STUDY VISITS TO ESTONIA AND SLOVENIA

TARTU

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LJUBLJANA



Partner organisations
Zavod Bob ja MTÜ Tähe Noorteklubi

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BOB
ZAVOD ZA IZOBRAŽEVANJE
IN KULTURNE DEJAVNOSTI

Tähe
noorteklubi

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CONTENT

I. Study visit to Estonia

4 Introduction of the project
5 A brief history of Street-based Youth work in Estonia
6 Street work practices in Tartu
7 Street mediation
9 Transformative evaluation
11 Street work practices in Tallinn
13 Conclusion

II. Study visit to Slovenia

14 Strategic Partnership Project "(Ex)Change Street Reality"
15 Grounded Theory
16 Street Work practices
19 Intervisions with the network
20 The Rental of Instruments
21 Corner for Clothes Swap
22 Dragon Dreaming

Study visit to Estonia

This publication is part of the Strategic Partnership Project (Ex)Change Street Reality involving two partner organisations: Zavod Bob (Slovenia) and MTÜ Tähe Noorteklubi (Estonia). The project was conceived based on the realisation reached by both organisations about there still existing a considerable number of young people who require additional support in order to reinforce their participation. This applies especially to vulnerable youth.

Street-based youth work is one mode of work applicable in this area that is being implemented by both organisations in their everyday activities. Street based youth work has been gaining recognition as a productive approach to youth work lately, as it enables us to reach vulnerable youth (e.g. NEET, young people with migrant background, socially excluded young people), as we can implement it in locations that such young people actually frequent, i.e. in their own environment. At the same time it also takes heed of individual social contexts and community aspects.
Street-based youth work is an approach that crosses the divide between vulnerable youth and relevant institutions. It is a way of creating positive experiences of participation in order to support vulnerable youth to participate in broader social contexts. The mission of both organisations and the goal of the project (Ex)change Street Reality is to improve the practice of street-based youth work in both organisations at the level of supporting elements and implementation of activities with the aim of reaching higher levels of inclusion and raising the level of participation of vulnerable youth. To achieve this, we have developed this project in order to exchange good practises, allow for peer intervision and gain feedback information to empower youth workers and organisations that implement street-based youth work through the exchange of good practises between Zavod Bob and Tähe Youth Club.

In the frame of the project we conducted two study visits for 14 participants (one in Estonia from July 11th to 17th 2021) and one in Slovenia from August 18th to 25th, 2021), which were the basis for this publication including examples of good practises. In order to answer real needs we identified the sources of strength and good practises in both organisations. Both exchanges were dedicated to sharing good/extant practises and resources that we identified, providing feedback information and reflecting upon them, as well as looking for potential improvements that served as the basis for reinforcing the practises of collaborating organisations.

A brief history of Street-based Youth work in Estonia

A brief history of Street-based Youth work in Estonia

As a starting-point we first reviewed the history of street work in Estonia, which was the precondition for deeper understanding of the big picture.
The beginnings go back to 1997 when local churches in Tallinn were the first to start working with children in the streets. In 1999 Estonia passed the Bill of Youth Work, which resulted in non-government organisations taking up social work as well (eg. the NGO Öökull in the town of Tartu) and starting to implement street work in their activities. In 2001 the concept of youth work was divided into subcategories, i.e. 'special youth work' that designated the establishment of developmental preconditions for youth living in precarious circumstances and/or demonstrating problematic behaviour by activating their abilities and skills and increasing their motivation.

The second area highlights the importance of individual approach, street work projects and committees for youth issues (overseeing the area of juvenile delinquency prevention). Between 2005 and 2007 a series of seminars with representatives from the international association for mobile youth work took place in Tallinn. This led to a pilot project implemented in Tallinn in 2007 that introduced street-based youth work by applying the Sprecht method. In 2010 a 3-year programme of promotion of mobile street work was initiated, coordinated by the Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres. Thus mobile youth work spread across Estonia between 2011 and 2013. The term 'special youth work' was abandoned in 2014.

