The Art of Ethics in Youth Work

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Introduction

This research is conducted in framework of the Erasmus+ project 'The Art of Ethics in Youth Work'[1] supported by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and implemented by the following partner countries and organisations/institutions:

- Australia: Victoria University (Dr Tim Corney)
- Bulgaria: the National Youth Card Association (EYCA Bulgaria)
- Croatia: the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb
- Finland: the Finnish Youth Research Society (FYRN)
- Serbia: the National association of Youth Workers (NAPOR)

This research process builds on the project 'Mapping the educational and carrier paths of youth workers in Europe' (O' Donovan et al. 2017)[2], coordinated by the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership, and relies on the findings of the follow-up analytical paper 'Ethical standards in youth work and how they support the development of education and career pathways of youth workers' (EU-Council of Europe Youth partnership, 2020)[3].

The overall purpose of this research is to inform about further development of the Erasmus+ project 'The Art of Ethics in Youth Work' and support knowledge transfer among the respective partners. Following the recommendation of the above-mentioned mapping project, this review looks into the content and implementation of the existing codes of ethics identified in the selected countries (i.e. Australia, Estonia, and Serbia)[4], in order to see how they support quality development of youth work policy and practice. A particular focus has been put on identifying the ethical frameworks and standards, supporting mechanisms, and types of rela-

1 Erasmus+ project (608842-EPP-1-2019-1-RS-EPPKA2-CBY-ACPALA)

2 https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262526/YWEdu+Mapping+Report-DLJR9WJF.pdf/52339377-1556-2f15-f65b-b15df0aa497c

3 https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261623/Web-PREMS-051920-Education-of-youth-workers-in-Europe.pdf/484a2b36-7784-d953-bfc4-2a34c988e854

4 Note: see methodological framework below to learn about the sample and scope of research.

tions addressed in these codes to facilitate better understanding of different approaches and 'models' applied in these contexts.

Accordingly, the main objectives of this research are the following:

Objective 1: to explore the ethical nature of youth work and elaborate on the role of the ethical codes (standards and frameworks) in supporting quality youth work in the selected countries (Australia, Estonia, and Serbia).

Objective 2: to identify the types of relations addressed and look into how these codes of ethics influence relations of youth work with other practices and professions that work with young people in the selected countries (Australia, Estonia, and Serbia).

Objective 3: to investigate the support systems for the implementation of the ethical codes in the selected countries (Australia, Estonia, and Serbia).

Objective 4: to identify common discussion points that will facilitate knowledge transfer among the partners involved in this project and help drafting a preliminary Europe-wide guidelines for the development of ethical youth work practice and policy.

Furthermore, the research aspires to serve as a starting point for reflection on ethical standards and how they support the development of quality youth work practice and policy in Europe. This resonates with the Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention[5], which demonstrates a lack of quality standards and the recognition and validation of youth work in Europe. Likewise, the European Youth Work Agenda, a strategic framework for strengthening and further developing youth work[6], calls for a Youth Work Research Agenda that implies research on the existing common agreed professional standards for youth workers' education and training (e.g. competence models and frameworks, code of ethics, curriculum, etc.).

The results of this research will be used within and outside the consortium partnership to support the development of ethics in youth work. Within the project, the results will be used to provide an evidence base for creation of the MOOC on Ethics in Youth Work that will target youth workers and youth organisations, as well as for development of educational programs

5 https://www.eywc2020.eu/downloads/doctrine/WebforumVeranstaltungenWebsiteBundle:Media-file-54/3rdEYWC_finalDeclaration.pdf

6 https://www.eywc2020.eu/en/agenda/

(both non-formal and formal) and different trainings and workshops. Outside of the project, this report could be used as an insightful resource for other youth workers and youth workers' associations who are committed to the development of ethics in youth work or want to improve their practice. The collection of practices and approaches presented through case studies can be also an inspiration for countries that want to start shaping the framework for ethics in youth work in specific contexts. Finally, the document can be used for further research in this field in order to showcase the importance of ethics in youth work in Europe.

