the development of competencies, knowledge, attitudes and other personality characteristics that are vital in contemporary post-industrial societies.

According to the Youth Work Act (Eesti Vabariigi Valitsus [Estonian Government] 1999), youth work in Estonia is defined as the provision of conditions that support the development of the personality of young persons through voluntary involvement in activities outside the formal educational system,

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family and work. Local municipalities are responsible for carrying out youth work activities (Eesti Vabariigi Valitsus [Estonian Government] 1999). Youth work in Tallinn follows the principles of European and Estonian youth work. Its main goal is to support the personal development of young people by providing suitable environments and opportunities outside the traditional core socialising institutions of school, labor market and parents, formal educational system, work and family. Youth is conceptualised as a resource, not as a problem in society (Development of Youth Work in Tallinn).

Previous research

There is quite a lot of proof that partaking in various youth work activities is positively related to the development of a number of personality characteristics. Those active in extracurricular activities during their high school years are more likely to be more politically and civically active in their adult years (Kirlin 2003). Participation in after school programs has a positive effect on a youth's self-esteem and self-concept, social skills, cooperation and leadership skills, adequate behavior in demanding social contexts, decreasing alcohol, tobacco and drug consumption, and enhancing academic performance and achievements (Durlak and Weissberg 2007; DCSF2007: 25-29; Granger 2008; Fredriks and Eccles 2006). Personal growth and increased self-efficacy certainly are among the most notable outcomes of youth work participation (Dworkin et al. 2003). In addition to these features, a positive impact on employment relationships and earning income, being healthy, local community engagement and contributing to environmental protection have also been documented (NYA 2008; Feinstein et al. 2008; Feinstein et al. 2006). Youth volunteering is positively associated with increased participation in civic and political life, life skills development, prevention of risky behaviors, intercultural competence, academic performance and success, community strengthening, peace-building and reduction of conflict, disease prevention and environmental restoration (Mattero and Campbell-Patton 2008). While the overall picture is rather positive, the relationship between youth program participation and its effects is highly complex. The effects depend on the programs and the outcome variables, as well as moderator and mediator variables like gender, skill level, social position, and others (Feldman and Matjasko 2005). Not all programs bear positive fruits in terms of youth development (Bouffard et al. 2006). More than one condition in program design and implementation must be met in order to deliver positive change. Quality in youth work includes:

- positive staff-youth relationships, appropriate supervision in a safe environment, treating teenagers not as 'problem', but focusing on competence and skill development, addressing young people's needs in the round
- sustained and age specific opportunities for skill-building and mastery, ease of access to the youth work sites, creative and attractive activities instead of lecturing; goal and purpose of projects and activities, and some level of organisation and facilitiation by a trusted adult or older peer,
- opportunities for youth engagement, voice, and decision making, involvement of young people in the design and delivery of youth development/work activities,
- positive peer relationships, no discrimination by peers,
- knowledge-based design and management of the projects and programs, sufficient financial and organisational resources (Moore et al. 2010a; Moore et al. 2010b; Goldblatt and Lewis 1998: 16, 123; National Research Council 1993: 193-234; Goss et al. 2008).

A generally recognised theoretical link between participation in youth work activities and positive change in young people builds on two theories: the object relations and attachment theory and the personal environment fit theory. Development of the personality of young people is viewed as a learning process. The definition of youth work as non-formal learning is also among the underlying

principles of youth work in Europe¹ and Estonia². Different qualities are developed through collaborative learning practices, meaning that young peoples' teachers, parents, and peers provide the support and framework that contributes to their thinking and learning. The emotional quality of the interpersonal environment in which development takes place is of central importance, since development of the self occurs best in warm and responsive surroundings. Hostility or lack of trust creates anxiety, which disrupts development. However, adaption to the environment has its limits and also properties of learning environments require attention to achieve optimal results. Developmental success presumes that environments are either adaptable to individuals, or that individuals can be selectively placed into environments that suit their predispositions. Youth learn best in environments that provide information and support at a level that is at or somewhat above their current level of cognitive development (Eccles and Gootman 2002: 320-323).

Youth work in Tallinn

Tallinn with its 400 000 inhabitants³ and 34 447 young people aged 10-19⁴ is the largest city in Estonia. It is also ethnically and culturally the most diverse city in Estonia, as half of the population is of an Estonian background, while the other half has a Slavic background. Nearly half of the Russians living in Estonia reside in Tallinn (Sokolova 2010).

