

Youth Work in Finland  
– Finding Ways for Intercultural Opening

National report for the project  
“Moving Societies towards Integration?”

Marja Peltola

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## INTRODUCTION: WHY SHOULD YOUTH WORK BE EXAMINED?

Youth work is about organizing leisure time activities for young people, supervised by (professional) adults but based on the interests and needs of the young people themselves. As a part of public youth services, youth work activities should be equally open for every young individual living in Finland. As one of the spheres for young people's peer contacts, it may ideally provide an arena for increased contacts with young people with different (ethnic) backgrounds and possibilities for educational purposes, such as advancing tolerance and anti-racism and encouraging encounters and friendships across cultural and ethnic boundaries. A previous study (Harinen 2005) has shown that youth work activities are important especially for those young people with migrant background, who have arrived in Finland rather recently. In this sense, youth work activities are far from being insignificant for the intercultural opening of the Finnish society as a whole.

In Finland, policies and practices related to immigrants and integration began to demand consideration in a relatively late phase<sup>1</sup>, due to which, the concrete experiences and practices in advancing intercultural openness are still relatively few, new and unestablished (Martikainen 2006, Martikainen, Sintonen & Pitkänen 2006.); (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007, Kivijärvi, Harinen 2008). However, the challenges related to intercultural opening have gained ground in the discussions around youth work from late 1990s onwards, and are one of the burning questions of youth work today. Although questions related to multiculturalism have gathered growing attention in the Finnish youth research, the possibilities for equal access to different leisure time activities have not been addressed too much (Harinen et al. 2009, 11). It is therefore of great importance to examine the degree the youth work system as an institution is capable of opening up culturally in order to allow young people with different backgrounds to enter it and to provide them services that suit their needs.

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1 Until the turn of 1980's and 1990's, Finland was a country characterized not by immigration but emigration. Although the number of people with foreign origin has rapidly grown since then, it still remains among the lowest in Europe, foreign-speaking population making up approximately 3.3 per cent of the Finnish population. Biggest migrant groups are people of Swedish, Russian, Estonian and Somali origin. (Statistics Finland 2007.)



# 1 WHAT IS YOUTH WORK IN FINLAND?

Youth work in Finland is regulated by the Youth Act (27.1.2006/72). According to the current Youth Act, youth work should aim at “*supporting young people’s growth and independence, promoting young people’s active citizenship and empowerment, and improving their growth and living conditions*”. The central values for the youth work are communality, solidarity, equity and equality, multiculturalism and internationality, healthy life styles and respect of life and the environment. (Anonymous2006) Youth work is a formally specialised and independent field, separate from the school, social work and child welfare.

Youth work concerns young people’s leisure time and is thus based on voluntariness, informal learning and practical orientation. It is, nevertheless, conscious, focused and structured action that aims at influencing the understanding, values, knowledge and action of young people. (Nieminen 2007.) It is aimed at promoting young people’s mastery over their lives by supporting them in schooling, hobbies, leisure time and temperance, among other things. Youth workers’ and young people’s relationships should be based on interaction and dialogue, thus enabling young people to participate in planning and creating new forms of activities, not as clients but as independent actors. (Gretschel 2007, Kylmäkoski 2007) The value of independency of young people is generally respected in the Finnish youth work – young people and their peer groups have traditionally been the most important target group, while the cooperation with their families has been limited. Although youth work has largely empowering and supportive intentions, it is also a form of education, whose aims are defined by (adult) professionals. In practice, an important task of youth work has traditionally been, and still is, to direct and control the ways young people spend their leisure time (Horelli, Haikkola & Sotkasiira 2007). Youth work therefore is twofold by nature, as it contains both controlling/directive and emancipative/empowering elements.

Youth work is targeted to all young people (generally under the age of 18), it should be equally available for all and reach all the young people in need of such services. The barriers of participation are thus are tried to keep as low as possible. The realization of the principle of equal openness may nevertheless be questioned as availability of youth services depends on the size of the municipality (Silvennoinen & Nieminen(Silvennoinen, Nieminen 2002) 2002: 31) and seemingly gender neutral tradition of youth work activities has, according to critics, many times resulted in focusing more on the interests of boys while forgetting the girls (Näre 2007: 542). Resting on a myth of Finland as a homogeneous or even mono-cultural society, equality is traditionally understood as similar treatment in Finland, while the right to being different is less emphasised (Törrönen & Vauhkonen 2007: 38). In youth work this has traditionally meant understanding equal opportunities as not preventing anyone to participate, “keeping doors open for all” (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007). This is problematic, as the existing differences, backgrounds and needs are obscured. With the growing amount of young people with multicultural background in Finland, there is also a growing need to acknowledge these differences in order to realize the truly equal opportunities.



## 2 ACTORS AND ACTIVITIES

The most important actors in the field of youth work are young people themselves. Their initiatives and independent activities are given a central role in the Youth Act (2006) and there are continuous efforts both in the structures and in the activities of youth work for realizing these rights and involving young people in the planning of the activities as much as possible. At the structural level, the Ministry of Education is in charge of developing the system of youth work as a whole. The political guidance system in Finland is rather strong and its central tools are the Youth Act and the Development Programme for Child and Youth Policy. The Ministry funds municipal youth work, national youth organizations and organizations doing youth work and is in charge of the occupational education of youth work professionals. (Aaltonen 2009): 37–39.) Municipalities are responsible for providing the youth services at the local level: organizing activities at youth houses and targeted youth work and funding local youth organizations. Congregations, national and local youth organizations and non-governmental organizations are working alongside with municipalities in organizing youth services<sup>2</sup>.

Municipalities' autonomy in organizing the youth work on their region is rather great. Especially in smaller municipalities, youth work may be in a disadvantaged position in terms of funding, as the state subsidies cover only a minor part of the expenditures. (Silvennoinen & Nieminen 2002; Cederlöf 2007: 26.) In the early 1990's, youth work undergone a profound change, as the revised Youth Work Act reduced state regulations and the deep recession resulted in municipalities cutting their expenses in youth work (Nieminen 1998): 29–30). The forms of youth work have nevertheless diversified from the late 1990s onwards along with a multiplicity of different projects, often set up as answers for certain local problematics (Silvennoinen, Nieminen 2002): 53–54). The newest Youth Act seeks to strengthen again the role and responsibilities of municipalities in organizing youth work (Aaltonen 2009): 13).

According to the Youth Act (2006), municipal youth work includes “*educational guidance of young people; facilities and hobby opportunities; information and advisory services; support to youth associations and other youth groups; sportive, cultural, international and multicultural youth activities; young people's environmental education; and, when needed, youth workshop services or other forms of activity suited to the local circumstances and needs*”. Central working areas in municipal youth work are “youth houses”, which are designed for different activities according to young people's interests. At a youth house, young people can meet their friends and other young people, but also professional adults, who can provide support and guidance if needed. Almost all municipalities offer facilities for free socializing, listening to music, watching television, playing games, using computers etc. (Silvennoinen, Nieminen 2002): 45.) Each municipality in Finland has at least one youth house, altogether there are approximately 1100 youth houses in Finland (Aaltonen 2009: 115). Besides the free recreational activities, youth house activities include clubs and groups of different types. They can be targeted to all who are interested or to a certain group, such as girls, boys, certain ethnic group or immigrant youth, disabled young people, young people of certain age or young people at risk. (Nieminen 2007): 29–31.) Group activities offer possibilities for the meeting special needs of certain groups. In order to enable and advance the participation of young people, most youth houses organize regular “house meetings” where the future activities are discussed and planned with young people.

Although central, youth houses are by no means the only forms of youth work. The term of spe-

2 The focus of this paper is in municipal youth work – the role of non-governmental organization and congregations is therefore not covered, notwithstanding their importance in the youth work field as a whole.



cific youth work (or targeted youth work) refers to youth work services that are targeted to specific groups, whose social needs are considered greater than those of users of “open” youth work services (Coussée 2008): 5). These may include certain immigrant groups, unemployed or unschooled young people and young people at risk of marginalisation on some other grounds. Organizing specific youth work according to local needs is another responsibility of municipalities. Targeted youth work may be regular or based on the demands of specific local situations or it may be realized within a project. It may involve mobile or outreach work in order to reach the target group, discussing with the young people in question, offering them information on existing services, offering them support and help and intervening in their actions. (Cederlöf 2007, Huhtajärvi 2007): 448–449.) Like other forms of youth work, social youth work is based on voluntariness and trust (Huhtajärvi 2007), 446). As virtual environments gain ground among the leisure time environments of young people, youth work is in growing extent trying to extend its scope there as well (Nieminen 2007). Examples include a project “Netari”, a “virtual youth house”, where young people can discuss with professional youth workers (Merkikivi 2008) and anti-racist chats that are supervised by professionals.





### 3 INTERCULTURAL OPENING IN YOUTH WORK

At the legal level, the need to see multiculturalism<sup>3</sup> or intercultural opening as an integral part of youth work can be considered relatively well acknowledged. Multiculturalism is spelled out one of the core values of youth work in the Youth Act and advancing it is responsibility of municipal youth work (Youth Act 2006). In the Act, multiculturalism means “advancing tolerance and supporting young people representing cultural minorities and their communities” (Aaltonen 2009): 25). Besides the Youth Act, issues of non-discrimination and diversity are directed by the Constitution Law and the Non-discrimination Act. The prohibition of discrimination, stated in the Constitution, is specified in the Non-discrimination Act, which obliges authorities to advance equality in a systematic and focused manner in all their actions. (Cortés Téllez 2009): 131–132.)