Methodological framework

Overall methodological approach to this research is qualitative, based on the desk review of secondary data sources, case studies, and semi-structured interviews with key informants from the selected countries (Australia, Estonia, and Serbia). This approach sets the scene for an in-depth investigation of the ethical nature of youth work and up-close examination of particular approaches to ethical codes and practice in these contexts.

Research questions: To meet the aforementioned objectives, four research questions are defined in cooperation with the respective partners involved in this project. These questions are addressed through key informant interviews and case studies (see section 3).

Research question 1: What ethical frameworks and standards (values, principles, rules and policies) are identified in the ethical codes in the selected countries (Australia, Estonia, and Serbia)?

Research question 2: What type of relations (e.g. between young people and youth workers, among the youth work community members, etc.) are considered by the ethical codes and how do they influence the development of quality youth work practice and policy in the selected countries?

Research question 3: What conditions and support mechanisms are in place for the implementation of the ethical codes in the selected countries?

Research question 4: How do the existing ethical codes influence the relations of youth work with other practices and professions that work with young people?

Sample and scope of research: The sample of the countries included in this research relies on the framework of practice architectures (Kiilakoski, 2018a), which includes:

1. The first group of states with strong practice architectures in which the ethical codes for youth work have been identified (i.e. Estonia, France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom (England and Wales)). These countries have legislative definitions and have either competence descriptions or quality-assurance systems for youth work, if not both. They all have public support for non-formal learning and identifiable career paths for youth workers. Formal learning on youth work is available in these countries (half being vocational or tertiary education) and they also have youth work associations. From this group, the case study of Estonia will be further elaborated in this report. Due to the lack of resources available in English, the case study of Finland has not been included in this report[7].

2. The second group of states with strong practice architectures – with room for development on a certain level – in which the ethical codes have been identified (i.e. the Czech Republic, Austria, Iceland, Malta, the Netherlands, and Serbia). These countries have legislative definitions of youth work and a quality-assurance system or competence description (if not both) and usually provide either vocational or higher education for youth work. The case study of Serbia will be presented in the context of this research.

The methodological approach is additionally applied to the ethical codes identified outside Europe (e.g. in Australia and the Commonwealth), according to the analytical paper mentioned earlier.

Limitations and generalisation: Acknowledging limitations of this methodological approach, findings of this report will be used to formulate relevant learning points and provide a platform for knowledge transfer among the respective partners and in the youth sector in Europe.

7 Note: in the case of Finland, the availability of literature and ethical codes in the English language was limited, and therefore, this case study was not involved in this report.

Ethical standards and their role in supporting quality youth work

The desk review provides an insight into the ethical nature youth work and explores the role of ethical codes/standards in supporting quality youth work in Europe and beyond.

As a social practice, youth work has been in the process of development and change, representing a rather heterogeneous family of occupations consisting of different methodologies, addressing different target groups, and supporting the achievement of different policy goals. Nevertheless, youth work is commonly understood as a tool for personal development and the social integration and active citizenship of young people (Council of Europe, 2015:7). The primary function of youth work is to motivate and support young people to find and pursue constructive pathways in life, thus contributing to their personal and social development and to society at large (Council of Europe, 2017: 4).

Considering ethical nature of youth work, the following aspects are worth mentioning:

- As a value-driven social practice, youth work has inherent moral elements, serves the higher purposes of inclusion and social cohesion, and produces actions that have moral, social and political consequences.

- As a relational practice, youth work seeks authentic communication with young people and contributes to sustaining viable communities (Council of Europe, 2015).

As a special type of ethical practice, youth work is defined as 'a professional relationship in which the young person is engaged as the primary client in their social context' (Sercombe, 2010:27). Although this relatively general approach tracks only a small proportion of the existing youth work practices, the definition emphasises a specific type of relationship between youth workers and young people, which is primarily concerned with the quality of the relationship and social characteristics of youth and their communities (Davies, 2016).

In this regard, youth work – as ethical social practice – has a potential to form and transform both the individuals involved in the practice and the contexts in which the practices occur (Kemmis, 2009; Kemmis et al. 2014; Salamon et al. 2016, all in Kiilakoski, 2018a).