Youth work in Tallinn is organised and implemented by several city departments, city district governments and other organisations. The youth in Tallinn is provided with rich opportunities for participation in organisations, activities, events organised for the youth and by the youth. Youth hobby education and hobby activities are long-term (hobby education) or short-term (hobby activities), systematic and supervised engagements with one's hobbies at one's will outside of formal education or work, meant for acquiring intensive knowledge and skills in a selected hobby. Long-term hobby education (e.g. learning an instrument, practicing sports) takes place in hobby schools and follows a curriculum, while short-term hobby activities take place in hobby rings, which operate in different organisational surrounding like schools, youth centres, cultural centres and in other similar environments. There are 12 municipal⁵ and 53 private hobby schools in Tallinn⁶. Out of these, 40 use Estonian as the working language, both Estonian and Russian is used in 20 hobby schools, and Russian only in 3 hobby schools⁷. With an aim of increasing cross-cultural integration among young people, municipal schools using Estonian as their main teaching language have a twinning school using Russian as the main teaching language. The twins are involved in various activities that bring together young people with different ethno-cultural backgrounds. Hobby schools and hobby activities at municipal schools are the responsibility of the Education Department of Tallinn.

Sports and Youth Work Department play a major part in organising developmental activities and environments for young people with diverse interests and needs.

There are 11 municipal youth centres in Tallinn⁸. A youth centre is a place that offers different opportunities for spending leisure time for any young person. For instance, young people can play board games, rent hiking equipment, engage in arts, talk about their problems with a youth worker and seek advice.

The Department supports youth projects. In 2008, 164 projects received funding and organisational

¹ See Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the youth field http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/ekcyp/BGKNGE/Non-formal_learning.html

² For more information about informal education in Estonia see www.mitteformaalne.ee (in Estonian).

³ 99 340 on the 1st of January 2010, according to Statistics Estonia

⁴ Statistics Estonia; 125 837 inhabitants aged 10-34

⁵ List of municipal hobby schools <http://www.tallinn.ee/huvikoolid/g6908>

⁶ List of private hobby schools <http://www.haridus.ee/lisad/asutused/?t=h>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ List is available at <http://www.taninfo.ee/nk>

support, with the number of beneficiaries being as high as 180 000. As the number of young people residing in Tallinn was much lower than 180 000, a notable portion of young people participated in more than one project or activity. The city government also supports youth camps and pupils' work brigades, which are organised during school vacations. Youth projects are supported also by the Cultural Heritage Department, the Education Department and the Social Welfare and Health Department, as well as other organisations.

There are two municipal information and counselling centres in Tallinn. The centres help children and young people choose which hobby group to join, evaluate and plan educational opportunities, help make plans for a career, offer advice on relationships with peers, and also health issues. Counselling service is carried out in schools, in special facilities, over the phone and via email, and also in the Internet.

There are two structures that channel the youth voice to city governance: the Tallinn City Youth Council¹⁰ and the Tallinn Youth Council¹¹. While the latter is composed of representatives of youth organisations solely, the former is a mix of city government officials and representatives of youth organisations. In addition to the two bodies representing the youth voice, city district governments also involve active young people and non-formal youth groups in their work.

Different services to young people, ranging from counselling delinquents to providing social care, organising different events and providing information to youths, are provided by city district governments. In each city district government, youth counsellors and youth workers are working.

Tens of youth organisations are located in Tallinn. Young people can partake in a profession-based organisation (e.g. the European Law Students Association or the Estonian Young Architects' Association), educational and self-development organisations (Scouts, 4H), and religious or political organisations aimed at impacting society (e.g. youth chapters of political parties)¹².

In short, youth work in Tallinn offers a rich and varied developmental environment for young people.

Youth work research in Tallinn

The body of research on youth work in Tallinn consists of several research reports on youth, youth work and youth work participation in Estonia (Nimmerfeldt et al. 2007; Taru et al. 2008; Vetik et al. 2006; Tallinn City Government 2006). In addition to Tallinn-centred research projects, one usually finds a chapter on Tallinn in youth work research projects of a national scope. Youth work research in Estonia has lacked a solid conceptual and methodological framework. Research has been mostly descriptive and not focused on the effects of youth work participation.