According to Cederlöf (2007: 39–40), intercultural opening is advanced in youth work in a more conscious manner than before and it takes forms of advancing tolerance and supporting and guiding social contacts and relations between young people from different ethnic backgrounds. Among possible ways for realizing intercultural opening in the municipal youth work, Cortés Téllez (Cortés Téllez 2009: 130–131) names planning youth work from the viewpoint of young people with migrant background, lowering barriers of minority young people’s participation by giving information on activities in multiple languages, making sure that youth workers have the relevant skills, giving training in related issues, allocating a part of youth houses’ hours for specific migrant groups and taking minority young people into consideration when formulating youth work’s plans and strategies. However, while advancing intercultural opening is a legislative responsibility, defining its contents at the practical level more specifically is left to the municipalities. Absence of binding regulations means that the emphasis of intercultural opening in youth work varies from a municipality to another, and this far, sporadicity seems to be the main flaw in developing good practices of multicultural youth work. (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007) Additionally, multicultural youth work has been criticized of being too often defined and planned by somebody else than the young people with multicultural backgrounds and only seldom hearing their voice when discussing the aims and contents of youth work (Honkasalo, Souto 2007: 115–116).

In researches on multicultural youth work (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007, Kivijärvi, Harinen 2008, Honkasalo 2007), it is stressed that intercultural opening should not be considered as a separate sector in youth work, but a phenomenon that demands consideration in the work community as a whole and at all levels of the institution and that challenges customary ways of thinking about youth work. Multicultural youth work is often defined as youth work done with young people representing different ethnic backgrounds. This brings about the risk of not seeing intercultural opening as a challenge for the youth work as a whole, but touching only those working on the areas with many immigrants. A wider understanding of intercultural opening of youth work is necessary; one that covers anti-racist ethos in youth work at all levels, advancing intercultural opening in the work communities and reassessment of work methods and underlying assumptions and attitudes. (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007: 12–15.) Intercultural opening in the youth work has also brought about a discussion on relations of educational and recreational elements: it has been brought up that organizing and enabling activities is not enough, but contemplation on what kind of activities or environments enable influencing the attitudes of Finnish young people and enhance the minority young people’s possibilities to participate is also necessary. (Ibid.: 17–20.)

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3 In Finland, the term “multiculturalism” is generally used when discussed about the need for intercultural opening.



The support of administrative level is of great significance in advancing intercultural opening, as it communicates that it is a shared value. Strategic work at the administrative level can provide concrete tools for intercultural opening and help allocating resources for advancing it in practice. Strategic work also sends the message that intercultural opening is considered important and the administrative level is committed in advancing it as well. (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007, 12–15.) Unfortunately, only three percent of all municipalities and four out of ten bigger cities have a strategy for advancing intercultural opening. Not having one is typically explained by not having many immigrants living in the municipality, considering young immigrants being “well adjusted” to the normal youth work, considering the strategies “just papers” or not having time and other resources for preparing a strategy. (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007, Kivijärvi, Harinen 2008)

Advancing intercultural opening demands constant evaluating and self-evaluating in the field of youth work, training and updating of the knowledge-base of youth workers. One in four municipalities has provided youth workers with training in intercultural issues and they are also brought up in some extent in the education of youth workers. However, the possibilities to update know-how in multicultural issues can be considered relatively scarce. (Kivijärvi, Harinen 2008: 28–29.) Merely stating the need for intercultural opening is not enough; resources and tools for advancing it are also needed. According to Honkasalo, Souto and Suurpää (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007), youth workers need support and tools for intervening in and preventing racist attitudes and actions; if no directions or strategies exist for fighting racism, it is up to individual youth worker’s interests and capabilities whether or not to intervene in discriminative or racist practices and attitudes. Unfortunately, in many municipalities, advancing intercultural opening is not considered a key value of youth work: more than one in three municipalities report that there are no multicultural young people attending to the youth activities, nearly two-thirds think special attention on needs of ethnic groups is not necessary in their municipality and only very seldom have municipalities employed people with special task of advancing intercultural opening (Kivijärvi, Harinen 2008).

Honkasalo, Souto and Suurpää (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007: 31) state that in advancing intercultural opening in the youth work, the practical work is lagging behind the legislation, as youth workers in the field are relatively ill aware of the obligations set by the legislation. The fundamental challenge of advancing intercultural opening in youth work lies in the difficulties of mainstreaming the ideas and ideals. The questions of intercultural opening are easily left to be a responsibility of those who are interested or those who are appointed to it, and not considered a shared challenge. While many hard-working individuals are interested in advancing these issues, their work load becomes far too big and intercultural opening is not developed as an all-encompassing principle. (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007, Kivijärvi, Harinen 2008)

At the level of attitudes, Herranen and Kivijärvi (Herranen, Kivijärvi 2009) write that Finnishness, as a homogeneous attribute, remains at the core of youth house activities and memberships, creating a severe obstacle for cross-cultural and multicultural group belongings. Honkasalo and her colleagues (2007) have found out an interesting contradiction between the ways of thinking of young people and the adults working with them: while the young people (with multicultural background) make claims for acknowledging existing racism and adopting active anti-racist mind-set in youth activities, the youth workers and workers of administrative level are not willing to discuss about racism, but prefer using the concept of tolerance, as a more “positive” approach (Honkasalo, Souto & Suurpää 2007, Kivijärvi, Harinen 2008). For many young people with minority background, negative attitudes and different mechanisms of exclusion leave only limited access to different activities (Keskisalo & Perho 2001, Rastas 2007), but many professionals working with young people seem to be surprisingly reluctant to or ill-equipped in even recognizing racism as an existing phenomenon.



## THE YOUTH DEPARTMENT OF CITY OF HELSINKI: SOME POSITIVE TRENDS

Helsinki and other big cities are in a very different situation if compared with small municipalities in Finland, as they have a strong administrative level, which means more resources in terms of strategic planning, coordination, training and other aspects related to advancing intercultural openness. The empirical analysis is restricted to Helsinki due to time and other resources, and this restriction does not suggest youth work in Helsinki being the most advanced in terms of intercultural openness in Finland, but good practices in advancing intercultural openness are most probably being developed in other parts of Finland as well. However, as the capital, Helsinki has a relatively big percentage of immigrant population<sup>4</sup> and alongside with that, rather strong tradition in acknowledging multicultural issues in youth work. Policies of intercultural opening can therefore be considered relatively advanced, if compared with many other municipalities in Finland.

The youth work in Helsinki is administered by the Youth Department of the City of Helsinki, a rather strong body with altogether 400 employees (youth workers in the field included) and 54 youth houses. The Youth Department has two full-time and one part-time employees with the special task of administrating and coordinating the issues related to intercultural opening. The Youth Department has recently prepared a new program for advancing multiculturalism in its field, with mainstreaming as its base line. According to the program, all youth services should be assessed and developed with the viewpoints of equality and multiculturalism in mind. Following the Non-discrimination Act, the need of specialised services and /or positive discrimination is also acknowledged in the programme, in order to guarantee true equality of possibilities to participate. (The Youth Department of the City of Helsinki 2009.)

In the programme, the role of The Youth Department as an organization and a work community is also taken under examination. The Youth Department follows the directions of recruitment of the City of Helsinki, stating its goal to have a percentage of employees with migrant background equalling with their percentage in the population as a whole. The system of apprenticeships, with a quota for people with migrant background, supports this goal. With the system of intercultural mediators, the organization's multicultural know-how is increased and the position of employees with migrant or minority background is strengthened. An intercultural mediator is a trained employee of the Youth Department, who has migrant or minority background and who acts as an informant concerning his/her cultural background(s) and mediates between representatives of Finnish and his/her culture. Intercultural mediators are utilized in situations that require sensitivity and information on different cultures and backgrounds, usually at the youth houses. Mediating may be consultative or conflict-solving and primarily it is preventive by nature. Developing the system of intercultural mediators was from the start done on the initiative of and in cooperation with employees with minority background. The system aims at spreading the expertise of the employees with minority background to broader scope, giving them an opportunity to develop themselves as employees and giving them recognition as significant experts of their work communities and the Youth Department. It also seeks to develop the Youth Department into a flexible and multicultural organization. Special attention is paid to the well-being of intercultural mediators at work by training and supporting them and making sure they do not need to work alone in the challenging situations. (The Youth Department of the City of Helsinki 2009.)

Alongside with releasing the updated programme for advancing multiculturalism, special attention will be paid in training the youth workers and other employees to be familiar with it. The

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<sup>4</sup> The share of foreign-speaking population in Helsinki is approximately 9,9 % (The Youth Department of Helsinki 2009).



programme brings up the need for advancing local level working communities' multicultural competence by giving training in culture-related issues, recognizing and dealing with one's own feelings and attitudes, working as a part of a multicultural community and recognizing and intervening in racist or prejudiced behaviour of Finnish young people. Job-shadowing at the various youth houses in Helsinki is also offered as an additional means for youth workers to develop his/her expertise in youth work. It means that a youth worker attends to the everyday work of another work community for a week and observes the environment and work methods used there. One of the themes of job-shadowing is multiculturalism, with a special attention on observing what multiculturalism means and how it is approached in the observed work community. (The Youth Department of City of Helsinki 2009.)



## 4 GLIMPSES ON THE MULTICULTURAL YOUTH WORK: THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

### 4.1 Defining the target group for the project “Moving Societies?”

The target group in Finland is young immigrants and young immigrant descendants approximately 12–18 years of age. The age scale is determined by the age of young people attending to activities of municipal youth work – the youth house activities are addressed to young people under the age of 18. (In targeted youth work the age scale may be wider and cover also young adults up to 29 years of age.) Following the definitions of the projects’ target group, the young people are third country nationals or their descendants, although young people who have attained Finnish citizenship are not excluded.

### 4.2 Conducting the interviews – participants

In order to gain different insights on youth work activities, group and individual interviews with youth work practitioners, young visitors with migrant background at the youth houses and representatives of migrant organizations working with young people were conducted. Additional interviews with different experts on the field of youth work and youth activities provided also important background information (see appendix on the interviewed experts).

The interviews with youth work practitioners covered one group interview with four youth workers and two individual interviews<sup>5</sup>. All of the interviewees were doing practical youth work with young people; they represented three different youth houses and one multicultural meeting point in Helsinki. All participants worked at youth houses that had visitors with migrant and multicultural backgrounds<sup>6</sup>. All but one of the interviewees had finished the studies on the field of youth work; they had from three to nine years of working history in the field of youth work. Gender distribution of the participants was somewhat biased, as five of the interviewees were male and only one female, although majority of the youth workers are women. Three of the interviewees were with migrant background themselves, three were of Finnish origin; the share of interviewees with migrant background thus was high if compared with their share of employees of the Youth Department of the City of Helsinki in general.