Understanding the ethical nature of youth work can further help supporting better recognition by articulating core attributes which differentiate youth work from other disciplines that involve working with young people. Establishing professional Codes of Ethics (Codes of Conduct, Codes of Ethical Practice, etc.) leads to a clearer definition of youth work as a distinct and highly professionalised occupation[8], and an increased distinction of youth work from other occupations. Although there is little evidence that youth work professionalisation guarantees quality youth work practice, these two goals – improving practice and impact and being more visible and recognised in society – need not be contradictory as, e.g. in the case of Finland, where professionalisation improved both the quality of and access to youth work[9].

The overall purpose of ethical standards is to provide a conceptual framework for recognition, reflection and discussion on ethical issues in youth work, and help identifying ethical principles, values, and guidelines for improvement of youth work practice (Banks and Imam, 2000). The standards of ethically 'good practice' tend to be used to cover a variety of measures which refer to:

- how youth workers treat the service users (e.g. with respect, without discrimination);
- the nature of the relationship (e.g. based on trust, confidentiality);
- how the outcomes affect the welfare of the service users (promote self-confidence, do no harm, challenge discrimination, and oppressive behaviour).

The ethical codes may be self-regulatory and voluntarily, or it may be imposed by government or sector-based imperatives. However, codes of ethics are not a guarantee of ethical practice but rather documents open to interpretation. Awareness, debate, guidance and the pursuit of clarity about good practice is essential for the safety and integrity of both youth

8 EU-Council of Europe youth partnership, Youth worker education in Europe (2020:110).

9 EU-Council of Europe youth partnership, Youth worker education in Europe (2020:97).

workers and young people (Quixley and Doostkhah, 2007, in Sercombe, 2010).

Identifying youth work values and principles and applying them to practice are considered to be the essential skills for understanding youth work roles and responsibilities (Sapin, 2012:20). Acknowledging that the ability of youth workers to make appropriate and justifiable ethical judgments is at the heart of youth work practice, youth work requires ethical understanding and a distinctive commitment to ethical behaviour from the youth workers involved. This is expressed in the requirements for the initial education of youth workers, in introducing different occupational standards, benchmarking statements and the aforementioned codes of conduct (Banks and Imam, 2000).

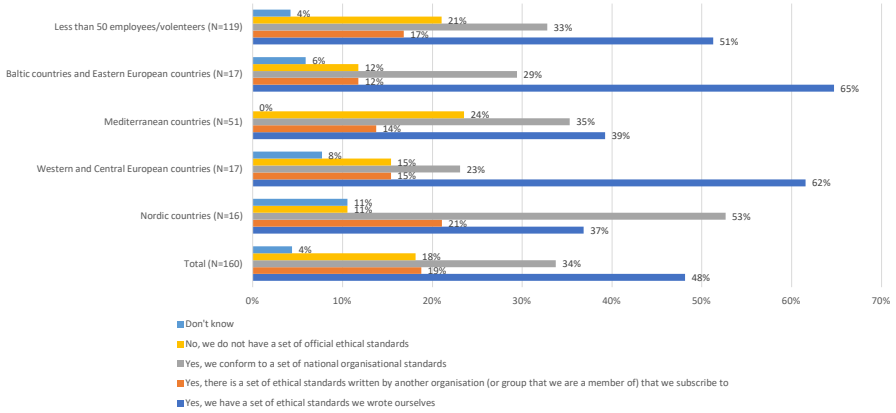
Despite raising pressure on youth work to identify its distinctiveness, to promote its effectiveness and develop sound ethical practices, the importance of ethical codes and behaviour in supporting the development of quality youth work is identified in a relatively limited number of countries included in the research project 'Mapping of education and carrier pathways of youth workers in Europe'[10], including: Estonia, Serbia, and the UK.

However, the study 'Youth Work in the EU' (European Commission DG EAC, ICF, 2020) reveals a bit higher level of awareness about the ethical codes among the representatives of youth organisations working across Europe (see figure 1): three quarters (77%) of survey respondents identified a set of ethical standards, although the most common kind of ethical standards are those imposed internally by the organisation, which exist for just under half of them (48%). An exception is identified in the Nordic countries, where the national ethical standards are more common (53%)[11].