Research question and hypothesis

The article seeks to answer the question what are the relationships between participation in various forms of youth work and three outcome variables, that reflect the central values of European and Estonian youth policy? Do participants display higher levels of valued characteristics or are participants and non-participants characterised by similar levels?

Results from earlier research completed elsewhere (see above) give good reasons to expect that participation has positive effects. The hypothesis, thus, states that those young people who reported participation in youth work activities also tend to report higher values on selected dependent

9 <http://www.tallinn.ee/g6137s42985>

10 The Tallinn City Youth Council webpage <http://www.tallinn.ee/est/Tallinna-linna-noortenoukogu> (in Estonian).

11 Information about the Tallinn Youth Council <http://www.tudengimaja.ee/?menyy=5> (in Estonian).

12 <http://www.enl.ee/et/Organisatsioonist/liikmed>

variables.

Three variables are selected as outcome variables: pre-vocational education, multiculturalism and voting behaviour. Integration in the labour market, tolerance of and mutual respect toward representatives of other cultures and socio-political activism are central values of Europe and the European youth policy (EC 2009; Intergovernmental programme of Council of Europe (2008); Denstad 2009).

Integration into the labour market has been and is among the central themes of youth socialisation. It has been argued that historically the whole concept of youth emerged together with the development and spread of schooling system; schooling was necessary for preparing young people to enter into the workforce (Morch 2003: 50-51). Today, the theme of transition from the educational system to the labour market still is among the central issues in the European and Estonian youth policy. The significance of the theme is highlighted by the fact that Estonia has started the national program 'Developing Youth Work Quality', which has focused on youth employment (Haridus ja teadusministeerium [Estonian Ministry of Education and Research] 2008).

Multiculturalism is a paradigm that has replaced the idea of linear assimilation, which tends to be both a reductionist and an oversimplifying approach in understanding and explaining interactions between cultural groups (Chirkov 2009). The contemporary understanding of the idea of integration builds on mutual adaptation and changes of ethno-cultural groups. The process involves different individual level characteristics like attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour, but also structural aspects like national policies, educational and employment opportunities, residence patterns (Berry 2009). Supporting the development of multiculturalism has been perceived to be of central importance in Estonia. The current national integration program focuses to a notable extent on young people – on second and third generation immigrants of Slavic origin – since the educational system carries an important role in integration efforts (Eesti Vabariigi Valitsus [Estonian Government] 2008). Education is a resource of central importance for participation in the labour market and in society in general.

The present debate on youth socio-political engagement includes a claim that classical forms and institutions of political participation in society carry little meaning and relevance for the young. Instead, citizenship is associated with the notion of youth (sub)cultures (Guidikova and Siurala 2001). Young people are more prone to pick up alternative forms of engagement that are more meaningful and more functional to them (Vinken 2005; Fahmy 2006: 9-16). Citizenship for the young is built using different building blocks in radically different ways. It is argued that being a member of either punk or hip-hop subcultures, engaging in certain practices can equally well be signs of membership in society, being concerned with and contributing to the common social space (Schafraad 2001; Huq 2001; Jacobsson and Hebert 2001; Martinez 2001).

However, casting a ballot at elections remains the most popular form of participation in politics, also for young people. According to a survey conducted in 8 European countries, 18-25 year olds reported a turnout in national elections that varied from 43% to 95%. No other form of participation was more popular, as participation in most other forms remained well below 10%. In addition to voting in local, national and European elections, young people also vote in organisational elections, such as school student council elections, youth organisation management board elections, trade union elections (Euyoupart 2005). Voting in different level elections captures an essential aspect of democratic societies, which perhaps appears to be the only form of influencing organisational, national and European politics for the highest proportion of people.

The socio-economic situation in society has been found to be among the strongest predictors of involvement in youth work. Moreover, youth work practices are shaped and defined depending on which social group and with what aims carries out the youth work (Coussee et al. 2009). However, there was no systematic relationship between the parents' socio-economic position and participating in youth work in Tallinn. However, we have found that some families spend much more money on their children's free time than others (Taru et al. 2010). Based on the findings, the socio-economic situation variable was not included in the analysis.

A conceptual model presenting central variables and the relationship between them is depicted in the figure below.