The interviews of young people were conducted at two different youth houses in Helsinki. The interviews with young people were conducted in pairs, as it was considered a way to guarantee every participant the chance to freely express his or her opinions (if compared with a bigger group inter-

5 As the data gathering took place in the late spring 2009 and the youth houses in general close their doors during the summer, organizing group interviews with youth workers was considered rather challenging. Therefore two individual interviews were done, as they were easier to organize.

6 The visitors of the multicultural meeting point were almost exclusively with migrant or multicultural backgrounds. At the youth houses, the participants estimated the share of visitors with migrant or multicultural background varying from 20 per cent to 35 per cent.



view). The participants were from 14 to 18 years old and they were with Gambian (1), Albanian (1) and Somali (4) backgrounds. One of them was born in Finland, the others had lived in Finland from 8 to 17 years. As majority of the youth house visitors tend to be male, only one of the interviewees was girl, five were boys. All except one of the interviewees reported they visited at the youth house or some youth house several times in a week; they can therefore be considered as active users of youth services. The interviews with the young people were considered rather challenging. As the participants were recruited during their leisure time activities, quite some of the visitors were keener in hanging out with their friends than attending to an interview. There were also signs of being tired of questions and researchers: among the replies to the request for an interview were “*I have attended this research already*”, “*I am not a multicultural youth*” and “*I have been interrogated so much*”. Additional challenge was that the young interviewees were not too familiar with concepts of multiculturalism or intercultural openness/opening, and although the concepts were tried to open and explain, it was not always the case that conversations kept on track of the topic (see also Honkasalo, Harinen & Anttila 2007).

The immigrant representatives were employees, active members and leader figures of the following organizations:

**Alliance ry**, one of the biggest organizations working with Russian-speaking young people; activities include Russian-language gatherings, trainings, conferences, festivals, summer camps etc. The interview was conducted with the presence of the executive director of the organization, one active member and the secretary, who also acted as an interpreter.

**AEY, Afro-European Youth ry**, organizes activities for young people with heterogeneous African backgrounds in order to support young people in preserving their culture of origin and in integrating into the Finnish society. The interview was conducted with the presence of three active members of the organization.

**Kanava nuoret ry**, a well-established organization working mostly with young people of Somali origin and their families. The activities range from open activities to camps and targeted activities for vulnerable youth. One interview was conducted with the executive director of the organization, one with an active member and group leader of youth groups.

**Kassandra ry**, a multicultural organization providing girls and women of different backgrounds (both Finnish and migrants) with possibilities to express themselves through arts. Kassandra organizes clubs, courses and short and long-term workshops in theatre, dance, visual arts etc. The interviewee was one of the teachers in the performing arts.

While some interviewees knew remarkably well the municipal youth work and were doing close cooperation with it, others were more distant to it. With the migrant representatives, the discussions on youth work and youth leisure time were generally on more general level about challenges of young people with migrant background, when seeking to participate in leisure time activities in the Finnish society. The viewpoints of organization representatives were varied; common denominators were a bit more critical views on youth work activities, stressing the importance of own cultural background and its preservation and a more important role given to immigrant communities, especially families and civic organizations.





## 4.3 Findings

### DEVELOPING THE DIVERSITY OF WORKFORCE AND INTERCULTURAL TRAININGS

The share of employees with migrant and minority background in the youth houses has grown slowly but steadily, and the Youth Department aims at increasing the number to be equivalent to their share in the population by means of apprenticeship contracts, among others. However, the employees with migrant/minority backgrounds are often working with temporary or short-time contracts, which is a problem undermining their position (Honkasalo et al. 2007). The interviewed Finnish youth workers all had one or more colleagues with migrant or minority background, which was considered as a huge advantage: firstly, they considered it increasing their personal intercultural competence as they were able to ask and discuss if something about the particular culture and its habits was unclear for them; secondly, it helped breaking possible prejudiced attitudes among Finnish young people by increasing diversity at the youth house; thirdly, it helped young people with migrant background to “fit in” and gave them a positive role model with minority background and fourthly, it brought in alternative ways to think and work. They hoped that the share of employees with migrant background would further increase in future, because:

*Youth worker [female, Finnish background]:* What I have seen here, during all these years, the influence of [a colleague with migrant background] has been [great] in breaking the prejudices. And the barriers. We should have them [more]. The more we have people of different ages, different genders, different cultures, the better. So that young people could find, those, encounters, in different things.

The representatives of immigrant organizations also considered The Youth Department’s policies in employing more people with immigrant or minority background as highly advantageous for the attempts to attract more visitors with migrant background. Although the presence of a migrant worker at a youth house as such is no guarantee of intercultural opening, it may help by sending a message, that people with diverse backgrounds are accepted and appreciated in the youth house. Having a migrant employee may also help in creating an atmosphere of trust between the youth house and migrant families:

*NGO representative [male, Somali background]:* I remember that, first, immigrant families had, like, a sort of barrier to get into youth houses. They didn’t know what happens there, why people go there in general, is this meant for the Finnish kids of the area, and so forth. [...] And the good strategy of the Youth Department was that they started recruiting a lot of immigrants, like to work at the youth houses. It was, like, an encouraging thing for those families, to see, that a national of their own country is there, or some other multicultural worker. It creates trust, for these families.

The youth workers with migrant background saw that their cultural background might work as an additional tool for their work. Nevertheless, they also knew the flip sides of being minority representatives in work communities: although majority of Finnish youth workers reported to be tolerant, covert racism and prejudiced attitudes still lived among some of them.

*Youth worker [male, Somali background]:* You notice it in working groups, who has prejudices and who doesn’t. Even though they don’t say it aloud. People are not stupid. You can tell about the jokes they tell. [...] But it hurts the young people more than adults. We adults are like this, we don’t care so much, but the next generation...

The same interviewee also thought that attitudes among youth workers influenced the way the young people with migrant background sought their ways to certain youth houses and avoided the others.



The share of visitors with migrant and minority background varies significantly across different youth houses in Helsinki, from close to zero up to almost 50 per cent. While this is partly due to different population structures, people with migrant background being concentrated on certain areas, it is highly possible that the attitude environment at the youth houses has an influence on concentration as well. The young migrants, who were interviewed at two separate youth houses with high share of migrant visitors, reported that atmosphere at these houses was relaxed and tolerant, and that they wouldn't visit there were the youth workers showing signs of prejudiced thinking. However, the young interviewees' experiences applied only to the certain youth houses.

The Youth Department organizes trainings with varying contents and lengths on topic in order to increase awareness on intercultural issues and to root out prejudices and negative attitudes. All the interviewed youth workers had attended at least in some of these and considered them mostly positive and useful, although some questioned the possibilities of learning such a "hands-on" work in special trainings: *"I've been thinking, that, I have learned the most important things about different cultures here in this work, through these young people"* (youth worker, female, Finnish background). Another problem with the trainings was that, since participating in these is voluntary, only those people who are interested in advancing multiculturalism attended them.

*Youth worker [male, Somali background]:* I think [the trainings] are necessary, but, in general, those who apply for them are those who are interested. [laughs] Like, how to get those most prejudiced people with us? You can't make them! [...] I can almost say that I always meet the same people.

The representatives of migrant organizations had different experiences on encounters with Finnish youth workers and other employees of The Youth Department, as all the organizations cooperated with it in some extent. The cooperation with the Youth Department was considered working well in general, and the youth workers being helpful and friendly. They considered however the Finnish youth workers being heterogeneous in their attitudes, some of them being more open and less prejudiced than others. In some cases the organization had even preferred to quit cooperation due to negative attitudes of certain individuals. The tolerant and cooperative attitudes towards migrant organizations' work were thus not a generalized principle, but a quality of certain individuals. The representatives of migrant organizations thus emphasized the need for continuous trainings of the work force of The Youth Department. The anti-racist mind set and capability to work in a multicultural environment was considered a true responsibility of youth workers and the organizations employing them:

*NGO representative [male, Somali background]:* Any employee who works in Helsinki, even though s/he is in the youth house where there are only Finnish people around, or in the area. S/he has to be able to work with other people as well. Like, this, multiculturalism, it is a forceful thing, it's something that cannot be ignored anymore. [...] They do have to be able to work in a multicultural way. Mere naivety is not enough anymore.

## INTERCULTURAL CONTENTS IN THE SUBAREA

When the youth workers were asked about the intercultural opening of youth work, it was the growing number of visitors with migrant background that was the first thing in their minds. The growing amount of people with migrant background in the Finnish society had meant an increase in the share of visitors with different backgrounds at the work places of the interviewees. As often is the case, discussions on intercultural opening therefore easily slipped in the narrow view on intercultural opening of youth work as youth work done with young migrants. When asked, what it meant in practice that





the visitors were with varying ethnic backgrounds, some very concrete issues were brought up, such as communication difficulties and differences in diet. However, for the youth workers, the general principle when working with young people with migrant background was to treat them in the same way as everybody else. They emphasized that young people with migrant/minority background were, after all, “*just same kind of young people like, Finnish young people. Like... [with] the same problems and difficulties, but also the same successes and like this.*” (youth worker, male, Finnish background). In fact, they considered giving special attention or behaving differently as a risk of categorizing the young people or putting them in an unequal position. While categorizing young people may indeed be considered negative, claiming all young people being “the same” may be dangerous and disadvantageous as well, as ignoring the real differences in resources, information, cultural views etc. may result in assimilative practices and additional barriers for migrant young people’s participation. Despite the discourse that emphasized the basic similarities in all young people regardless of ethnic background, in a more “between-the-lines” level, immigrant background was also articulated as a source of vulnerability, resulting in increased need for support, especially if combined with other challenges:

*Youth worker [female, Finnish background]:* With some young people [with migrant background] you can see, that, if they have a family crisis, they need even more... like, they already are immigrants, and then additionally they have family crises. Then they need more help.