10 https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262526/YWEdu+Mapping+Report-DLJR9WJF.pdf/52339377-1556-2f15-f65b-b15df0aa497c

11 Note: these data are not included in the official version of the final report

Figure 1: Does your organisation have a set of ethical standards in place that you refer to when engaging in youth work?



Besides, the survey respondents felt that the most important theme to be covered by the European Youth Work Agenda[12] should be (among others) raising awareness about the relevance of youth work (42%). The respondents from practice architectures in need of development were ten percentage points more likely to favour the promotion of a shared understanding of youth work and quality tools then the others (European Commission DG EAC, ICF, 2020: 62).

The most frequently mentioned needs of youth workers identified by the same survey include the recognition of youth work referring to recognition of both the standards of youth work and outcomes of youth work. Similarly, the final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (EYWC)[13] emphasises the need for strengthening an evidence-based approach and mechanisms to better showcase the impact of youth work not only on individuals but also on communities and on society. It states that moving towards the better recognition of youth work in Europe requires more investment in strategic and coordinated efforts and resources to make youth work better understood, visible, and credible as a self-standing work arena (EYWC, 2020).

Another significant need identified by the survey respondents is the need to build relationships with the stakeholders across different sectors (40%) and the related needs to network with other youth workers (34%) and to up skill staff (34%) (European Commission DG EAC, ICF, 2020: 38). This is of

12 https://www.eywc2020.eu/en/agenda/

13 https://www.eywc2020.eu/en/convention/final-declaration/

particular relevance, since youth work is based on a community of people engaging in actions whose meanings they negotiate with each other (Wenger, 2008:73, in Kiilakoski, 2018b). Therefore, exploring the relationship among the different members of the youth work community of practice[14] deserves further attention.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that youth work shares similar ethical issues and conflicts with other occupations working within the welfare systems that raise ethical difficulties for both youth workers and policy makers (Banks and Imam, 2000; Sercombe, 2010). On general terms, these issues are linked to the welfare or wellbeing of a young person or youth group and linked to the central youth work values of equity, equality, empowerment, and working ethically across differences and diversity. On a more specific note, these ethical issues and conflicts relate to:

- the context in which youth work is taking place (e.g. ethics and agency policy or youth work and the state);
- the identity and professional development of youth workers (self-determination and negotiation of personal and professional values, interests, and commitments; professional development and self-care);
- the relationship with young people (the ethics of power; professional boundaries and dual relationships; empowerment and dependency in the youth work relationship; taking care and managing risk; confidentiality etc.);
- the relationship with other professions (referral and working across professional disciplines).

To shed more light on the ethical nature of youth work and implementation of codes of ethics in practice, the next chapter will present three case studies and look into the ethical frameworks and standards identified in the selected countries (i.e. Australia, Estonia, and Serbia), exploring how they support quality youth work in these contexts. The support mecha-

14 Communities of practice are defined as a process of social learning when people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time, sharing ideas and strategies, determining solutions and building innovations (EYWC 2020). This concept is recognized in the final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention as a major active and responsible stakeholder in the Bonn process that includes: youth workers and youth leaders, youth work managers, project carriers, accredited, and independent youth work organisations, trainers, researchers, educators of youth workers, local communities and municipalities, National Agencies for Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, youth representations, young people, and policy-makers at all levels of governance.

nisms related to the implementation of the ethical standards will be additionally tacked as well as various types of relationships addressed in these codes of ethics.

Case studies

Case study: Australia and the Commonwealth

The national definition of Youth Work in Australia was established by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), through a participatory process, as follows:

'Youth work is a practice that places young people and their interests first. Youth work is a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their context. Youth work is an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person's independence, participation in society, connectedness and realisation of their rights'. (AYAC, 2013:2)

This definition articulates the core attributes of youth work and differentiates youth work from other disciplines that involve working with young people, and as such, it has been acknowledged by the youth sector as desirable. This is of particular relevance due to a strong sense that youth work is undervalued by the general public, other professionals, funders, and decision makers in Australia, which results in limited support for resourcing and funding. The absence of a shared identity for youth workers, decline of education and training opportunities, and a lack of promotion of the approaches that lay at the heart of youth work and are important in achieving outcomes for young people are the context in which the definition of youth work was established.