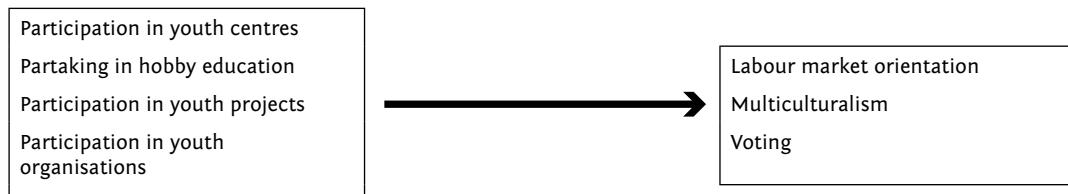


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Data

The empirical analysis is based on data collected in April-May 2010, from among Tallinn municipal school students¹³. An Internet survey was used to collect the data. The total population consisted of all 5th, 8th and 11th grade students of Tallinn municipal schools; the students were aged 11-18 years. A cluster sampling procedure was used: all municipal schools were included in the sample and in step one, each of them picked at random one class from among all its 5th, 8th and 11th grade classes; in step two, all pupils in the selected class filled out an online questionnaire during one school lesson. Filling in the questionnaire was arranged by a school employee.

A sample of 1061 young people was collected. Gender, age and home language distribution of the sample is given in the table below.

Table 1. Gender, age and home language distribution of respondents

Boy	41%
Girl	59%
Total	100%
11-12 years old	35%
14-15 years old	33%
17-18 years old	33%
Total	100%
Home language Estonian	55%
Home language Russian	39%
Home language other	6%
Total	100%

Source: Project Tallinna noorte osalemine noorsootöös [Youth participation in youth work in Tallinn]

¹³ The project was supported by the Sport and Youth Work Department, Tallinn City Government.

Operationalisation of variables

Voting

Three questions were used to gauge the young peoples' voting activism. In September-October 2009, student shadow elections were arranged in Tallinn prior to local elections and two of the questions are related to the shadow elections, while one is related to voting intentions in adulthood.

Did you vote in the student shadow elections?

- 1 No, because I did not about shadow elections
- 2 No, because I am below voting age
- 3 No
- 4 Yes

The response options were collapsed into 2 categories of 1 Yes, 0 No (original categories 1 to 3).

Do you intend to vote in student shadow elections in the future?

- 1 Definitely
- 2 Maybe
- 3 Rather not
- 4 Definitely not

Do you intend to vote in real elections in the future?

- 1 Intend to vote in all elections
- 2 Intend to vote in most elections
- 3 Intend to vote in some elections
- 4 Do not intend to vote

Multiculturalism

Two questions that have been used also in the Estonian Interethnic Integration Monitoring projects were included.

- How would you evaluate interethnic relations in Estonia?
 - What is your own attitude toward Estonians/non-Estonians?¹⁴
- 1 Very friendly
 - 2 Rather friendly
 - 3 Neutral
 - 4 Rather unfriendly
 - 5 Very unfriendly

Labour market orientation

The variable of labour market orientation for young people still in compulsory education or in general secondary education system, aged 11-18, was operationalised as possessing future educational and/or professional plans. Focus was on possessing such plans, not on the specific content of the plans. However, the original indicator included a list of possible educational and professional options, plus response options such as 'have not thought about it yet' and 'do not know'. The responses were later collapsed into two categories:

'have not thought about it yet' or 'do not know' = 0, indication of educational or professional preference = 1.

Youth work participation

In order to capture participation in most of opportunities of youth work in Tallinn, six item batteries

¹⁴ Young Estonians were asked to describe their attitude toward non-Estonians while non-Estonians were asked to describe their attitude toward Estonians.

were used, each consisting of a set of indicators. For each indicator, respondents indicated whether they had partaken in any particular activity during the preceding 12 months with some regularity. In order to be counted, regular participation for at least one month was required.

The beginning of participation in a particular activity was asked also in the questionnaire. Most young people reported having had participated for a considerably long period in various activities. In hobby education activities on average, 12% reported having had participated for a shorter period than one year, 31% 1 to 2 years, 28% 3 to 4 years and 29% 5 years or longer.

Open youth centres

Students indicated whether they had been during the last 12 months to one or more of the 11 youth centres in Tallinn by checking the appropriate centres in the list.

Hobby education

Students indicated whether they had taken part in organised hobby education during the last 12 months by checking the appropriate activities in the list. The list contained 12 different activities, plus one extra category entitled 'other'.