Youth workers with migrant background tended to have a more multifaceted view on the special challenges of young migrants that had to be taken into consideration when working. According to them, different ethnic backgrounds did demand consideration and they considered it a responsibility of a youth worker to acknowledge them. However, acknowledging did not mean doing things for the migrant young people or making their path easier.

*Youth worker [male, Afghan background]:* You should take [different ethnic backgrounds] in consideration. If you don’t, then... little by little, the young people don’t have the courage to come to the youth house. They think “ok, I’m not part of that group” [...] It is the responsibility of the youth worker, to give him/her more attention.

In regards to the question whether the differences between the young people should be acknowledged or blot out, the criticism by the representatives of migrant organizations was telling. According to them, despite the Finnish youth workers’ tendency to claim that they treat everybody in the same way, the distinction between the Finnish people and “the others” or “the immigrants” still prevailed. The youth house activities were criticized of working on “the Finnish logics”, therefore also being targeted mainly to Finnish young people.

However, the representatives of organizations generally had relatively positive stance towards municipal youth work and youth house activities. Majority of the interviewees were conscious of municipal youth work being keen to recruit more young people with immigrant background in their activities and thought this was a positive development. Nevertheless, the openness of youth work services was generally reduced in that the access to youth houses or other services was not restricted. Although nobody is prevented to step in the youth house, gaining the actual (social) membership in the house may be more problematic for the young people with migrant background, especially for those who do not master the Finnish language: “*Of course, you are welcome to walk in and, do something, but until certain time, [...] for example, if you’re not so good in Finnish, it starts being... tight.*” (male interviewee with Russian background). Mere access tells little about developing the contents of the activities in the direction that would attract young people with immigrant background that would take into consideration the special needs of the young people with immigrant background and their immediate social networks.



*Interviewer:* What do you think, do [the youth houses] offer good services for young people with immigrant background?

*NGO representative [male, Somali background]:* Well, they do try to. So, I believe, and I know, that all the time they are trying to do, trying to develop it, so that, immigrants would be there with them. But it's a bit difficult, because you should also see... that young immigrants, many young people, they have different culture and different, you know, thoughts. And also, do they offer what the parents want, too? It's another thing. That, of course, the thing about youth houses is that, they are offered with the Finnish tradition.

As a majority of those organizing youth activities are Finns themselves, they do not have the knowledge of alternative ways for organizing activities and even do not understand that someone may have different understanding. Unlike in the interviews with the young migrants and youth workers, the representatives of migrant organizations brought up as an equally important issue with increasing the contacts between migrant and Finnish young people the preserving the culture of origin and its characteristics. As an interviewee with Russian background stated: “[To] *integrate is a better option than just to assimilate*”. In addition, as the excerpt above shows, many representatives of migrant organizations brought up that in the youth house activities it is easily ignored that the role of family is often stronger in the lives of young migrants than it is for the Finnish youth; if the parents do not know what youth work is, or if they do not feel safe letting their children to participate in the activities, the possibilities of their children to participate in youth activities are also limited.

The Finnish youth activities were also criticized of lack of gender sensitivity. A representative of organization working with young people with Somali origin brought up Muslim girls' more sheltered and regulated position in their family that was ignored in the Finnish youth work when, for example, organizing sports activities for girls and boys together:

*NGO representative [male, Somali background]:* In our culture, girls are brought up to be, like, [to be] mothers, and a mother has a central role in the family. On those grounds, we are trying to organize quite a lot of activities to girls. [...] They have their own sports hours, like, in order to offer a form of sports that the parents can approve. [...] Other places cannot organize the same, the activities for Muslim women, so that their parents could approve it. They put everybody in the same place.

In accordance of their wish to treat everybody “in the same way”, regardless of ethnic background, the interviewed youth workers were skeptical towards organizing activities separately for young people with certain ethnic backgrounds, as they interpreted it as a categorizing and unequal. In addition, separated activities were considered as countering the integrative dimension of youth work.

*Youth worker 4 [male, Russian background]:* Well we don't have that. And we explain it by, that we don't want to ca-, at least I don't want to categorize those young people. Then like, adjusting to Finland and to the Finnish society, it doesn't support that. [...] According to my logics, that's like China Town.

*Youth worker2 [male, Finnish background]:* I don't see the idea either, that, if you are a Somali, you have your own club, if you are Estonian, you have your own club. Like, it doesn't advance adjusting to the Finnish society

The youth workers' opinions were backed up by the interviews with young migrants, who did not express wishes of targeted groups, and, when asked explicitly, remained skeptical towards them: “*There wouldn't be any point. Nobody would visit those*” [18-year old boy with Somali background]. However, not all targeted activities were considered categorizing and negative; the groups targeted for girls were considered as a positive means for “*supporting the girls' growth to womanhood*”. Also, if planned and realized carefully, positive experiences in other targeted groups were possible:



*Youth worker [female, Finnish background]:* I was in worker exchange last week in another unit, and they had this, like a group for boys with different ethnic backgrounds. It was really well thought, and they had, as workers, a Finnish man and a Somali man. And that way they got, like, encounters and, broke some preconceptions. Like, I thought it was good.

When speaking about the openness of the youth houses, the interviewees stated that the activities were equally open for all young people, regardless of their ethnic background. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that the visitors almost without exceptions familiarized themselves with the youth house with the help of their friends: stepping in to an unfamiliar youth house with no friends demanded an enormous amount of courage of any young person. In the interviews with young migrants, having friends at the youth house actually appeared as a prerequisite for coming to the youth house for the first time. As creating social contacts and networks takes time it seems likely that especially newly arrived young migrants may lack social resources that would enable and facilitate their access to a youth house. Therefore the openness of youth houses may be considered limited at least at certain level.

The representatives of migrant organizations were more skeptical toward the equal openness of youth houses. Presence of racism and prejudices in the Finnish society was especially strongly stressed by the representatives of Afro European Youth (AEY ry), who brought it up as one of the most important negative phenomenon influencing young people with migrant background in multiple institutions and levels. They brought up that unequal treatment on basis of ethnic background is taking place in schools, in hobbies and in leisure time activities, often initiated by adults of Finnish origin: parents, teachers and other professionals. Even when outright racism is not taking place, the earlier experiences and awareness of the possibility of facing racist attitudes has a negative influence on the participation of the young people with migrant background, as they are always forced to think about and assess this possibility:

*Interviewer:* Do you think it is equally easy for young people with immigrant background to participate [to youth activities], if you compare with, like, Finnish young people?

*NGO representative [male, Somali background]:* No, it's not. Because, like, many young people have to see, whether or not there are foreigners, like, for example, if go play something, it's quite a big challenge just to go straight to a team. [...] When they're 15, 16, they start to look at people, like, that one is slightly racist, and like this. Like, do you have the courage to go?

In the interviews with youth workers, anti-racist educative work with Finnish young people was discussed as well. If and when conflicts between young people occurred, it was the responsibility of the youth workers to intervene in them. The interviewees however emphasized that in general, the young visitors with different backgrounds were getting along well. The strength of the youth work activities is that the youth workers have everyday interaction with the young visitors and they are able to intervene when they observe bullying, bad language usage or other negative activities. According to one of the interviewed youth workers, their role is one of a "side educator":

*Interviewer:* And in what extent you are trying to do, like, to influence these attitudes?

*Youth worker 3 [female, Finnish background]:* All the time. In this everyday life, just by grasping these issues.

*Youth worker 2 [male, Finnish background]:* The same here. Every day, in the everyday life. For both sides.

*Youth worker 3 [female, Finnish]:* It's like, if you think, we are like the educators, just as any parent, it is in the everyday life, there when we sit down and have a talk, or then all the time, on the side when doing something. We are there, a sort of side educators.

One of the clearly positive practices reported by the youth workers and young migrants alike was the "house meetings", regular meetings for discussions between the youth workers and young visitors on youth house rules and planning and developing the youth house activities. The idea of "house



meetings” is to get the young people involved in planning and organizing the youth house activities. According to an interviewed youth worker, this is important, because it makes the rules more meaningful for the young people, and it is easier for them to commit to them.

*Youth worker [male, Afghan background]:* We have our rules, and we have the house meetings, where we have discussed about them, and the young people themselves have decided, like, “if somebody swears two times, s/he have to take a break for 15 minutes”. [...] It is, it’s useful. For one thing, they have the knowledge, they know the rules. Because they have been involved. And secondly, they think, they belong in the house.

The visitors are free to bring up suggestions outside the house meetings as well, but organizing the meetings guarantee that there is a regular time and place for discussions, planning and feed-back that the visitors are aware of. All except one of the young interviewees reported that they attended to the house meetings, at least if they “happened to be around”. The young people also considered as positive opportunities to bring up suggestions and opinions about the activities:

*Interviewer:* Do you think it’s a good thing to organize those [house meetings]?

*Young interviewee [male, 16, Somali background]:* I think it is. They decide everything, like, what you’d like to do, if somebody says let’s cook, then we’ll cook, and like this. [...] On free time, no one cares to say these kinds of things, like... I want this or that. You don’t even come to think about it.

As one of the criticism towards multicultural youth work is that it is typically planned by somebody else than the young people with migrant background (Honkasalo & Souto 2007), it seems that properly working house meetings might be one tool for advancing the possibilities to hearing young migrants’ say as well.

## **VIEWS ON DIVERSITY POLICIES AND STATE-OF-THE-ART OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE POLICIES**

The most important legislative pieces in regards to intercultural opening of youth work are the Youth Act that states multiculturalism as a central value of youth work; the Constitution Law that prohibits discrimination and the Non-discrimination Act that obliges authorities to advance equality in a systematic and focused manner in all their actions. This legislative frame was not too familiar for the interviewees. The representatives of migrant organizations were aware that certain anti-discrimination legislation existed; however, they were not familiar with its contents and remained sceptical towards the implementation of the legislation. Repeated view was that the authorities, whose task it is to put the legislation into action, did not care their responsibility too much, which was why the government and politicians were hoped to be more effective in guaranteeing the implementation of the legislation in practice.

