

Amar Toplić

Youth Sector in Schools. Towards Effective Collaboration

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University of Ljubljana
Faculty of Social Work

Univerza v Ljubljani
Fakulteta za socialno delo

Amar Toplič

Youth Sector in Schools: Towards Effective Collaboration
Mladinski sektor v šolah: na poti k uspešnemu sodelovanju

Graduation Thesis
Diplomsko delo

Ljubljana, 2021

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Amar Toplič

YOUTH SECTOR IN SCHOOLS
Towards Effective Collaboration

Graduation Thesis

Ljubljana, 2021

*To my dad,
who encouraged and supported me in all my endeavours.*

Throughout the writing of this graduation thesis, I have received a great deal of support and assistance.

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Professor Dr. Miloslav Poštrak, whose expertise and insightful feedback pushed me to sharpen my thinking and brought my work to a higher level.

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Abstract

Youth workers work with young people to facilitate their personal, social, and political development through non-formal and informal education, counselling, and leisure activities. Furthermore, they support youth to have a voice in communities. Slovenian youth sector is highly engaged and active in working with young people where they are at. Slovenian youth spend most of the day in schools. Considering the previous facts, having youth work in schools is not only beneficial for young people, but also for schools and communities. "Youth work in Schools" is a concept for delivering informal and non-formal learning in formal settings. For instance, in primary and secondary schools.

With this graduation thesis, I explored the possibilities of cooperation between the youth sector and schools in the Municipality of Ljubljana. First, I explored how youth workers imagine this partnership. Namely, what approaches, activities, and methods would they use when working in and with schools. Later, I focused on possible chances and challenges which the youth sector and schools may deal with in the partnership. Finally, I explored what youth workers think which practices and experiences from abroad could be adopted to Slovenia and why. For instance, practices observed and experiences gained by participating in mobility programmes for youth workers.

Keywords: youth work, young people, youth work in schools, partnership

Povzetek

Mladinske delavke in mladinski delavci podpirajo mlade v njihovem osebnostnem, socialnem in politično-izobraževalnem razvoju skozi informalno in neformalno učenje, svetovanje in prostoračasne dejavnosti. Omogočajo mladim, da imajo svoj glas v skupnosti. Mladinski sektor v Sloveniji je visoko angažiran in aktiven v delu z mladimi. Slovenska mladina večino svojega dneva preživi v šolah. Ob upoštevanju naštetega lahko sklepamo, da bo imelo mladinsko delo v šolah pozitiven vpliv ne le na mlade, temveč tudi na šole in skupnost. »Mladinsko delo v šolah« je koncept za aplikacijo formalnega in neformalnega učenja v formalnih okoljih, in sicer v osnovnih in srednjih šolah.

Z diplomskim delom sem raziskoval priložnosti sodelovanja mladinskega sektorja in šol v mestni občini Ljubljana. Raziskoval sem, kako mladinske delavke in mladinski delavci opredeljujejo to partnerstvo, katere pristope, aktivnosti in metode bi radi uporabljali v svojem delu v šolah in s šolami. Osredotočil sem se na priložnosti in izzive, s katerimi bi se mladinski sektor in šole soočali v okviru svojega partnerstva. Raziskoval sem, katere prakse in izkušnje iz tujine bi, po mnenju mladinskih delavk in delavcev, lahko aplicirali v Sloveniji, na primer ogledane prakse in pridobljene izkušnje iz tujine skozi udeležbo na programih mobilnosti za mladinske delavke in delavce.

Ključne besede: mladinsko delo, mladi, mladinsko delo v šolah, partnerstvo

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 YOUTH

This chapter explores and explains the different views to understanding the concept of youth as well as the term youth and youth age group. In the first part, we focus on explaining Spence's (Spence, as cited in Hine, 2009) intersecting approach to understanding the concept of youth, which consists of four inter-related dimensions that impact the youth. In the second part, we focus on defining the term youth and the youth age group. Besides this, we also discuss youth in Slovenia, their life-worlds and subcultures.

1.1.1 The Concept of Youth

The field of youth studies has developed rapidly since the 1940s as young people became the subject of enormous research (Wyn and White, 1997, p. 8). As a result, researchers and practitioners in the field of youth studies and youth work (e.g., social workers, social pedagogues, psychologists, and others working in non-governmental youth organisations) are not always precise about the theories they use (Cieslik and Simpson, 2013, see also Wyn and White, 1997; Kehily, 2013). However, all of them agree that young people, as non-adults, are a separate category of people (Wyn and White, 1997, p. 8; Kehily, 2013). Mannheim (as cited in Cieslik and Simpson, 2013) argues that researchers and practitioners have different understandings about the concept of youth and that those understandings are very often different from the understandings the young people have about themselves. Therefore, we need to theorise the concept of youth so that we know what and whom we are researching.