From 2015 however, mobile street work has been promoted by Youth Guarantee and started to reach NEET youth through these programmes. In 2017 the Committees of Juvenile Issues was disbanded, as youth work was recognised as a common responsibility. Since 2019 the majority of municipalities (Parnu, Haapsalu, Saaremaa) have started to regularly finance mobile street work which was additionally boosted by the outbreak of Covid-19.

Street work practices in Tartu

In the course of the study visit we were introduced to two youth centres in Tartu. Two street youth workers from Tähe Noorteklubi explained how street-based youth work is implemented in this town.

The two youth centres we visited appeared very spacious, well lit and well equipped for creative and constructive spending of leisure time and for developing basic social and living skills (e.g. they both include a kitchen, computers, board and other types of games, etc.).

What we found especially interesting was the information that every youth worker employed in the youth centre is obligated to join street youth workers carrying out street youth work at least once per month. Another interesting example of good practises was found in the so-called 'car-free avenue,' a month-long event organised in the Tartu town centre every summer. For the duration of the event they set up an outdoors youth centre, thus appearing directly in the living space of the local youth, i.e. the street, while its distinctive red colour, interesting architectural design and numerous activities on offer make the outdoors centre appeal to other generations as well.

Such an approach also promotes broader recognition of youth work in the wider community. Youth workers there dedicate a lot of attention and time to the visitors in order to explain the purpose of the project and to hang out with them and talk to them. This way they are, on the one hand, able to adequately represent their organisation, while on the other hand they are able to establish connections with young people through various social activities.

During the student exchange we were also introduced to the organisation MoNo Parnu active in the Estonian town of Parnu since 2019. They took up street work in order to address various social problems in the town - in the first place the chaos at the central bus station in Parnu and youth violence in the town centre, where one person was even killed in a street fight. At first, street work was just a minor part of the institutional work of Parnu youth centre. In 2020 however they founded an autonomous team of street youth workers which is financed by the municipality of Parnu. One of the more interesting practises implemented by the Parnu team in their activities is street mediation. Street mediation is based on the concept of restorative justice. It is always grounded in a concrete case (of disagreement, conflict, fight, bullying...) that youth street workers find out about either by witnessing it or hearing about it or being informed about it directly by young people themselves or by overhearing young people talk about it. Street youth workers then engage young people in conversations, inviting them to resolve the case through mediation. Mediation is always based on voluntary participation - participants can quit the process at any time or decide not to take part in a certain stage of the process. It is the facilitators' task to create a safe space and to guide and motivate young people to insist and partake in the process. A couple of street youth workers (a tandem) is selected from the team in order to conduct the mediation. In choosing the facilitators, it is very important that the selected persons are neutral towards the case and/or the young people with whom they are about to conduct the mediation (i.e. that they do not know the participants beforehand, etc.). The next step is for the duo facilitating the process to have a separate preliminary meeting with each of the involved parties in order to gain basic information about the case and to find out what are the needs of the involved young people, to create a space for the participants to share (relieve), to investigate who else needs to be included, and what are their fears.

Once these preliminary meetings are concluded, the mediation commences, consisting of the following elements:

- Investigation of the event(s) - What actually happened?
- Research of the experience, thoughts and emotions about the event.
- What was the impact of the event on the involved persons?
- What are their wishes?
- How to proceed?

During the process of mediation it is of utmost importance that the rules presented at individual meetings be observed at all cost and that we reiterate them at the start of the mediation.
The most important rules of the process are:

1. We are on the side of everyone involved in the process.
2. We are not looking to find a culprit.
3. We accuse nobody.
4. The mediator offers everyone the chance to speak.
5. Only one person at a time can speak.
6. Expressing emotion is okay, aggression is not okay.
7. Each person only talks about themself.
8. Everyone has to feel safe.
9. When we express ourselves, we use the form 'I…'
10. Everyone has to feel safe.
11. Confidentiality.
12. Mediators are the ones guiding the process.