*NGO representative [male, Somali background]:* In Finland, in legislation, I think we have [tools], for that. [...] But, people necessarily don’t know too much about what the legislation says. Like, sometimes, some people call other people with the n-word, and then they say, “this is open to interpretations”. I think this is really embarrassing. [...] For 20 years, we’ve had anti-racist work in Finland. Now we have to have the results. [...] The politicians must intervene in this issue. Like, so much more.

Besides the wider legislative framework, in Helsinki, the municipal youth work is guided by The Youth Department’s own programme for advancing multiculturalism and equality. The programme has been recently thoroughly revised, a lot of effort has been put in this programme and it is extensive and



based on various hearings of migrant organizations and other experts. Two of the interviewed youth workers had been involved in the process of revising the programme, and all the other interviewed youth workers were aware of such programme and certain other strategies of The Youth Department. The contents of the programme can be considered rather extensive and advanced, as it covers the level of principles in youth work, the contents of youth work (for example positive discrimination, anti-racist work, gender sensitivity, cooperation with parents and communities) and the developing of the work force. The interviewed youth workers expressed contentment about The Youth Department having such a programme; its contents were also considered principally being of good quality.

However, the interviewed youth workers remained doubtful about usefulness of such official papers, for two main reasons. Firstly, the Finnish youth workers considered youth work very “hands-on” work; and while being in throes of daily activities, it is not so easy to think about official strategies. They thought that “*the most important learning takes place here, in this work and through these young people*”.

*Youth worker [female, Finnish background]:* Well, the strategy papers come from up there to down here, but the thing is that how much you have time to read them and internalize them, in the midst of all this, that's different.

*Youth worker [male, Finnish background]:* Yeah, and these strategies... I'm starting to feel it's like a swear work, that strategy. Everything has a strategy, and then it's once read through somewhere. [...] In principle, it's good that you have defined goals and measures. But it doesn't go every time like this.

Secondly, an important question of implementation of the program still remained. An interviewed youth worker, with migrant background himself, thought that having programs is positive as such and it is a prerequisite for developing youth work; however, he thought that at least until the moment of the interview, it was too poorly put into action. According to him, the multicultural youth work was too much concentrated on young immigrants and too little concentrated on influencing the attitude environment at the youth houses:

*Youth worker [male, Somali background]:* We have the program, but how it is put into action among the staff, that's a different thing. [...] On the paper, the plan is quite good. It's good. But how do we take it into practice? [...] Many times we have these, mm... downplaying cultures and all. Like, that, “we need to teach these immigrants to adapt into Finland, in the Finnish rules.” But never have they asked what Finnish people need. Never we talk about that. It is a two-way thing.

As a positive response for criticism of this kind, it can be stated that educative actions, anti-racism and attitudes in the working communities are given a central role in the new program of the Youth Department of City of Helsinki.

## HOW YOUNG MIGRANTS PERCEIVE THE INTERCULTURAL OPENING OF THE SUBAREA

By and large, the interviewed young migrants were rather content with both the contents and the degree of intercultural openness of the particular youth houses they visited. In general, the opinions they were willing to bring up remained at a quite concrete level and were not very critical towards the youth house services. They reported they liked the youth houses, especially because they could hang out there with their friends. Having an indoor place for socializing with friends and making new friends thus seemed to be the most important reason for the young interviewees to visit youth houses. Friends and social relations were also the reason the young people had in first place decided to step in to a youth house: most commonly they had a friend or friends who already were familiar





with youth house activities, who they could join when first coming to visit the youth house. After familiarizing oneself with the youth house and people visiting there, the young people reported making new friendships, which motivated them to continue visiting there.

*MP:* How you come to find this [youth house]?

*Young interviewee [female, 14, Gambian background]:* Through my friends. These who had been [here] earlier.

*MP:* And then, like, why did you start coming here again?

*YI:* Well my friends come here, that's why. And then you get to know new people here, so...

Therefore it was not so much the efforts of the Youth Department or youth houses themselves that initiated and encouraged young people to visit the youth houses, but the networks of the young people themselves. That the youth houses are a place for socializing is hardly surprising, but the fact that young people seldom enter the services without a friend means also that they need to have certain amount of pre-existing social resources and networks, which at least newly arrived immigrant easily lack. While being also a place for making new contacts, the existing friends at the youth house also had influence on how it was possible to make new friends in the youth house activities.

*MP:* Do you get to know people easily here?

*Young interviewee [male, 16, Somali background]:* Well yeah, easier than... here it is quite good.

*MP:* Like, easier than elsewhere or...?

*YI:* Well... I don't know, in my case it has been like that, but... it is... Yes, it's easy here, if you have a friend and he knows [the people in the youth house], then, it's pretty easy to get to know everybody.

In both youth houses, where I interviewed young people, a relatively high share of visitors was with migrant or other multicultural background. All the interviewees considered this as a positive thing. Diversity was considered positive as such, but it also helped the young people with migrant background to "fit in". As a 16-year old boy with a Somali background expressed it: "*Yeah, I think it's a great thing. Like, you don't need to feel yourself as an outsider. Or anything like.*" The young interviewees also reported that social relations and friendships were created and maintained over ethnic boundaries as well, the youth house was a place to socialize with young people with diverse backgrounds. The relatively high share of migrant and minority visitors tell about these particular youth houses having succeeded in creating an atmosphere that is, at very least, not hostile towards those with different backgrounds. The young interviewees did not report any racist or prejudiced attitudes or actions at the youth house and explained the relatively tolerant atmosphere by the high share of visitors with migrant background: "*So many foreigners visit here, that nobody bothers to start something like that.*" (a boy, 16, with Somali background). A non-discriminatory atmosphere was considered also a prerequisite for the young visitors to visit the place.

Although important, spending time and socializing were not the sole purposes of visiting youth houses. Youth house activities were also considered to be more positive or constructive than some other forms of youth leisure time, such as hanging out in the streets. An 18-year old interviewee with a Somali background points out the controlling element of youth work, preventing them from "doing stupidities":

*MP:* Why you are visiting here?

*Young interviewee [male, 18, Somali background]:* Well, if we weren't, we'd probably be outside right now, boozing every Friday. We'd do everything, I think... the list of crimes would be longer than this. Many are still like that. [...] That is the reason these things are organized, that young people wouldn't be... behind the crimes. Or in front of them, let's say. We are behind of them.



Although the young people's own social relationships were strongly emphasized, when discussing about what makes a good youth house, the youth workers were also given quite an important role. Youth workers were played a part in creating and maintaining the relaxed atmosphere – they also had special role if and when conflicts occurred. Among qualities of a good youth worker were mentioned “being laid-back but not too laid-back”, understanding humor, attentiveness and versatility. The youth workers of the two youth houses got good grades – also other youth workers on the same area were named.

The young interviewees knew the youth services quite well: they often named many other youth houses on the area and the majority of them also knew about other activities provided by the Youth Department, especially the festivals and special events. Generally however, the young interviewees were regularly visiting only one youth house, the one that was familiar to them and where their friends also visited. Although they did know about events and other activities, they did not necessarily visit them. An 18-year-old boy with a Somali background reported that he did not feel like going except if somebody specifically asked him:

Well I haven't visited those places, but, if somebody asked me I would go. But, I don't, like, that I hear about something and run there straight away. I do not visit such places that much. If nobody asks me, like other young people or the workers, but in other case, I hardly go.

The youth house can be considered as a place the young people visit because it is familiar, safe and they feel they belong there, and its positive qualities are not that much about the environment but the atmosphere. Although the young people know about other possibilities for leisure time activities, they prefer to stick to the one youth house familiar to them, instead of changing place according to interesting activities. It is a positive thing that a youth house can provide an environment where young people feel safe and comfortable in their everyday life. However, in order to widen their circles to other environments as well, the young people need not only information but also encouragement.

## **“INTEGRATIVE ROLE” OF THE SUBAREA AND EFFECTS ONTO SOCIETY AS A WHOLE**

The integrative role of youth work in the Finnish society is based on its possibilities to offer places, spaces and activities that bring together young people with different backgrounds, increase the contacts and enable friendships between them. As youth work includes, or should include, an educative dimension, it also offers possibilities for influencing the attitudes among the Finnish young people by everyday interventions and discussions, therefore ideally contributing to developing the Finnish society to be more open, tolerant and anti-racist. However, in case proper tools for mainstreaming the ideas of intercultural opening in youth work are not found and put to use, this potential may remain largely latent.

The socializing function of youth work was especially important for the young people visiting the youth houses (see the subchapter before), but it was also brought up by the interviewed youth workers. Besides having value as such, enabling and widening social networks of young people and finding like-minded peers give them a sense of belonging, a sense of meaningful activities and resources in form of information.

*Youth worker [male, Somali background]:* The more we get young people to use services, or we give the information for them, the better. Because lack of networks is one problem. [...] But my goal here is to, like, well, that they would find a friend with similar interests. Similar goals, so that they can support each other, peer support and all these.



The representatives of migrant organizations also emphasized the positive influences of friendships across ethnic boundaries. The young people were considered learning best from each other; the task of adults was to make sure that their interests were channeled in positive directions.

*NGO representative [male, Somali background]:* Those kinds of activities where young people automatically accept each other. They automatically learn a lot from each other. So, they create interaction, a dialogue. And after that, approving, friendships. And we need to support these circles of friends that have different nationalities. Only thing is that, they need help, if they are on the wrong side, they only need to be straightened. [...] It is an ideal situation, when you see different people, doing things together.

According to the interviewed youth workers, their task was to act as responsible and safe adults, who enabled the contacts between the young visitors. If there was a young person, who lacked friendship networks or was insecure, it was the youth workers who were able to support them, to encourage them in finding their place in the social circles of the youth house. The ultimate goal was, nevertheless, to get the young individuals to find their own (peer) networks:

*Youth worker [male, Finnish background]:* Like, those things help so much the integration, that s/he finds one safe person, close to whom they can walk for the first half a year, or something. Before they have the courage like, really, set out.