Ethical frameworks and standards (values, principles, rules and policies) identified in the ethical codes in Australia and the Commonwealth

'The Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector' issued by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic, 2007, 2008) is a document developed through a participatory process by a body of practitioners to provide an agreed framework and a set of values that define safe, professional, and ethical youth work practice in the Australian State of Victoria.

This Code of Ethical Practice is voluntarily adhered to, but is relevant to all qualified youth workers and to others working with young people who may not have a youth work qualification. To assist with the implementation of the Code, the YACVic has produced supporting documents and provides further resources (such as training and information sessions) to ensure that the Code is widely understood and embraced across the sector.

This Code is clearly based within a human rights framework. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998), ratified by Australia, has particular relevance to youth work practice (i.e. UNCRC Article 3.1). Other United Nations declarations are also of particular relevance to the content of this Code, such as the Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Victorian State government Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities also outlines the human rights that all Victorians can expect to enjoy. The youth workers in the State of Victoria need to have an understanding of these rights and actively work to promote them[15] (Corney, 2014b).

Accordingly, youth workers work to promote, protect, and facilitate the exercise of young peoples' rights, including their legal, civic, economic, social, cultural, political, and human rights. This approach ensures that anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practices are maintained, as it recognises young people as whole human beings with inherent rights that youth workers assist in exercising.

The principles and practice responsibilities outlined in the Code support and guide the work that youth workers do with all young people. The Code offers an opportunity for the sector to articulate the elements of youth work that define why it is so valuable and unique. It describes the principles that drive youth work in improving the lives of young people, as well as the practice responsibilities of youth workers that ensure the highest level of professionalism.

15 For an extensive analysis on the development of the Victorian code, its basis in human rights and its similarities and important differences to the Western Australian code see Corney, T (2014) chapter 1 'The human rights of young people: A catalyst for the professionalisation of youth work through the development of codes of practice'. In Professional Youth Work: An Australian perspective. Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies, Tasmania.

Table 1: A CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE (YACVic) (2007, 2008)

Youth Work Principles	Youth workers will work towards enabling and ensuring: ⦿ empowerment of all young people; ⦿ young people's participation; ⦿ social justice for young people; ⦿ safety of young people; ⦿ respect for young people's human dignity and worth; ⦿ young people's connectedness to important people in their lives, such as family and community; ⦿ positive health and wellbeing outcomes for young people; ⦿ positive transitions and healthy development of young people.

Table 1: A CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE (YACVic) (2007, 2008)

Youth Work Practice Responsibilities

To work ethically with young people, youth workers will adopt the following practice responsibilities.

- recognition of indigenous peoples;
- young people as the primary consideration;
- duty of care;
- privacy and confidentiality;
- boundaries;
- transparency, honesty and integrity;
- social context;
- anti-oppressive practice: non-discrimination, equity, and self-awareness;
- cooperation and collaboration;
- knowledge, skills;
- self-care.

Similarly, across the 54 Commonwealth of Nations, which includes Australia, there is increasing recognition of the importance of considering human rights in the way in which youth work with young people has been conducted and how programs, policies, and procedures have been established and monitored.

The Draft Commonwealth Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers (Corney, 2014)[16] is motivated by the importance of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of young people and those that work with them. The Code seeks to draw attention to particular International Conventions and Com-

16 For a commentary on the relationship between the Commonwealth code and the Victorian code of ethics see Corney, T (2014) chapter 1 'The human rights of young people: A catalyst for the professionalisation of youth work through the development of codes of practice'. In Professional Youth Work: An Australian perspective. Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies, Tasmania.

monwealth member governments' legislation in regard to safe work practices with young people and to document the values and principles that underpin the ethical youth work practice in the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers includes the following draft guiding principles: 'primary consideration; social environment; equity; empowerment; duty of care; corruption; transparency; confidentiality; cooperation/collaboration; knowledge and skills; self-awareness; boundaries; self-care; integrity; ethical awareness; anti-oppressive practice; social justice; and participation'.