Youth projects

Students indicated whether they had participated in youth projects, camps or activities during the last 12 months by checking all appropriate activities in the list of 8 different options.

Youth organisations

Students indicated whether they had participated in youth organisations during the last 12 months by checking all appropriate organisations in the list of 7 different organisation types.

Joint events

Pupils indicated whether they had participated in joint events organised by schools, language camps or student exchange during last 12 months by checking all appropriate response options.

Counselling

Respondents indicated whether they had received counselling during last 12 months in any of these 4 areas: hobby education, education, work career and job selection, relations with peers.

All independent variables were coded into dichotomous variables: 'yes' if the respondent did check any of the response options in an item battery and 'no' if he or she did not check any.

Home language and age

In addition to the variables described above, home language and age were included because these are related to the levels of both youth work and outcome variables. Home language was measured as a dichotomous variable: Estonian = 1, Russian = 2. Age was a three category variable: 11-12 years = 1, 14-15 = 2, 17-18 = 3.

Method of data analysis

Linear regression was used to estimate relationships between youth work variables and outcome variables. Regression was preferred over analysis of variance or correlation analysis because it does return the estimates of direct relationships of individual variables.

Among the many variants of regression analysis, linear regression was used, although some of the dependent variables were dichotomous. For those variables, logistic regression is a generally

recognised method for computing relationships between dependent and independent variables. Logistic regression is appropriate for dependent variables that have natural borders 0 and 1 when the aim is to correctly predict the values of the dependent variable.

When the goal is not to predict values of the dependent variable, but rather to draw conclusions on the significance of independent variables, then the logit link that is used for assuring that predicted values remain between 0 and 1, becomes obsolete. Using the logit link does not contribute to establishing direct effects within a set of independent variables, but assures that effect sizes are such that predictions of the dependent variable computed from values of the independent variables will not be less than 0 and not greater than 1. When this is not the goal and the goal is to elicit direct effects of independent variables, then linear regression can be used instead of logistic regression.

Analysis results

Multiculturalism “

First, regression models with independent variables included better describe data than the model with intercept only.

Second, values of the variance inflation factor are low, meaning that there is no significant correlation between independent variables.

Table 2. Standardised regression coefficients. Multiculturalism attitudes

	How would you characterise interethnic relations between Estonians and non-Estonians?	What is your own attitude toward Estonians/non-Estonians?
Constant	3,18***	3,35***
Youth centre	-0,04	-0,05
Hobby education	-0,03	-0,07**
Youth project, camp, training	-0,01	-0,02
Youth group, organisation	-0,06	-0,01
Joint events	-0,06*	-0,07**
Counselling, education	-0,06*	-0,02
Counselling, work	-0,01	-0,00
Counselling, hobby education	-0,02	-0,04
Counselling, peer relations	-0,04	-0,02
Age	,13***	-0,10***
Home language	0,04	0,02
ANOVA	44,87***	32,11***
Adjusted R2	0,033	0,018
R2	0,044	0,029

*** significant at 0,005 level, ** significant at 0,05 level, * significant at 0,1 level

Source: Project Tallinna noorte osalemine noorsootöös [Youth participation in youth work in Tallinn]

Effects of partaking in different youth work activities are rather small and in most cases insignificant. However, they all point in the same direction: those reporting participation in youth work activities also tend to express a more positive attitude toward representatives of the 'other' group and they tend to evaluate interethnic relations to be somewhat better.

Still, the single most significant variable was age. Compared to younger children, older children tended to evaluate interethnic relations better, but expressed a less friendly attitude toward the other language group.

The home language had no significant relationship with the attitudes; there was an insignificant indication that non-Estonians were a bit less friendly and evaluated interethnic relations to be a bit less positive.