However, what is interesting is that the interviewed youth workers largely lacked means for advancing contacts between young people with different backgrounds; it was considered that these contacts should come “in a natural way” and that they were not to be “forced”. Here the voluntary nature of youth work activities became clearly visible, as the youth workers thought that at the youth house, the young visitors should be able to choose their company, because it was their free time. The situation was considered being different in schools, where the young people necessarily came into contact with other young people with different backgrounds. Consequently, the youth workers did not assume the responsibility to advancing multiple social contacts, but actually it was left for schools.

*Youth worker [male, Somali background]:* I think it's important [to get people with different backgrounds together]. But it needs to be natural. Like, we cannot force them. It needs to be natural, and I think it's going to be through school, like that. In the school, they become friends and then they come here.

Leaving the responsibility to advance contacts across ethnic borders to schools is problematic. The contacts are not necessarily developed there and even if they are, there is no guarantee for them to continuing at the youth house. According to Perho and Keskisalo (2001) youth houses are also places of exclusions and hierarchies. In their study on multicultural youth work, Honkasalo and her colleagues (2007, 51–52) found functionality, “doing thing together” and perseverance of youth workers to be among the best tools for advancing friendships across ethnic boundaries.

Besides encouraging and enabling the contacts between the young people, another task of youth work, also having integrative effects was to act as an extra network to ensure the well-being of young people. Were the young people having problems in the school or with their families, the familiar youth workers had the chance to offer their help. If the young people lacked information on services or support provided by the society, they were also able to guide in finding the right place to seek for help. However, it was emphasized that also giving and getting help was taking place only on the terms of young people in need: as youth work is based on voluntariness, also support and help may be offered only if the receiver is willing to receive them.





## 5 SHORT CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CRITERIA FOR INTERCULTURAL OPENING OF THE YOUTH WORK

The interview data suggests that while there are attempts to develop youth work to be more inter-culturally open sphere, many challenges and draw-backs still remain. The relative contentment of young migrants with the youth work services tell that they have sought their ways to those places that have succeeded in developing their activities and atmosphere in a more tolerant, open and multicultural direction. Especially involving young people themselves in decision-making in youth house activities may enhance the possibilities to develop the activities according to special needs of young migrants. However, Finnishness seems to remain at the core of youth work activities and the supposed equality of the service rests on “treating everybody in the same way” rather than recognizing the different needs and resources. Additionally, working for intercultural opening seems to rest on shoulders of some rather than all, which brings sporadicity in the work. The idea of intercultural opening yet needs to be mainstreamed at all levels of youth work, and competences of youth workers in advancing anti-racism, positive dialogue and social contacts between different young people should be guaranteed. More extensive cooperation especially with immigrant communities (families and organizations) would be highly beneficial.

Suggestions for criteria for “good practices” in developing intercultural openness in youth work:

- Recruiting more employees with migrant/minority background (additional means positive discrimination, apprenticeships) and securing their position as equal employees.
- The system of cultural interpreters as a means for supporting work communities in multicultural work, enhancing their intercultural know-how and strengthening the position of employees with migrant/minority background.
- Continuous training of the work force that needs to be motivating and “hands-on” enough. Finding ways to train also those people who do not consider advancing intercultural opening as their main interest. Trainings should give youth workers tools for assessing their own attitudes, recognizing and intervening racism among young people and developing their working methods to be culturally sensitive. Trainings should be extended to the employees of administrative level as well.
- Enhancing vertical communication inside the organization: knowledge on legislative framework, strategies and their implementation in practice should be properly communicated to the field – employees on the field should be offered opportunities for participating discussions, strategy-making etc. communication on the administrative level. Enhancing horizontal communication inside the organization: exchange of experiences of good practices between different units. Enhancing communication with the cross-professional field working with young people.
- Maintaining and developing practices and structures that encourage young people to participate in planning and decision-making of youth work activities. Creating an anti-racist and open atmosphere in order to enable open discussions about cultures, differences, prejudices and racism.



- Increasing cooperation with families and immigrant organizations in order to build trust and increase knowledge on youth work inside immigrant communities to ensure the possibilities of participation of young people with migrant background.
- Finding effective ways to spread information youth work activities (in several languages) and reaching out to encourage the participation of the young people who do not have social contacts to youth houses.



## 6 CASE STUDY: YOUTH HOUSE ACTIVITIES AT THE YOUTH DEPARTMENT OF THE CITY OF HELSINKI

As the national report and the first interview round hinted that there has been some positive developments taking place in the youth work practices regarding to intercultural opening in the Helsinki region, a closer look at these services was taken in the case study. In order to delimit the broad field, the youth house activities organized by The Youth Department of the City of Helsinki were chosen to be the target of observations. This is, however, not to say that other actors on the field in the Helsinki region are not developing practices for intercultural opening, but a necessary decision for research purposes.

The Youth Department of the City of Helsinki is the municipal, administrative body responsible for coordinating and organizing youth activities in Helsinki. It currently has approximately 400 employees and 54 youth houses. In the Finnish context, Helsinki has a longer tradition in acknowledging intercultural issues in youth work than most of the other municipalities, due to its position as a capital city that has attracted a relatively big percent of the migrant population. As a youth worker put it: *“Helsinki is so much ahead of the other parts of Finland. But of course it would be alarming if it wasn’t.”*

The case study is concentrated on the youth house activities organized by The Youth Department of the City of Helsinki. Observations have been carried out at four youth houses and young people and youth workers with different responsibilities at these houses participated in informal interviews (see appendix on more detailed information). Multi-sited observations were considered reasonable, as youth work activities are highly dispersed. In order to gain understanding on organizing and developing youth work at more general level, and cooperation at different levels, participant observation was also done in a national meeting for professionals doing youth work. Discussions with the coordinator of the multicultural issues at The Youth Department have also served as information on the big picture. Written material, such as the multicultural programme for The Youth Department, presentations on projects developing workforce and outputs of the above-mentioned meeting supplements the observation data by illustrating the strategic developments taking place at The Youth Department.

### 6.1 Strategic work

In 2009, The Youth Department produced a renewed *“Multicultural Programme for The Youth Department of City of Helsinki 2009–2012”*, which is a strategic tool for assessing and developing practices advancing intercultural opening in the services provided by the department. The programme can be considered extensive and various directions have been involved in the process of preparing it, such as the personnel of The Youth Department, migrant and youth organizations, different governmental bodies and authorities and researchers. During the autumn 2009 and spring 2010, a lot of effort is put also in communicating the contents of the programme to the level of youth workers by giving training on it in each unit.

The Programme deals with issues of intercultural opening at multiple levels: in workforce, in youth house activities and at the levels of attitudes (of both youth workers and young visitors). The need to mainstream the thoughts of intercultural opening is its central message. It promotes cultural sensitivity as an all-encompassing principle, but also offers concrete tools for advancing it. A group



for multiculturalism (at the administrative level) is responsible for conducting and evaluating the measures stated in The Programme and preparing yearly a plan for the measures, their execution and budgeting.

## 6.2 Youth house activities: general points on intercultural contents

When doing multicultural youth work, the youth workers need to create an open atmosphere for positive interaction over (ethnic and cultural) borders and be sensitive for the individual needs of each visitor; a young people with migrant/minority background may demand more attention or encouragement. Observations at the youth houses confirmed youth work activities being situational and ever changing. During one evening, a youth house may turn from a sleepy “living room” where only a couple of young people watch television, play or discuss into a hectic meeting place of tens of young people. Changing situations set different demands on the youth workers’ duties as well: while at times, a vast majority of a youth worker’s energy seems to go into simply controlling the situations, during more calm moments, more individual attention and discussions with young visitors are possible. One challenge is, thus, that how the youth workers can, in their daily reality with tens of young visitors, both take care of the group as a whole and be attentive to individuals and their special needs. For an outsider, the concrete work of a youth worker may look simply sitting on a couch or playing ping pong. However, as more than one youth worker pointed out, there is a deeper idea behind these seemingly simple things: doing ordinary things, being actively present for the young visitors is important in communicating that the young people and their well-being matter, that the youth worker, as a reliable adult, is available if and when any of the young individuals need support, help or company. Playing ping pong (as an example) is a *tool* for giving a young visitor a moment of more individualized attention: through shared activities a youth worker can create more relaxed and confidential bond with the young visitor, which is a prerequisite for deeper discussions and guidance. According to the observations, also during the busy moments, the youth workers tried to give the young visitors short moments of more individualized attention; if nothing more, at least asking how is it going or how was school today. This way they communicate to the young people that they are not overlooked as individuals, that they matter.

As thinking about the official guidelines and strategies may be challenging in the midst of the hectic everyday life of the youth houses, it is especially important the each youth worker had internalized the principle of intercultural opening and they were advanced systematically in all the activities and communication. Giving training in recognizing and developing one’s own attitudes is therefore one of the crucial prerequisites for intercultural opening. It is also of great importance that the youth workers systematically intervene if racist language, symbols (that are common in certain subcultures) or acts are met at a youth house. Anti-racism and tolerance should be generalized principles at the youth house activities and advancing them also among the Finnish visitors is the responsibility of the youth worker.

Youth worker is working in the intersection of enabling independent activities of the young people and educating and guiding them in a focused manner. One of the youth workers argued that his work had changed, during his career, all the time away from simply enabling the activities towards more conscious educational purposes, which he thought was positive. Educational approach is crucial when working with multicultural group, as it is the only way to unravel and question prejudiced or racist attitudes among the young people and to build anti-racist and open atmosphere. If youth house activities are based only on the independent activities of the young people, they face the risk



of the visitors forming exclusive in-side groups (according to ethnicity or some other difference). Organized activities aiming at the young people learning to communicate and cooperate with each other may be highly useful here. Encouraging positive solidarity and cooperation is especially important in the autumns, when the group of visitors at the youth houses is taking its shape (as the visitors in general remain a somewhat stable group throughout the year). One example of promoting cooperative attitudes even before the young people entered the youth house was youth workers visiting at the nearby schools in the autumns, leading practices on cooperating and group work, spreading information on youth house activities and inviting new people to join.