To do that we will use a concept developed by Spence (2005) as it offers a more holistic view to understanding youth. Spence developed a concept of youth that consists of four intersecting dimensions, namely historical, social, spatial, and biological as illustrated in Figure 1 (Spence, 2005; Spence as cited in Hine, 2009, p. 30).

The Historical dimension addresses the reality that during history young people have been understood differently by societies (Spence, 2005; Hine, 2009). To illustrate this, child labour was widely spread in preindustrial societies, during the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Spence, 2005; Kehily, 2013). Later, with the prohibition of child labour and the introduction of obligatory education, children and young people became separated from the adult world and were understood as a distinct group (Spence, 2005; Kehily, 2013; Cieslik and Simpson, 2013).

Today, in postmodern societies, young people may complete secondary education at the age of eighteen and higher education between the ages of twenty-one or twenty-two (Cieslik and Simpson, 2013).

The social and economic position of young people relates to the opportunities and chances they will have in life with regards to accessing information, resources, and support (Hine, 2009, p. 31). Hine (2009, p. 31) argues that "the social dimension is the most important" in shaping a young person's life. Moreover, Hine (2009, p. 31) highlights that young people's lives "are substantially shaped by key social structures and institutions around them (e.g., family, school, employment) and in the accompanying economic position".

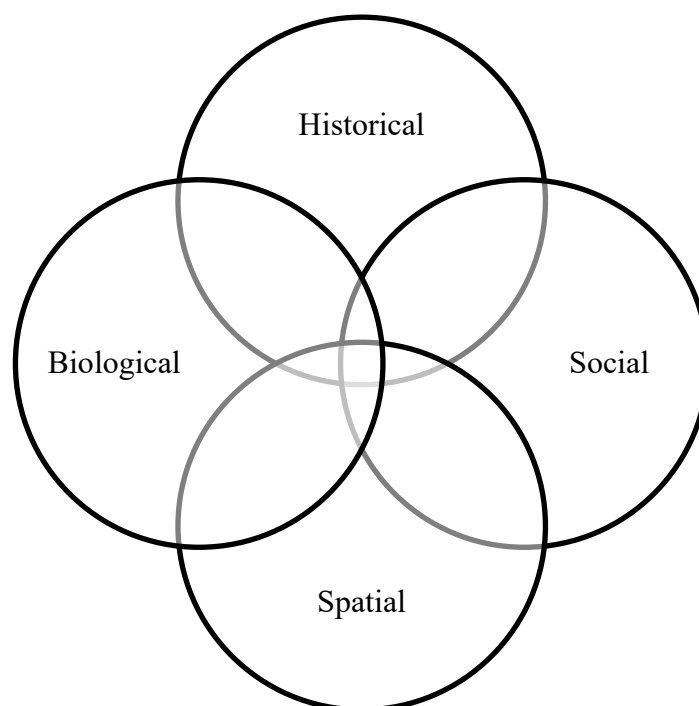


Figure 1 Intersecting dimensions of youth

Based on Spence, 2005, as in Hine, 2009, p. 30

Note. Reprinted from *Young People's Lives: Taking a Different View* by J. Hine, 2009 (p. 30), in J. Wood & J. Hine (Ed.), *Work with Young People* (pp. 27-38). London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage Publications. Copyright 2009 by Jean Hine.

The physical appearance and inherited personal characteristics of the individual are addressed by the *biological dimension* (Hine, 2009, p. 30). Hine (2009, p. 30) highlighted that "there are certain expectations of what young people will look like at particular ages". For instance, Hine (2009, p. 30) argues that key characteristics as gender, height, and stages of puberty will have a great influence on how some individuals experience youth, especially on those who do not fit into the general expectations. In fact, "psychological theories contain expectations of the

acquisition of particular cognitive and emotional abilities within specific age binds" (Hine, 2009, p. 30).

The *Spatial dimension* relates to the fact that the youth as a concept is understood differently in different places and cultures as it is a social construct that is made and shaped by the society we live in (Hine, 2009, p. 30; Kehily, 2013). Moreover, Hine (2009, p. 30) and Kehily (2013) argue that in various countries and cultures, young people become "young" at different moments in their lives, and thus they undergo this period differently. Besides, Kehily (2013) argues that this "can have a powerful influence on how we look at young people and interpret their behaviour".