Support mechanisms in place for the implementation of the ethical codes in Australia

The Code of Ethical Practice issued by The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic, 2007, 2008) was informed by the Commonwealth of Nations calling for codes of ethics in youth work based in human rights (Corney, 2014b). The Victorian code is considered to be very important according to the empirical data. It has been called for by the states youth and children's commissioner, written by academics and practitioners (Hoiles and Corney, 2007) with the support of Victoria University, and developed with organisational support of the state peak youth affairs body, demonstrating a strong synergy and ownership among the stakeholders (Corney, 2014b). The Code consultation process was supported by the youth sector, while the document was launched by the State government Minister for Youth and the Victorian Child Safety Commissioner. Furthermore, The Code is endorsed by the professional association for youth workers (YWA) and taught within university youth work degree programmes. The main strengths of this Code are the support from the youth sector (and recognition from high level public authorities), while the barriers are mainly linked to national differences between codes across the states, particularly the ethical foundations such as human rights.

One example of the tool supporting the development of ethical youth work policy and practice in Australia is 'Supporting Ethical Youth Work – a guide for using the Code of Ethics for Youth Workers in Western Australia as a tool for ensuring quality youth work', created by the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) and the Western Australian Association of Youth Workers (WAAYW) (2014). This guide provides practical tips and resources in order to help organisations that employ youth workers to put the ideas given in the ethical code into practice. In order to

make the most of the ethical code, the guide highlights various contexts in which ethical standards should be applied.

Table 2: SUPPORTING ETHICAL YOUTH WORK – A GUIDE FOR USING THE CODE OF ETHICS FOR YOUTH WORKERS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA AS A TOOL FOR ENSURING QUALITY YOUTH WORK (YACWA, WAAYW 2014b: 5, 6)

Building awareness of the Code of Ethics	In order to get the greatest benefit from the Code, it is important to build an awareness that the document (and the principles within) exists. It is important to inform not only youth workers (as part of their induction process) but also other stakeholders who have an interest in youth work (including young people, parents, community members, community organisations, relevant government departments and other professionals). Creation and distribution of the youth-friendly version of the Code is also recommended.
Using the code in policies and procedures	The guide recommends that the Code should be referred to when developing organisational policies and procedures and incorporating specific principles embedded in the Code. In addition, the Code should be referred to when working with professionals from other disciplines, when developing memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between organisations, and when introducing the role and purpose of youth work or discussing expectations.

Table 2: SUPPORTING ETHICAL YOUTH WORK – A GUIDE FOR USING THE CODE OF ETHICS FOR YOUTH WORKERS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA AS A TOOL FOR ENSURING QUALITY YOUTH WORK (YACWA, WAAYW 2014b: 5, 6)

Employing ethical youth workers	The Code is useful in helping to attract and recruit a high profile of youth work staff to the organisation through the following activities: advertising youth worker positions; demonstrating knowledge of the Code in job applications; using the Code in youth worker job descriptions; using the Code in job interviews. Each of these gives potential applicants a clear message that the organisation recognises and values the Code, and helps to ensure that youth workers share this commitment. Publicly endorsing the Code also makes clear that the role of youth workers is taken seriously in the organisation, and that youth workers employed in it will be supported to do the best job they can for themselves, the organisation, the young people they work with and for the profession of youth work as a whole.
Supporting ethical youth workers	Once the youth workers have been chosen for the job through the recruitment process, it is important to reinforce the importance of ethical practice in the inception phase of their work, and to continue to support and reinforce this message throughout their engagement with the organisation through on-the-job supporting mechanisms. A guide recommends that this can be done in a number of ways, e.g. by: including the Code as part of the staff induction process; using the Code as a tool for ongoing individual and group supervision sessions; using the Code for staff development during team meetings and events; offering opportunities for staff to attend training in the Code and in issues of ethical practice; providing access to other resources such as self-assessment tools.

Types of relations considered by the ethical codes and how they influence the development of quality youth work practice and policy in Australia

As mentioned earlier, the Code of Ethical Practice developed by The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic, 2007, 2008), is based in a human rights approach and underpinned by government legislation, through the Children, Youth and Families Act (2005) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998). This framework sees the relationship of ethics as universal and applying to all young people and those that work with them. As such, youth workers will work in the best interests of all young people (Corney, 2014b)[17].This provides a clear philosophical and practice distinction between the Victorian code and the Western Australian state code.