After the mediation is over, certain agreements are made and then documented, all of the involved receive copies of these agreements and in the end everyone has to sign them. After the mediation proper, the facilitators and participants continue meeting in order to check how they have been in the meantime, how the agreements are being respected and to relieve participants.

Transformative evaluation

Transformative evaluation

On the third day of our study visit to Estonia, the former manager of the youth service in the municipal administration of Tartu presented to us a good practice of testing the quality and results of her work with the aim of introducing improvements and to pass the results to relevant decision-makers (local community, schools, colleges, police, financiers, etc.). The method requires a participant to give answers which are then written down by the youth worker with the participant's aid. Besides this record, the youth worker adds their own assessment of the participant's progress and the document is then submitted for review by several other stake-holders (colleges, police, social work centres, parents, etc.) who give their own feedback to the record. This allows for an evaluation of the process from three diverse perspectives. This method also enables participants to reflect on their own progress during the time of contact with street youth workers. The method is called a transformative method of evaluation which, through different questions, follows the progress and professional and personal development of street youth workers. The method focuses on improvements, positive outcomes and changes introduced to the participants' lives, while allowing their knowledge to come to the fore. It is most important to take heed of the fact that the process itself affects the outcomes of the evaluation and that combining different participants allows one to notice different positive outcomes and more potential improvements. It also focuses on the role of reviewers who take care of the progress in the assessment, it evaluates the roles of the participants and how they evaluate, and strives for continuous improvement. The method emphasises reflective practises, as one has to be aware that there exists no absolute good nor absolute truth as far as potential improvement is concerned. The method highlights the dilemma about who is the person that decides what 'good practice' actually means.
The transformative method of evaluation is founded on three pillars, namely:

- 'appreciative inquiry' - an approach based on sources of strength and asks the question: 'What works and why does it work?'
- the second pillar is participatory evaluation which appreciates the participants' knowledge and promotes reflection and collective analysis;
- the third pillar allows for transformative learning, as the evaluation makes part of the intervention - it is a simple and flexible process that reinforces the mechanisms of feedback information.

Transformative evaluation begins with preliminary work in which one sets up a plan and the goals which one wants the participants to focus on. This is indicated by basic question:

- Looking back, what do you think has been the most significant change that occured for you as a result of coming here?

After that, participants are given the task to answer these questions. Once the stories are written down, severa street workers perform an analysis and together they agree on a story that reflects the most significant change. Youth workers also select relevant decision-makers to be included into the process of evaluation and take care that they also give their feedback. This allows for a meta-evaluation which guarantees strong evidence of the impact of the programme and aids in the process of reaching decisions about its further course. The results of the meta-evaluation help and increase the confidence in the results of the evaluation of all the involved parties, relevant decision-makers as well as programme managers.

The limitations of the transformative evaluation method mostly lie in the fact that it only uses positive stories in order to demonstrate positive impacts of programmes, with the aim of convincing decision-makers. It is a selective, rather than inclusive process, as it is intentionally sampled. It also allows for potential manipulation on the part of story-tellers. Nevertheless, it also has advantages, i.e. dedication to developing evaluation literacy with different target groups (young people, youth workers, decision-makers), it determines lived experience and its effect on individuals, it develops understanding of the 'What?' and 'How?' in practice. It empowers, liberates and reinforces all the involved parties.

Transformative evaluation is an approach to measuring effects that deliberately includes involved parties throughout the course of the evaluation, especially those coming from marginalised groups. It helps to recognize, understand and reveal more unique experiences with the product or programme. Youth workers from Slovenia recognized this method to be important, as we often find it quite hard to present our results merely through statistics, due to the qualitative impacts of our programmes, and this method allows for a transfer of opinions of different roles in the process itself. It also allows for easier accessibility and presentation of the results. By including decision-makers, it also enables them to form a personal opinion of participants and the impact that the programme exerts on them, while enabling youth workers to perceive them as individuals. Preferably, the starting question to be used would be: 'What was good and what would you like to change in the process as a whole?', which relates to both the process and the attitude towards oneself and the youth worker.