Voting

Table 3. Standardised regression coefficients. Voting

	Did you vote in shadow elections? 1=Yes, 0=No	Do you intend to vote in shadow elections in the future?	Do you intend to vote in adulthood?
Constant	-0,04	2,98	
Youth centre	0,07	-0,07*	-0,00
Hobby education	-0,10**	-0,02	-0,03
Youth project, camp, training	0,02	0,00	-0,02
Youth group, organisation	0,05	-0,11***	-0,06
Joint events	0,06	-0,04	-0,06
Counselling, education	-0,00	-0,16***	-0,04
Counselling, work	-0,04	-0,04	-0,06
Counselling, hobby education	0,07	0,03	0,12***
Counselling, peer relations	0,06	-0,04	-0,03
Age	0,06	-0,01	-0,08**
Home language	0,07	-0,03	0,04
ANOVA	1,23**	57,18***	25,02***
Adjusted R2	0,02	0,06	0,02
R2	0,04	0,07	0,03

* only those at least 14 years of age included, since voting in shadow elections was limited to students at least 14 years old¹⁵.

*** significant at 0,005 level, ** significant at 0,05 level, * significant at 0,1 level

Source: Project Tallinna noorte osalemine noorsootöös [Youth participation in youth work in Tallinn]

¹⁵ Homepage of the shadow elections project www.varivalimised.ee. The project was organised by Estonian Youth Council in cooperation with Tartu Youth Council.

All three models are significantly better when independent variables are included than when only the intercept is included. The degree of description still rather low.

Regarding relationships between the dependent variables and participation in youth work, results indicate that participation in youth centres, youth projects, youth organisations and joint events all are positively related to voting in shadow elections. There also is indication that participation is associated with plans to vote in the future.

However, effects of participation in hobby education diverged from the coherent pattern – among those in hobby education, voting in shadow elections was less common. Also, having received advice on hobby education and spending one's leisure time was associated with a significantly lower likelihood to plan voting in adulthood. These results allow the hypothetical interpretation that hobby education, by concentrating on a specific activity, draws attention away from more general issues and young people concentrate more on the particular activity of interest.

Effects of counselling were less clear. Having been advised on the topics of further education, jobs and relationships with peers was associated with positive intentions to vote in the future, but not with actual voting behaviour.

Age was positively related to voting and voting intentions – in the older group, voting was more common and plans to vote in the future are also more common.

The relationship between home language and voting was negative, meaning that voting was more common among Estonians than among Russian-speakers. Voting plans for the future were unclear: though the plan to vote in adulthood was more common among Russian-speakers, the plan to vote in student shadow elections was more common among Estonians.

Educational and work plans

Table 4. Standardised regression coefficients. Educational and work plans.

	Educational plan	Educational plan	Work plan
Constant	0,35***		0,56***
Youth centre	0,01		0,07*
Hobby education	0,09***		0,03
Youth project, camp, training	-0,01		-0,02
Youth group, organisation	-0,02		-0,01
Joint events	0,00		0,07**
Counselling, education	0,05		-0,02
Counselling, work	-0,02		0,05
Counselling, hobby education	0,03		0,09**
Counselling, peer relations	-0,04		-0,07*
Age	0,09**		0,18***
Home language	0,15***		0,07**
ANOVA	7,52***		11,92***
Adjusted R2	0,03		0,04
R2	0,04		0,05

*** significant at 0,005 level, ** significant at 0,05 level, * significant at 0,1 level

Source Project Tallinna noorte osalemine noorsootöös [Youth participation in youth work in Tallinn]

Results indicate that the inclusion of independent variables significantly improves the validity of the models.

Here, four variables are of particular interest: hobby education and youth centres that offer opportunities to get a first glance at different jobs, and counselling on education and careers.

Analysis results indicate that going to youth centres, attending hobby activities and joint events were associated with having educational and work plans. Having reported participation in youth projects or organisations, on the contrary, showed that participants tended not to have plans for the future.

Among the counselling variables, having received advice on education and work choices had an incoherent relationship to having educational and work plans. Coherent relationships characterise advice on hobby education and peer relations. While hobby education counselling was positively related, peer relation counselling is negatively related to having formulated plans for the future.

However, age and home language displayed notably stronger relationships. Older age groups were characterised by a higher likelihood of having plans. Also, the non-Estonian group was more likely to report concrete ideas about what would be their highest educational attainment, as well as their desired job position.

Summary and discussion

Data analysis revealed several important points about youth work in Tallinn. First and most importantly, relationships between participation and outcome variables tended to be positive. Participants in youth work were characterised by higher levels of characteristics that are of central importance in youth policy. The finding supports the main hypothesis that partaking in youth work does have positive effects on young people. Even if the effects were not strong and were in many cases insignificant, they pointed in the same direction, suggesting a coherent underlying pattern of relationships between participation and outcomes.