Wood & Hine (2013) argue that young people in postmodern societies lead complicated lives that are influenced by things that were not experienced by all previous generations (e.g., globalization, technological innovations, gender, race, disability, sexuality, and so on). Hine (2009, p. 31) points out that the utmost importance of this holistic, cross-dimensional approach to understanding young people is the necessity of considering each of the four dimensions factors within them, as well as how they are interrelated and how, as such, they impact the youth.

1.1.2 Defining Youth

Defining the term "youth" is still extremely complex as there is no universally accepted definition of the term youth and the youth age group. In everyday language, the term "youth" refers to the transition period between the dependency of childhood and the responsibilities of adulthood (Wyn and White, 1997). However, the youth age group is defined differently. So, who are the youth?

In dictionaries, the term youth is defined similarly. The online Oxford Learner's Dictionary (n.d.) defines youth as "the time of life when a person is young, especially the time before a child becomes an adult" and "young people considered as a group". Likewise, the online Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines youth as "the period of your life when you are young, or the state of being young" and "young people, both male and female, considered as a group".

Wyn and White (1997, pp. 11-12) argue that the youth is a transition period between childhood and adulthood, where being a child is the starting point and being an adult is the ending point of the transition. They point out that this transition period relates to different beliefs and ideas

about youth which emerge into a social construct (Table 1). Other researchers name this transition period as adolescence (Patterson, 2008).

Youth	Adult
Not adult / Adolescent	Adult / Grown up
Becoming	Arrived
Pre social self that will emerge under the right conditions	Identity is fixed
Powerless & Vulnerable	Powerful & Strong
Less responsible	Responsible
Dependent	Independent
Ignorant	Knowledgeable
Risky behaviours	Considered behaviour
Rebellious	Conformist
Reliant	Autonomous

Table 1 Notions of youth and adult

Note. Reprinted from Rethinking youth (p. 12), by J. Wyn & R. White, 1997, Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd. Copyright 1997 by Johanna Wyn and Rob White.

On the other hand, Cohen and Ainley (as cited in Cieslik and Simpson, 2013) point out that in postmodern societies the boundaries between childhood and adulthood became unclear. Therefore, many researchers and practitioners are questioning the use of the concept of youth as a transition period (Cohen and Ainley, as cited in Cieslik and Simpson, 2013). Social workers in Slovenia see young people as experts of their own life who have unique experiences and social worker's responsibility is to consider those when exploring young people's life-worlds and subcultures (Šugman et al., 2007 as cited in Poštrak, 2015, pp. 270-271).

The youth age group is, as mentioned before, defined differently by countries and international organizations. For instance, the United Nations (World Youth Report, 2018) define youth as persons aged from 15 to 24 years, while Slovenia (Public Interest in Youth Sector Act, 2010) defines youth as persons aged 15 to 29.

During the transition period or adolescence young people will experience broad physical and psychological changes (Patterson, 2018; Wyn and White 1997, p. 12). The transition period or adolescence itself is divided into three distinct phases: early adolescence which begins at the age of 11 or 12 and continues to the age of 14, middle adolescence which happens between the ages of 14 and 16, and late adolescence which happens between the ages of 16 and 18

(Patterson, 2018). Each of these phases is connected to certain changes that happen in a young person's life. For instance, in early adolescence young people experience fast changes in their physical appearance due to puberty. Besides this, they also experience emotional changes in a way that they are becoming more independent from parents and start relying on peers when it comes to social and emotional support. In middle adolescence young people start to develop an interest in romantic and sexual relationships. Puberty ends in late adolescence and young people have developed a more stable sense of self-identity (Patterson, 2018).

1.1.3 Youth in Slovenia

Youth is a vibrant social group that is fast in following trends. Young people have different lifestyles and are part of many subcultures. In this chapter, we reflect on the position of young people in Slovenia.

After a sharp decline in the youth population from 1990 to 2020, recent demographic development shows stabilization of the youth population in Slovenia (Lavrič et al, 2020). Cupar et al. (2019, p. 3) argue that the "aging of [the] Slovenian society will continue and by 2050 the ratio between young and old will reach 1:2". Slovenia is experiencing a brain drain. The number of young people leaving the country has increased drastically in the period from 2010 to 2016 (Ibid). Youth Study Slovenia (Cupar et al., 2019, p. 41) found that "young Slovenians strongly invest in preparation for emigration, the most competent individuals are the most likely to emigrate, their emigration is well thought out (e.g., language acquisition, postponed departure, longer preparation period), and their emigration often includes plans to return home."