### 6.3 Targeted activities: promoting equality

Adopting culturally sensitive attitude that respects other ways of doing and thinking about youth work is one of the central challenges and prerequisites for developing the youth house activities to be more open interculturally. A youth worker, when discussing about headscarves of the young girls, pointed out that to think it was the task of youth work activities to “liberate” the girls from such “oppressive” cultural practices was totally wrong: youth work cannot be about imposing the “right” cultural ideas but respecting difference. Respecting difference means also respecting that the young people have different needs and interests. While for some, open youth house activities are all they want, others may need activities in a smaller group or some form of special attention. The need and purpose of targeted activities are currently much discussed in the field of youth work and this was also the theme in the national meeting for professionals of multicultural youth work in autumn 2009.

Cultural sensitivity goes hand in hand with gender sensitivity. Many issues of intercultural opening and multiculturalism also touch upon gender issues, since cultural and religious views on appropriate ways to spend leisure time vary. A youth worker put the interconnectedness of cultural and gender sensitivity as “*they are the two sides of the same thing*”. Gender sensitivity is about acknowledging and respecting difference and different needs and interests of girls and boys and responding to them. Most of the gender sensitive work has thus far been targeted to girls, which is partly because of the traditional, supposed gender neutrality of the youth houses has resulted in the youth houses being more open to the boys and responding better to the needs of boys. In the context of intercultural opening, the special position and possibilities for participation of girls with migrant background (especially Muslim) have been brought up as a central issue.

Gender sensitivity may mean acknowledging different needs of girls and boys in the open activities; it may also mean organizing groups or activities targeted only to girls and boys, according to the needs and wishes of the young visitors. At one youth house, a youth worker with Somali origin organized a club for girls with Somali origin. The club met once a week and its activities varied from handicrafts and baking to indoor climbing and excursions to the movies and bowling. The activities were planned by the girls and organized by the youth worker. What was crucial in this case was the cooperation with the girls’ parents. The youth worker reported she had worked hard in order to give correct information on youth house activities to the parents and to gain their trust. The trust relationship was the prerequisite for the girls to participate, as the parents needed to be sure the girls were “in good hands” and were not, for example, socializing with boys. At another youth house, a group for boys (with both migrant and Finnish backgrounds) was meeting regularly. The underlying idea of the group was that through shared activities, the (male) workers group gained the boys’ trust and this way the possibility to guide and support them. One of the youth houses in Helsinki is also a ‘Girls’ House’ (Tyttöjen talo), meaning it is for girls only. It is a youth house working as cooperation of The Youth Department and two NGOs and it is based on the idea of offering girls and young women a safe place that is easy to access to spend time and get support. Multiculturalism



has been one of the central values of the Girls' House from the very beginning and at the moment, a notable share of its visitors are girls with migrant background.

Targeted activities are one answer to the different needs of different young people. Organizing such activities does not undermine the importance of open activities targeted to all young people, as they are bring together the different young people. Open and targeted activities should not be considered competing but complementing each other.

## 6.4 Cooperation

Youth work activities cannot be thought of as an isolated area. Although an independent administrative branch, youth work has close connections with schools and social work, as well as many non-governmental organizations, as they aim at contributing to comprehensive well-being of young people. The importance of cross-professional cooperation has grown during recent years; it is especially important when working with young people who are considered vulnerable. Special needs of individuals are better acknowledged when professionals have information on possible challenges on other areas of a young individual's life. When considering intercultural opening in youth work activities, comprehensive understanding of young visitors' situations is beneficial both when supporting young people with migrant/minority background and encouraging anti-racism among all young visitors. An example of supportive measures carried out in close cooperation with both social work, school personnel and young people's families was a special group for boys of both Finnish and migrant origin, who were considered being in a way or another 'at risk' (due to problems in school or at home). The group was aimed at supporting their constructive ways to spend leisure time and mastery of their own lives. Extensive cooperation is often done in the sphere of targeted activities; it would be beneficial to adopt these practices more in open activities as well.

When considering enhancing the possibilities of young people with migrant background to participate in the youth activities, the cooperation with the families was brought up as an issue of primary importance. Youth house activities are not necessarily familiar to the parents with migrant background, which may result in them not encouraging their children to join the activities. To guarantee the equal possibilities to participation, creating trust relationship with the families is needed. At its best, youth work activities work alongside with the education given by the parents and their task is not to challenge the (cultural, religious etc.) values of young people's homes. Cooperation with migrant organizations would also help creating contacts with the migrant population, enhance young migrants' equal possibilities to participate in youth activities and enrich the activities themselves.

Youth work services are highly dispersed as the services are tried to keep close to the customers at the local level. Intercultural opening as the organization's learning process would benefit greatly if channels for communication between different units doing youth work are secured. This way good practices can be more effectively advanced. An example of national level cooperation and developing intercultural opening of youth work are the biannual meetings for professionals doing multicultural youth work. The meetings gather together a wide range of people working with young people and interested in multiculturalism; it is open for municipal youth workers and organizations. Under a certain theme (for example targeted vs open activities; mainstreaming), the participants listen to presentations, discuss and do brainstorming in groups. The meeting serves multiple ends: it is a place to share good and bad experiences, compare the development in different parts of Finland and search for and possibly agree on the preferred guidelines for advancing multiculturalism in youth work.





## 6.5 Workforce

In compliance with the strategic guidelines for recruitment and human resources policies for the City of Helsinki, The Youth Department is committed to advancing the diversity of their workforce and its intercultural competence. The Youth Department aims at increasing the number of employees with migrant/minority background to be equivalent to their share in the population. A means for recruiting and training employees with migrant/minority background are apprenticeships, which have annual quota for applicants with migrant/minority background. Their possibilities to participate in language training are guaranteed as a part of normal, work-related and paid training. In all but one youth house observed, there were employees with migrant background among the staff (although sometimes with temporary contracts). When sharing an equal position among staff, they bring invaluable know-how at the working community, and may facilitate creating trust relationships with visitors with migrant background and migrant parents living on the area. However, multicultural work or working with visitors with minority/migrant background should never be thought as the special task of the employee with migrant background but as a normal part of every employee's work.

The Youth Department organizes training in intercultural issues for the workforce: these have addressed the questions of attitudes, multiculturalism in the work community and racism, among others. "Learning by doing" is emphasized in the training of the workforce. Job shadowing started as a pilot in 2008 and was expanded in 2009. Its aim is to provide youth workers with opportunities for assessing critically one's own work and getting new ideas for developing multicultural youth work in own work community by enabling them to see other environments and work methods. The feedback from the pilot suggests that job shadowing may be an effective method for activating workers to contemplate multiculturalism and possibility of different work methods, if instructed properly.

System of intercultural mediators is another example worth mentioning. An intercultural mediator is an employee of The Youth Department, who has migrant or Roma background and who acts as a key person concerning his/her cultural background(s) and mediates between representatives of Finnish culture and representatives of his/her culture. Intercultural mediators are utilized in situations that require cultural sensitivity and information on different cultures and backgrounds. Intercultural mediating can be consultative or conflict-solving. Situations of intercultural mediating may include f ex parents' meetings, planning/starting girl or boy work; (intercultural) conflict situations at youth houses, training work communities. During the observations, positive feedback on intercultural mediators was got from both Finnish youth workers who had utilized their expertise and two mediators themselves.

Developing the system of intercultural mediators was from the start done on the initiative of and in cooperation with employees with migrant/minority background. The system aims at spreading the expertise of the employees with minority background to broader scope, giving them an opportunity to develop themselves as employees and giving them recognition as significant experts of their work communities and the Youth Department. It also seeks to develop the Youth Department into a flexible and multicultural organisation. At the moment there are ten employees working as intercultural mediators in the Youth Department of City of Helsinki, and two more are in training. The system of intercultural mediators was included in Strategy and Action Plan for Multicultural Work 2005–2007. During these years the intercultural mediators were trained and the system got started. In 2007 the system was developed further, and it has been followed up and updated. The system of intercultural mediators and developing it further are included in the new Programme for Multiculturalism (2009–2012).



## 6.7 Conclusions

Although many challenges remain, especially in regard to mainstreaming the ideas, The Youth Department of City of Helsinki is, in the Finnish context, advancing intercultural opening in a rather conscious and extensive manner. Criteria for good practices in advancing intercultural opening in the youth house activities include at least the following:

- Developing intercultural know-how of the workforce: recruiting employees with migrant/minority background and strengthening their position in the working community; continuous training in self-evaluating, cultural sensitivity, gender sensitivity, recognizing and intervening racism.
  - Examples of measures concretely addressing the intercultural opening of workforce: recruiting through apprenticeships, system of intercultural mediators, job shadowing
- Cooperation and communication at multiple levels (horizontal and vertical/cross-professional/ with communities, families and NGOs) in order to secure the flow of information inside the organization, to exchange of experiences with different units and professionals working with young people and to involve communities, migrant organizations and families in discussions on youth work.
- Maintaining and developing practices and structures that encourage young people to participate in planning and decision-making of youth work activities. Creating an anti-racist and open atmosphere in order to enable open discussions about cultures, differences, prejudices and racism. Encouraging communication and friendships across (ethnic) borders. Acknowledging and respecting difference among young people (and adults as well) and responding to different needs by organizing targeted activities according to the needs/interests (f ex for girls and boys).





## 7 FINAL INTERVIEW ROUND

April – May 2010

In the last phase of the project, different politicians, policy-makers, migrant representatives and experts were interviewed in order to check the relevance of the previous study results and to assess the criteria of intercultural opening developed by the project Moving Societies. The developed criteria were introduced<sup>7</sup> to the interviewees and discussed with them. The aim of the last interview round was to get feedback on the earlier work and find possible gaps in the criteria.

In Finland, the five interviewees on the final round were (local) politicians, experts on youth activities (outside The Youth Department) and migrant representatives. Most of them had a sort of double role regarding these categories, as they were, for example, both figures representing migrant population in Finland and local politicians or employees of some administrative body (see the list of interviewees in the end). Three of the interviewees were with migrant background themselves, two were with Finnish origin. Only one of the interviewees was male, while four of them were female. The level of the discussions varied from interview to another, as some of the interviewees were more familiar with youth work services, others spoke about services for young people in general and others were more attached to certain more concrete forms of services (f ex leisure sports activities).