Street work practices in Tallinn

On the final day of the study visit we met with a team of street youth workers from MOBIILNE NOORSOOTÖÖ TALLINNAS from the Estonian capital Tallinn. Even the structure of the team is quite unique, as it consists of eight youth workers and one coordinator who are employed full-time to conduct street youth work. What they do is a kind of so-called mobile youth work, a practice developed under the influence of German (specifically Stuttgart, i.e. the German founder of mobile street work Walter Sprech) and Dutch practice. The evolution of mobile street work (in Estonia) began around 2014 and was at the time perceived as a rather radical idea, as it is harder to defend due to a lack of short-term results or indicators. Today, their methodology of mobile street work includes: 1) detached and outreach forms of street work; 2) individual work; 3) working in groups (group visits to museums and exhibitions, providing free entry to young people); 4) community activities (they set up hitherto non-existent activities, e.g. a football tournament, volunteer assistance, urban culture events, etc.); 5) networking.

Beside being directly present in the field, they are also available 24/7 to young people for 2) individual work either through a) social networks (IG, FB) and telephone (team members take daily turns at this) or b) in person, meeting young people where they can feel comfortable. Any young person who expresses the need is assigned a mentor available to them until the individual decides that they do not need this assistance any more. The youth workers' role is perceived mostly as mediators who aid young people to guide them along a straight path, collect information about them and check their needs.

As non-institutional street youth workers they are aware of the importance of establishing connections with local stake-holders, that is why they have established a network of partners (police, schools, NGOs) who meet on a monthly basis in order to exchange information of current affairs (youth workers are the ones who pass the word from the street onto decision-makers and function as mediators between different groups) and to brainstorm new ideas about how to improve their activities and services for young people.

For the first two years their work was more project based, but they realised that in order to reach more systematic and long-term development in this area, it is important to gain support of decision-makers. As early as 2016 the city council recognized them as important agents and they were further supported by the mayor who used to work in the youth sector himself. Beside the support of the city government, they have also achieved wider

recognition in their community as well as among teachers and students in local schools. The recognisability of their identity is aided by the established acronym 'MoNo' that stands for street youth work. The word is catchy, as it is short and straightforward. They diligently use the acronym in all of their promo materials and stickers that can be noticed in the locations they frequent. In order to make it even more appealing to youth, they carried out a competition for best sticker design among young people, printed the chosen proposals and are now handing them to young people in the streets. Due to all of the above their approach to street work has been recognised as good practice and is being implemented by others.

For two years now their street youth workers have been working in the field, regularly every day, seven days a week, during periods of young people's leisure time. At first they opposed working on Sundays, but they soon realised that this was the day on which the young people's frustrations about school are prone to increase (especially if they have not prepared for Monday). The amount of time spent in the field is determined by youth workers themselves, according to real needs (they are constantly mapping out what is going on in the city and if there is e.g. a party organised, they go there as they know that young people will not be able to enter and will most likely hang around outside the club). They always work in pairs. Before setting out into the street, they also gather all relevant information about the functioning and activities of local youth centres.

As there is a lot of Russian speaking young people in Tallinn, they take care that at least one of the youth workers in the team can speak Russian and is familiar with Russian culture (6 out of their 8 youth workers are fluent in Russian, even though it is even more important to know Russian culture). This makes it easier for them to establish genuine contact with young people. They told us that they have noticed that there is quite a big division between Estonian and Russian youth and this led them to increase their presence in areas predominantly frequented by Russian youth. With this it is important to stress that their target group consists of all youth, not just the ones who are more exposed to precarious situations. When establishing contact, they make no assumptions about the young people's needs, in principle they establish contact with everyone, approaching them through their own interests and hobbies (e.g. skating).