As it was indicated above, the length of involvement in various activities was counted in years and in the case of over than a half young people, it was reported to be longer than 3 years. This fact lends some support to the claim that it was youth work participation that influenced the development of the outcome variables. However, as the theoretical model used here was rather unsophisticated, this support can be at best interpreted as an indication of a further research direction. More detailed investigation of youth work effects and elaboration of the theoretical model are highly desirable in the context of the current European and Estonian youth policy developments. The future of youth policy sees more of youth work as well as more of knowledge-based evaluation, planning and decision making in the youth field.

Relationship magnitudes were roughly similar for most forms of youth work. Three of the variables still displayed weaker links: partaking in youth projects, receiving advice on careers and peer relations. Participation in youth projects could have been most diversified in terms of activities, thus, gathering responses from the most varied group of respondents. As an outcome, the relationship between the project participation index and the dependent variables was the weakest. Advice on careers perhaps carries relatively little relevance for young people aged 11 to 15, which constituted two thirds of the sample. As a result, the overall relationship was weak too. The low magnitude of the effect of advice on peer relationships can be attributed to a relatively weak substantive link with the used dependent variables. While relationships with friends and companions certainly is of central importance for youth, advice on this topic does not contribute much to making up educational and/or work plans, voting and voting intentions, and attitudes toward the other cultural group.

Age had the strongest relationships with the dependent variables. This finding suggests that effects of maturation that take place between ages 11 and 18 override the effects that are associated with

partaking in different youth work activities.

Regarding multiculturalist attitudes, a contact hypothesis offers an explanation. According to the hypothesis, negative stereotypes and attitudes toward representatives of a particular group (e.g. Estonians – non-Estonians) weaken when people from the groups are involved in mutually engaging collective activities. Additional conditions of equality and security must be met as well, but the most important requirement is that both sides are actively involved in the group activities. Such involvement has been shown to lead to a weakening of negative prejudice toward each other (Pettigrew and Tropp 2000 in Berry 2006; Abramovich 2005) and evidence has been recorded also in Estonia (Schulze 2010). Evidently youth work provides such opportunities – young Estonians and non-Estonians spend time together in various leisure time contexts: hobby education groups, youth organisations, training, youth camps and projects, joint events, and in other situations.

Regarding education and work plans, we see a significant positive role of hobby education, both participation in and getting advice on choosing a suitable activity. Evidently intense engagement in a particular activity does shape a young person's preferences for what he or she wants and intends to do in the future. We also see that age has a strong positive effect on formulating education and work plans, which reflects the maturation of a personality. Personal history of participation in a particular hobby education activity probably has contributed to the formation of preferences over time. The fact that non-Estonian youth was characterised by a higher percentage of young people with future plans reflects structural and cultural differences. The non-Estonian population perceives lesser opportunities for education and work in Estonia (Kultuuriministeerium [Estonian Ministry of Culture] 2010), which makes making choices easier since less options are perceived to be available.

Though the results can be interpreted positively in general, a critical reader might still not be convinced by the findings. The absence of a 'pre- and post-test measurement' makes it actually impossible to conclude from the cross-sectional empirical analysis only that the youth work variables did influence the outcome variables. This pattern of relationships could equally well reflect the selection effects of youth work. The design and implementation of the youth work activities could have been such that mainly young people with a certain predisposition participated in them. Selection effects have been suggested by Feinstein et al. (2006), who also found relevant empirical evidence. Although the likelihood of the existence of such an effect is not very high, as was also observed by Feinstein et al. in the case of open youth spaces, it can not be excluded completely. More importantly, such a possibility alerts us to research the concrete content and size of the effects of particular modes of youth work. Youth work as a youth policy measure has definite tasks to fulfil in society, but unfortunately there is no common understanding of what the outcomes of particular investments are. Establishing the effects of youth work is a challenge for researchers, policy makers and practitioners likewise, since it would contribute to more effective youth work measures. Methodical advances, such as the combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses, the use of panel data with measurements on levels of relevant variables taken before and after participation in a particular youth program, are necessary in the next steps. On the conceptual level, analysis of the functions of youth work and its embeddedness in wider social contexts (e.g. Cousse 2008; Bohn et al. 2006; Verschelden et al. 2009) are necessary prerequisites for asking fruitful and meaningful questions.

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