Leisure time is one of the most important factors which determines young people's lifestyle. In leisure time young people follow their interests and socialize with peers. Most youth work activities happen during their free time. Therefore, we need to answer the question of which leisure time activities young people in Slovenia enjoy the most. For young people in Slovenia family and friends are very important. Hence, spending time with them is among their top 5 leisure time activities (Cupar et al., 2019). Music and movies are important factors that influence the building of subcultures and the development of values and specific personality traits. Listening to music, closely followed by watching movies are the most enjoyable free time activities for young people in Slovenia. Young people in Slovenia practice sports very often as well (Ibid.).

Young people born between 1996 and 2012 or Generation Z are often referred to as digital natives because they never experienced the world without the internet. Consequently, online interactions with friends are increasing as young people nowadays are more technologically advanced and use smartphones, tablets, and computers daily from an early age (Cupar et al., 2019). Moreover, they are also using technologies to support their learning in the sense of researching the internet for data, watching tutorials, reading blogs, and doing homework. Furthermore, they tend to use social networks and instant messaging apps rather than email and calls to stay connected with the teaching staff and their fellow peers. They organize themselves in closed groups and chats on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Viber, where they share various information. Although internet use is drastically increasing, less than half of the young people stated that they can differentiate trustworthy from fake content on the internet (Lavrič et al., 2020). Some may say that they are screen addicts, but I say that they are investing time in self-branding and self-promotion, which became very important in the age of social media.

Young people in Slovenia practice more environment-friendly and healthy lifestyles than the young people from previous generations Y and X. Cupar et al. (2019) found that practicing sports increased during the last decade. A small fraction of them is also not afraid to practice activism, do volunteering work or engage in politics for achieving social change (Ibid.).

This generation is keen to protect nature and the environment. Subsequently, we may witness an unusual development in the field of youth subcultures. Many argue that youth subcultures are developing back to youth scenes, because the influence of mainstream and fast-changing trends put some subcultures close to extinction in the Western Balkans.

The fear of unemployment after finishing education increased dramatically among young people in Slovenia (Cupar et al., 2019). Moreover, job security has dropped as young people work in more precarious conditions as compared to their parents. Connections, acquaintances, and luck are considered as one of the key factors for a successful job search (Ibid.). Safe employment, independence in the working environment, interesting working tasks, and clear goals are important factors for young people's job search (Lavrič et al., 2020).

To conclude, we may say that the lives of youth in Slovenia changed dramatically with the introduction of new information and communication technologies. Young people are spending increasingly more time online with friends. However, they are still active in public spaces where they do sports and meet friends in cafes. The demographic changes regarding aging and brain

drain will pose a great risk for Slovenia and adequate public policies are necessary to combat these emerging social problems. The interest in politics is decreasing among young people while the readiness to participate in elections has increased. Slovenian youth still have precarious work conditions with irregular income which makes it harder to leave parents' home sooner.

1.1.4 Life-worlds and Subcultures of Youth

Poštrak (2015, p. 271) stated that the "lifeworld of a youngster is a complex symbolic world in which the youngster attempts to cope with it as best as they can. They try to survive. Therefore, they develop various forms of behaviours, namely life strategies or survival strategies." Young people nowadays lead complicated lives, and their upbringing is influenced by many factors, amongst which are family, peers, gender, race, disability, sexuality, values, globalization, and technological innovation (Wood & Hine, 2013; Poštrak, n.d.).

Our present world has become globally connected and the information flow is enormous. Young people in postmodern societies must deal with this amount of information available to them as well as the appearance of new media and the emerging of social media like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and others. Interactions with peers and family members moved to the online world (Lavrič et al., 2020; Cupar et al., 2019). Generation Z is the first generation that has not seen the world without the internet, and they had to cope with these changes alone as their parents were also occupied in mastering the changes in this segment of life.