Conclusion

The methods, approaches and practises to street youth work in Estonia described above are by no means the only ones we were able to observe during our study visit. Thus we have also witnessed for example the method of backcasting which functions as the opposite of forecasting. This was much harder to implement in practice than we expected, as it makes you proceed from the vision and move towards the first steps that you have to change. Usually we think in a sequential way, which means that the vision of a project is only established at the end. The backcasting method allows for a view from the other side and so far it has often come in handy to us in planning our projects in order to change perspective and open up new insights into the process of planning itself.

The report lists and highlights only the practises that we have found most interesting during our study visit and applicable to our practice in the future.



Study visit to Slovenia

As part of the Erasmus + international cooperation project "(Ex) Change Street Reality", we visited Zavod Bob on 18th-25th August 2021 in Ljubljana, Slovenia with a group of representatives from Tähe Youth Club.

During the study visit, we got acquainted with the work of Zavod Bob. We got an overview of the general nature of the organization, the practices of the BOB youth centers and street-based youth work, and the theories that guide their practices. Another focus was on sharing know-how and experiences of networking within the context of street-based youth work.
In addition, we were introduced to a couple of good examples of cooperation with schools and the activities of some partner organizations.

The following are some of the more interesting methods and practices that have spoken to us. We focus mainly on two areas of work - street-based youth work and networking.

In Estonia, little attention has been paid to theories and research guiding youth work in the context of street-based youth work. Street-based youth work is practiced in several cities (eg Tallinn, Tartu, Pärnu, Kuressaare, Haapsalu), but the theoretical framework of the work is mostly weak. It is for this reason that we would like to share first and foremost the grounded theory from the new methods and practices of the project. The BOB team used the grounded theory method to form the theoretical basis for street-based youth work.

According the experiences of Zavod Bob, the development of the theory by this method consisted of five major steps (some of which were performed in parallel):
1) collection of data related to young people and urban space;
2) data coding and analysis;
3) creation of a theory based on the analysis and existing theories of the related field in the practice of street-based youth work;
4) practicing the created theory (so-called testing);
5) further development and supplementation of the theory based on practice.

The grounded theory creation team consisted of five youth workers with different higher education backgrounds (psychology, social work, pedagogy, social pedagogy, andragogy). In addition, the team was supervised by a professor of social work. The process of developing the theory took about a year, and as a result of the work, the BOB team has a theoretical framework to guide practitioners of street-based youth work. Based on the created theory, new street youth workers are also trained both inside and outside their organization (eg in the network).

Grounded Theory

During the study visit, we got to know the street work practices of BOB and their partners. We were able to observe two street work practices, we name one as Night Street Work and the other as Site Street Work.

Night street work

As part of this practice, two youth workers worked in a previously agreed area in the late evening, in particular to diversify the repertoire of young people's behavior in a public urban space (eg throwing rubbish in the bin; listening to music without disturbing others, etc.). The target group of the practice was mostly young people in their late teens and young adults. The areas where Night Street Work was implemented were popular gathering places for young people during the night, starting from 21.00, so the youth workers worked in the area in the late evening. The areas were, for example, larger parks, green areas along the river, etc.