### 7.1 Developing intercultural opening in youth activities

It was brought up by several interviewees that in Finland, the level of intercultural opening in different organizations in general has developed a lot for example within a time period of ten years. Differences in language skills and ethnic backgrounds are better acknowledged and different mechanisms that aim at improving migrants' status in the Finnish society have been developed.

Political actors are responsible for securing the financial means needed for guaranteeing equal access to services for all. An important part of realizing the equality is to invest in intercultural opening of the services. Yet, financial resources are only one prerequisite for this development, as the commitment of the administration and field workers is required as well. Municipalities were also considered carrying a lot of responsibility for guaranteeing that public services (such as youth work) really are equally available for everybody living in the area. They have the possibility to set a good example and also encourage and demand organizations working in the municipality to develop their activities.

In the field of youth work, the challenges of multiculturalism have been acknowledged, they are taken seriously and invested in, also at the level of budgeting, as was brought up by one of the interviewed local politicians. Multiculturalism has been one of the central focuses, especially through resourcing the activities and projects initiated by the young people themselves. The new multicultural programme for the Youth Department grasps many of the criteria gathered by Moving Societies -project, f ex those related to work force, trainings, strategies, intercultural contents and mediation. Involving young clients to participate in planning and decision-making has traditionally been among central themes of youth work. However, much remains to be done, as both attitudes,

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<sup>7</sup> The criteria were sent to the interviewees approximately a week before the interviews. However, not all interviewees had the time or possibility to look through the criteria in advance.



lack of information and basic obstacles, such as language questions, remain to affect negatively the degree of openness of youth activities for young people with migrant backgrounds.

## 7.2 Views on criteria of intercultural opening

All in all, the last interviewees considered the criteria developed by the project as relevant and important. The starting point of the project and the criteria was considered important and the ideas brought up among the criteria were considered positive. Basically all interviewees agreed with the criteria and there were no sector that would have been considered redundant to think about when advancing intercultural opening.

In general, the criteria related to personnel and trainings were considered being among the most relevant by almost all the interviewees. Among the individual criteria, those encouraging the recruitment of employees with migrant or minority background and getting them in diverse positions at all the levels of the organization were emphasized by three of the interviewees, who considered the visibility of employees with migrant/minority background crucial in creating that sent the message of openness and respecting diversity. This visibility also served bringing multiculturalism as a normal part of everyday life of the young people. Training the workforce to be culturally sensitive was considered important by all the interviewees. Especially the continuity in the process of training was emphasized by some. One of the interviewees also brought up that involving young people in the planning and decision-making was often ignored or forgot; he considered especially positive that this had been included in the criteria as well.

The interviewees were the most critical or skeptical towards criteria related to strategic planning and measuring the impact of trainings or other actions. Although no one of the interviewees considered strategies harmful or needless as such, they were too often considered being an end in themselves and having too little impact in the concrete work.

Besides very obvious measurements, such as the number of employees having training, the number of employees with migrant/minority background or the number of visitors with migrant/minority background at youth houses, the interviewees did not have new ideas for measuring intercultural opening. The Youth Department has already set an official goal to increase the number of employees with migrant/minority background at the level that corresponds their share in the population.

Regarding measuring the impact of actions, it was brought up that it might be hard or even impossible to measure the impacts (at least financially) and that demanding such might lead to discouraging certain good activities if they cannot be labeled with a price. Especially phenomenon such as intercultural opening is extremely hard to measure and evaluate, as its impacts may be seen only much later or they cannot be compared to a fictitious situation where certain actions would not have been carried out. Therefore, more important than measuring impacts of trainings or other actions is the processual, continuous and systematic nature of such actions and considering them valuable as such. This was considered an important means to advance mainstreaming of the ideas of intercultural opening.

## 7.3 Hindrances in developing intercultural opening

Two of the interviewees considered the level of attitudes in Finland in general, i.e. the lack of will to develop the intercultural opening, the greatest hindrance for positive development. As one of them put it: “*Are Finnish people emotionally even ready for having an open conversation on these topics? I really do not know.*” Multiculturalism or co-existence of different cultural backgrounds is thus not yet a



natural part of the Finnish society and accordingly, it is possible to bring out rather backward ideas even at relatively high political levels<sup>8</sup>. Lack of information on services remains a central hindrance for integration, especially when young migrants and their parents lack sufficient Finnish skills. Another big hindrance is the lack of knowledge among the Finnish people, all of whom are not aware of different cultures, religions, reasons for immigration and so on.

It was also brought up that advancing intercultural opening demanded economic resources, and although intercultural opening had been an important focus area in resourcing youth work, finding resources for new forms of activities was very hard considering the current economic situation in general.

Additional issue affecting the manner how intercultural opening is advanced, or is it advanced at all, are the competences of the personnel. The interviewees brought up that when doing the same work year after year, the employees easily get routinized and no longer reflect the motives or goals behind their actions. Taking the young clients as individuals and giving them the time and attention they need may also become risked. Training may help against routinization like this; however, it may be challenging to convince the well-experienced employees on their need of training and to influence their work methods and ways of thinking by the means of training.

## 7.4 Other notions and comments

One of the interviewees brought up that the trend of project-based working models with young people, having gained popularity due to the structures of budgeting, is not necessarily positive. Although projects mean well and often do valuable work, they are insufficient in providing comprehensive services for young people because, especially if working with vulnerable groups of young people, it is important to guarantee the continuity of the services. Young people's services should therefore be developed as wholes. Individual attention, enough time and low threshold of access are needed. It is only positive to give space and time for 'stupidities', too: youth is the time for experiments and this should be allowed (in sensible degrees).

It was also brought up that offering training in Finnish language for those employees with migrant background who are not fluent in it would be important way to enhance their position, expertise and professional skills. This would improve also their possibilities to ascend the organizational ladder. Language training should ideally be part of the normal trainings done within the working hours, not an extra work load. So, instead of demanding perfect knowledge in Finnish language, employers could invest in providing language training by themselves.

One of the interviewees brought up that by and large, the needs and vulnerabilities of young people with migrant background were the same as those of Finnish young people. According to her, it would be important to acknowledge, respect and support the heterogeneity and difference among young people in general, not only regarding some aspects. Differences in ethnic background are not the only thing making somebody 'different', but sexual orientation, handicaps etc. are also to be acknowledged.

<sup>8</sup> In Finland, a strengthened trend of hard-edged nationalist discourse, critical towards multiculturalism and immigration (sometimes plainly xenophobic and racist), can be distinguished both in the media and in politics. This discourse was referred to by most of the interviewees. This trend was explained by the tightened economic situation, among other things and was expected to remain temporary.



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- Youth Act 27.1.2006/72.



## Appendix

### *Observation & interview sites in October–November 2009 (case study)*

- National network meeting for professionals doing multicultural youth work, Vaasa 29.–30.10.2009
- Youth house activities: a club for girls of Somali origin, 9.11.2009
- A launching of a study on gender sensitive youth work, at a gender sensitive Girls' House, 17.11.2009
- Youth house activities: open activities at a youth house, 23.11.2009
- Youth house activities: open activities at a youth house, 26.11.2009
- Girls' House (interview of a executive director and a youth worker responsible of multicultural work), 10.12.2009

### *Documents & written material (case study)*

- The website of The Youth Department of City of Helsinki, [www.nuoriso.hel.fi](http://www.nuoriso.hel.fi).
- The Multicultural Programme for the Youth Department of City of Helsinki (2009)
- Outputs of the group work sessions in the national network meeting (30.10.2009)
- “A pronouncement” based on the discussions and group work in the national network meeting (30.10.2009)
- Summary on job shadowing pilot at the Youth Department (unpublished [2008], for the use of the Department)
- Instructions for job shadowing at the Youth Department (unpublished [2008], for the use of the Department)
- Summary on principles and experiences of system of “intercultural mediators” at the Youth Department (unpublished [2008], for the use of the Department)
- Eisher, H. & Tuppurainen, J. (2009): Tyttöjen Talo on kuin avoin koti. (Girls' House Is Like a Open Home). A study on gender sensitive youth work at Girls' Houses. Helsinki: Setlementtinuorten liitto ry.
- Uutta kohti. Pääkaupunkiseudun kaupunkien henkilöstöstrategiahanke 2004–2009. Loppuraportti. (The final report of the project for human resources strategy for cities of metropolitan area 2004–2009.)
- Rasismin ja etnisen syrjinnän ehkäiseminen Helsingin kaupungin toiminnassa (2004). Helsinki: Helsingin kaupunki. (Preventing Racism and Ethnic Discrimination in the Activities of The City of Helsinki.)

### *Interviewees, April 2010 (the final interview round)*

- Zahra Abdulla: politician/migrant representative, female, with Somali background
  - Helsinki City Council
- Mukhtar Abib: administrator/migrant representative, male, with Somali background
  - Social Services Department
- Emma Kari: politician, female, Finnish
  - Helsinki City Council, the chair of The Youth Board
- Päivi Korkea-aho: expert, female, Finnish
  - representative of two organizations working with young migrants
- Zarina Razai: migrant representative/politician, female, with Afghan background
  - chair of Advisory Board on migration and integration





### *Additional informants and observation sites*

- Conversation with the Coordinator of multicultural youth work at the Youth Department of the City of Helsinki, 10.2.2009
- A meeting for multicultural coordinators of cities of Helsinki, Turku and Oulu and Allianssi Youth  
Co-operation, 13.2.2009
- Observations at two youth houses, 4.3.2009, 26.3.2009 and a multicultural meeting point  
25.3.2009
- A study day for students at the course “Multiculturalism and a multicultural civil society” in the University of Applied Sciences (HUMAK), with the theme multicultural youth work in Helsinki.  
25.3.2009
- A national two-day network meeting for professionals doing multicultural youth work. Kuopio  
2.–3.4.2009
- An interview with Executive Director in Kassandra ry (a multicultural organization providing girls and women with possibilities to express themselves through arts), 27.8.2009
- Comments and cooperation with researchers Antti Kivijärvi and Veronika Honkasalo, The Finnish Youth Research Network, throughout the project