In puberty, young people search for independence from parents and join other peers in groups or cliques (Patterson, 2018). Some of those join diverse subcultures and scenes in the attempt to distinguish themselves from the predominant culture, namely the culture of their parents (Poštrak, 1994a). Sociologists recognize many subcultures, such as: the raving scene, techno scene, rock, metal, emo, punk, hip-hopers, skaters, and "čefurji" (Prešeren, 2010). "Čefurji" is a distinct subculture in Slovenia (Prešeren, 2010), whose members are mainly migrants from former Yugoslavia living in the country. They have a specific language, namely a mixture of Slovene and any other language spoken on the territory of former Yugoslavia, distinct clothing style, that is, sports shoes and trousers, and music, namely Balkan turbo-folk (Prešeren, 2010; Fran, n.d.). Young people join subcultures and scenes with different ambitions. Some identify themselves with the music, clothes, and values of the culture or scene, others are simply curious and want to explore (Prešeren, 2010).

Values are cultural constructs and interpretations of acceptable and appropriate behaviours and traits in a society (Poštrak, n.d.). Youngsters may develop values distinct from their peer group, subculture, and religious beliefs. Equally important is gender, which as well a social construct about how girls and boys should grow up. For example, in many cultures, it is acceptable if boys fight among themselves. On the contrary, girls must be nice and talk about problems. The values influence their transition from childhood to adulthood as it bears specific personal traits and habits (Ibid.).

How the family spends time with the youngsters has a great impact on their early development and experience of growing up (Poštrak, n.d.). Parents may be good guidance and emotional support to their children. On the contrary, abusive parents may cause distress and harm to the young person. This experience shapes youngsters' view of the world and their life strategies (Ibid.).

In brief, young people must cope with many factors and try to define and find themselves in a very complex society filled with expectations and various social constructs which shape youngsters' traits, behavioural traits, social and sexual identities and values.

1.2 YOUTH WORK

In this chapter we define youth work as a professional practice. We discuss youth work's aims and the importance of ethics for delivering high quality activities and producing positive outcomes. Moreover, we explore community youth work as one of the fundamental methods used in youth work.

1.2.1 Defining Youth Work

Youth work is professional and pedagogical work with young people which is carried out in their free time and in whose activities young people join voluntarily (Rečnik omladinske politike, 2015). Youth work contributes to young people's learning and development. The key purpose of youth work is to "enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence, and place in society and to reach their full potential" (National Occupational Standards, 2008). The key purpose is achieved through long-term programmes, which can be different by topics and the location where the programme activities are carried out, for example,

street-based youth work, centre-based youth work, and school-based youth work (Rečnik omladinske politike, 2015). This graduation thesis will focus on school-based youth work.

Garača et al. (2017, p. 46) highlight the importance of co-creating youth work programmes and activities together with young people, as such a bottom-up approach assures that young people's needs are met in the best possible way. These authors also point out that youth work is based on humanistic and constructivist approaches to working with young people. In other words, young people are seen holistically and as the "masters" of their own life.

In the National Occupational Standards (2008) it is recognized that the heart of all youth work programmes and activities is a young person-led approach. Therefore, in the National Occupational Standards (2008) a set of values were agreed upon. These values also illustrate how youth work is involved in the holistic development of young people, and are as follows:

- Promoting and empowering young people's active participation and involvement in the decision-making processes,
- Promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion,
- Partnership with young people and others and
- Personal, social, and political development.

In other words, youth work empowers young people's abilities of critical thinking and offers them safe spaces for social and cultural exchange with other young people. By using the methods and tools of non-formal education youth work allows young people the opportunity to self-reflect upon their lives, develop new skills, and gain new knowledge which they will be able to use later in life. In the next chapter we will explore the ethics of youth work more detailed.

1.2.2 Youth Work Ethics

What is right and what is wrong is determined by professions ethics. (NYCI, n.d.). They support practitioners develop quality youth work and good practices in working with young people (Ibid.). Nevertheless, the ethical principles in youth work are diverse as youth work is not the same in every country. Therefore, in this chapter we will make an overview of ethical principles and values in use by practitioners (AGJF, n.d.; NYCI, n.d.; YACWA & WAAYW, 2014). Highlighting this is important for youth work in schools as it is possible that some ethical issues arise when we start with the implementation of the concept.

Youth workers are there for the young people. They are their primary clients. Namely, youth workers collaborate with various social services and stakeholders who have different interests. Hence, youth workers must keep in mind and advocate in the best interest of the young people they work with and not the agencies they are cooperating with. This way young people always have an accountable ally they can rely on.

On the other hand, youth workers have a holistic approach to young people. Namely, they work with young people in their social contexts i.e., family, peers, education, culture, community, and society. They have great influence on a youngster's life. Hence, youth workers facilitate positive system changes and community actions targeted into strengthening the wellbeing of young people.