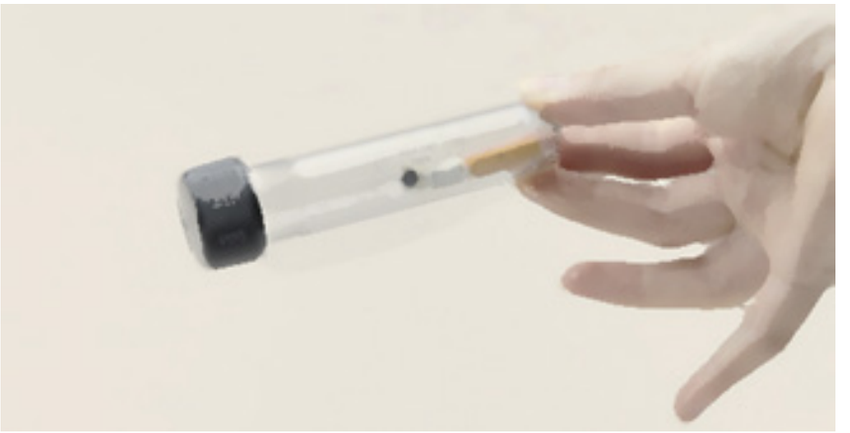
Background information: In Ljubljana, there are some gathering places for young people (between ages 15-26) to meet in the evenings. Smaller and larger groups talk to each other, consume alcohol and tobacco products, occasionally drugs, listen to music, dance, and so on. These areas are problematic in the eyes of local government representatives, as young people who spend their free time in the area pollute the environment, and vandalism has also emerged. Local citizens have been negatively affected by this behavior and other local authorities have decided to involve youth organizations in tackling the problem. BOB's street youth workers visit certain problem areas regularly to address the problem through street-based youth work.

As part of the Night Street Work, the youth workers moved around the area and took turns interacting with young people gathered in smaller groups. The young people were mostly unfamiliar to the youth workers. The youth workers introduced themselves and talked to each group for about 3-10 minutes.

Topics of conversation included plans for the evening and other gathering places, throwing any leftovers or trash in the trash bins, collecting cigarette buds in an ashtray, appropriate music in a loud public space, taking everybody into account when using a public space, etc. In the course of the conversations, an attempt was made to briefly open the perspective of other citizens of the city to the behavior of young people, to explore the problems that young people face and possible solutions.

Where possible, the appropriate behavior of young people was acknowledged and, if necessary, the etiquette of public spaces was recalled in a positive tone. Young people were also given pocket ashtrays marked with the BOB logo and contact information (see sample photo below), condoms, etc.

If young people were interested in youth work, the youth workers also informed them about this topic (eg what are the opportunities for young people in the city, when a youth event is taking place, etc.).



Site Street Work

As part of the Site Street Work practice, youth workers offered a range of activities to support young people's participation in the community and to prevent risky behavior for young people living and/or spending time in a particular area at a particular location. The target group of this practice was mostly young people aged 15–18 and they were mostly contacted by youth workers in the afternoon or evening (street work started at, for example, 5 pm or 6 pm). Youth workers had already been in primary contact with a number of young people who had taken part in the activities.

Site Street Work was practiced mainly in ball fields, playgrounds and green areas in the areas that consist mainly of blocks of flats. As part of the work, the following meeting times, places and possible activities were agreed with the young people who spend more time in the area. Various games were played with the young people (ball games, board games, etc.), topics relevant to the youth were discussed (eg initiating and maintaining friendships, hobby activities, etc.), joint picnics and other leisure events were organized, which other members of the community were invited to attend, as well.

During Site Street Work, the youth workers stayed in one location for a longer period of time and there was significantly less movement around than in Night Street Work. THis allowed the contact established with young people to be longer and deeper within the scope of one street work session. The youth workers interacted with the young people for mostly 15–50 minutes in a row. Based on the needs of the young people, youth workers also provided primary counseling for them during street work.

Both practices were applied by employees on a weekly basis during the street work season (spring to autumn) and different practices were spread over different days (eg Site Street Work on Tuesdays and Night Street Work on Fridays). The implementation of these practices was systematic, well thought out and the substantive activities were prepared as needed.

Intervisions with the network

Intervisions with the network

Intervision is a common practice in the Mreža Mlada Ulica (street-based youth work) network. Zavod Bob's youth workers are the leaders of the network. All representatives of the network members participate in the interviews on an as-needed basis. Solutions to various issues are discussed and colleagues can learn from each other.

The facilitator rotates, ensuring that each member of the network has the opportunity to develop their communication and leadership skills. This means that responsibilities in the network are shared between all members, and if a network member finds that they do not have the resources to contribute enough to the network, this can be announced at the end of each street work season or at the beginning of the next one. Street work is provided from autumn to spring in Ljubljana.

Expectations and operating principles have been negotiated with all parties in the network (including the funder, in this case the local government). While each member of the network participates in the network to introduce young people to their organization and to find new ones to work with, they also take part in Erasmus+ study visits and other activities which show that youth workers are committed to the quality of youth work and sustainable development of their knowledge and competences.

During our visit, it was good to see a seamless communication between the members of the network. Honest feedback is welcome and supported. Of course, the network had to meet virtually due to the pandemic, and this has affected the motivation of the staff, the funding of the service and the contacts with young people, but from what we have seen, the work of the Mreža Mlada Ulica network is commendable.

In order to ensure that the members of the network have access to both the literature on the methodology of (street-based) youth work and the necessary tools, Mreža Mlada Ulica has set up a joint rental of books and tools to be used by the entire network. All items have the network logo and contact information on them, and the network visually represents all members. Things like board games are used skilfully to connect with young people.

The library mainly contains literature on youth work both in Slovenian and other languages. Tools one can rent include card games and board games, items for sports games, a condom and lubricant pack with a sexual health brochure, and information leaflets on a range of other topics. Youth workers make sure that the tools are varied, as they work with young people from very different backgrounds and ages. When youth workers plan which area to go to, they discuss which age group they have mainly been in contact with in that area and whether these youngsters have had any favorite activities or games. During the study visit, we went to a part of the city where the residents gathered around a basketball court in the afternoon, so we brought a basketball, playing cards and a simple board game.

Zavod Bob's employees have also created a card game with the names and short descriptions of various professions. The titles on the cards are in Slovenian and English.

All members of the network also have the opportunity to participate in Erasmus+ projects - network leaders will write projects, find partners and represent Slovenia in the international street youth work network Dynamo.

Participation in the projects is offered to all partner organizations that have been active in street-based youth work during the season. It can be seen that the members of the network also appreciate this possibility, which was revealed both in the meeting with the members of the network in Slovenia and during the study visit to Estonia.

The Rental of Instruments

The Rental of Instruments

Corner for Clothes Swap

Corner for Clothes Swap

At the entrance to the Zavod Bob Youth Center, there is a corner in the corridor where one can browse and try on clothes and accessories, any guest of the youth centre can take and use these things freely. The clothes reach the clothes swap corner mainly as donations.

Youth workers keep an eye on the cleanliness and accessibility of this corner, but do not keep track of who tries on their clothes or how often anyone chooses clothes for themselves.

We find this practice important because adolescents want to explore boundaries and find out their identities through experimentation. Such free access, according to the desire or need to choose clothes without restrictions, can have a liberating and empowering effect on the young person. It was good to see that the clothes were not divided into gender-specific categories.

In general, there was a clear sense of solidarity between the people of Zavod Bob and Mreža Mlada Ulica.

On one of the last days of our study visit, Zavod Bob's employees gave us the opportunity to discuss what we have learned during the visit and to dream together about what kind of cooperation network could exist in Estonia. We used the Dragon Dreaming method under the guidance of Sara Rodman.

It is a good tool that allows group members to listen to each other's wishes and needs and share their own with others. During Dragon Dreaming, the group goes through four steps: dreaming (gathering information, discussing motivating factors), planning (discussing alternatives, setting up a strategy and plan for testing the idea), taking action (discussing the functioning of the administrative parties and agreeing on progress indicators) and celebration (mapping skills needed, awareness of the possible results of the activities, ways of sharing lessons are established).

The biggest benefit of the Dragon Dreaming method was that it gave space and opportunity to speak to all members of the group, including those who may not be as assertive during group discussions to speak or ask questions on their own initiative. Thanks to this, we were able to consolidate the new knowledge gathered during the study visit and reflect on the experience and think about what to apply in our own work when we return home.