Youth workers promote anti-discrimination and protect the rights young people have. Nobody can be discriminated based on their religion, social class, occupation, colour, economic status, or political views. All young people are equal and youth workers respect and value diversity.

The aim of youth work is to strengthen young people's independence, social and political participation. Young people are competent to make own decisions independently. Nevertheless, youth workers support them by giving information and guidance on possible ways for young people's desired outcomes. Furthermore, youth work helps youngsters identify and further develop their strengths and talents.

Establishing and maintaining trustful relationships with young people is another crucial ethical principle in youth work. Everything shared by the young person with the youth worker must be kept confidential. The confidentiality may be broken only with the informed consent of the young person and in cases of suspected danger of self-harm or harm to others.

Commitment to maintain a high level of competence by keeping track on latest professional and practical developments in youth work and youth policy is important for quality youth work. Furthermore, youth workers commit to engage in professional training to further develop skills and knowledge needed in working with young people.

Youth worker's self-awareness of personal experiences, beliefs, values, ideology and sexual identity is important, because youth workers work with various young people who often do not share the same identity as they. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of one own identity and respect that no human is the same.

In professional life youth workers witness many distressing situations. Therefore, it is important that they join take part in supervision and collegial meetings to discuss burning topics. Self-care ensures a high quality of services and the protection of youth workers.

The relationships youth workers establish with young people are deep, trustful, and strong. Nevertheless, these relationships have boundaries and limits which need to be clearly communicated. Codes of conduct, professional standards and laws further define the boundaries and limits of relationships.

Youth workers are representing social services and are in most cases contracted by state and local authorities to work with young people in the communities. With this comes great responsibility. Youth workers need to protect the integrity of youth work practice by maintaining high quality service and refrain from behaviours which may cause harm to the recognition of youth work as a valuable and effective social service.

To conclude, we may say that the ethics of youth work act as a guide for youth workers to maintaining a high quality of their services and activities. Nevertheless, it provides a framework for working with young people in their social contexts by establishing trustful relationships.

1.2.3 Community Youth Work

Community work is one of the fundamental methods used in youth work when working with communities. Young people's "base" are their communities. Hence, working with them directly where they are at is the ambition of many youth workers and other stakeholders. As such, youth work activities and programmes have been ever since focused on building strong communities and developing social services which will suit its members the best. In youth work, the most common approach to community work is community development. Community development is trying to offer different services to empower, mobilize and motivate young people and adults to co-create their communities through social action (Dragoš, n.d.). We may see that community development is not only delivering more people-oriented services, but it is also enabling people from the community to have an active influence in shaping them.

Before we continue, it is important to answer the question about what communities are. In dictionaries, they are defined similarly. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (n.d.b) defines community as "all the people who live in a particular area" and as "the feeling of sharing things and belonging to a group in the place where you live". Likewise, the online Cambridge

Dictionary (n.d.b) defines community as "all the people who live in a particular area, or a group of people who are considered as a unit because of their shared interests or background" and a "group of people who have similar interests or who want to achieve something together".

Goel, Francis and Pulla (2014, p. 5). Say that "community development has been identified as a core social work approach or method to work with communities who are disenfranchised, marginalised and faced with broad social issues resulting from unjust policies and planning at global, national, state and local level." Community youth work benefits communities and young people on many levels. We will take a moment to explore some of the benefits.

Some of the benefits for the communities are (Centar za omladinski rad, n.d):

- Building and empowering active citizenship among young people who are ready to tackle challenges in their communities and build a more open and democratic society,
- Holistic approach to young people's education by complementing formal education with informal methods,
- Promoting diversity among young people and
- Helping young people reach their full potentials.
- Some of the benefits for young people are (Centar za omladinski rad, n.d.):
- Holistic approach to young people's personal and social development,
- Empowerment and opportunities for young people to develop their competencies,
- Young people know where to search for help and support if needed and
- A wider offer of educational and recreational activities and programmes for young people.

Schools are as well a type of micro-communities where young people spend most of their time. Therefore, youth welfare services need to have developed methods in community work.

1.3 YOUTH WORK IN SCHOOLS

"Youth work in schools" is a relatively new concept in youth work about working with young people where they are at, namely at schools. In this chapter we try to define youth work in schools and describe a step-by-step guide on how to build effective partnerships between the youth sector and schools for those who are interested in the implementation of this concept in their own communities.