Furthermore, the AYAC national definition of Youth Work in Australia clearly places young people and their human rights first. It also clearly defines youth work as a relational practice. The strong, respectful, trust-based relationship between youth workers and young people allows youth workers to do their jobs safely. The working relations between youth worker and young person are paramount to the way in which youth workers achieve positive outcomes for young people. Improving and supporting the relations between young people and those around them (including the relationship with their family and community context, and with society in general), are also a key to achieving the outcomes of youth work.

Youth workers work alongside young people in their context. This means that youth workers recognise the impact of that context (place, culture, family, peer group, community, society) when working. Therefore, youth work must be both mindful of the context and have an impact on this context where appropriate. Whilst recognising young people as the primary constituent, the sphere of intervention of the youth worker may also include work with their families, their communities, school systems, government decisions that affect their constituents, etc. Youth workers work to facilitate the connection of young people to others around them (family, community, peer groups, society).

17 Chapter 1 'The human rights of young people: A catalyst for the professionalisation of youth work through the development of codes of practice'. In Professional Youth Work: An Australian perspective. Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies, Tasmania

Young people are affected by their context, but they also shape that context. Youth work is, therefore, an empowering practice. If a young person is empowered, they can own their identity and pursue the lives they choose. In working alongside young people, the youth work approach ensures that it plays a facilitation role, rather than viewing young people as a passive recipient of services. Youth workers also aim to work with young people to affect their context and this often requires advocacy work to influence and participate in the decisions made by others that can have a significant impact on the lives of young people. Youth workers work to advocate for and facilitate the empowerment, independence, and participation of young people.

The above-mentioned characteristics include not only the dimension of building relationships with young people, but also an important aspect of setting boundaries. According to the Victorian Code, the youth work relationship is strictly professional. Professional boundaries intentionally protect both the young person and the worker. Youth workers will maintain the integrity of these limits. Youth workers will cooperate and collaborate with others, including families, in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people. As an activity or social practice, youth work involves working with participants who have fewer rights than adults, are often vulnerable, lack power, and may be open to manipulation – hence giving scope for their exploitation and harm.

Respecting the limits of the professional role and the reach of power relationships helps to avoid an ethical conflict in practice. While the relationship between a youth worker and a young person is often an important source of personal support for the young, the relationship should be a professional one, intentionally limited to protect both parties. Youth workers should maintain the integrity of these limits, recognising the tensions between developing supportive and caring relationships with young people and the need to preserve the boundaries of professional relationships (YACVic, 2007, 2008).

How do the existing ethical codes influence the relations of youth work with other practices and professions that work with young people in Australia?

In Australia, other professions that work with young people have their own codes of ethics, e.g. teachers, social workers, etc. However, the link of these professional codes and ethical standards for youth work is not yet clear and needs further exploration.

Case study: Estonia

There is a long history of youth work in Estonia, as one of the countries with strong practice architectures (Kiilakoski, 2018a). Youth work is considered it to be an essential part of the youth field which is tightly connected to youth policy[18]. The Youth Work Act in Estonia currently provides a legal basis for the organisation and financing of youth work and defines it as '(...) the creation of conditions to promote the diverse development of young persons, which enable them to be active outside their families, formal education acquired within the adult education system, and work on the basis of their free will.' Although youth workers are not defined in the Youth Work Act, youth work can be studied in three universities in Estonia on different levels – higher applied sciences degree, bachelor's degree, and master's degree. Estonia also has a concept of smart youth work[19].

The quality of youth work is assessed differently in Estonia depending on the mechanism, project, or programme. For example, there are the competencies of youth workers (including the occupational standard), quality assessment model for local municipalities, and financing of hobby education and hobby activities in local municipalities.

Ethical frameworks and standards (values, principles, rules, and policies) identified in the ethical code in Estonia

Occupational ethics in youth work is created in the context of 'Youth Worker Occupational Standard' developed by the Estonian Youth Work Centre (EYWC, 2018, Appendix 4. p 30-31).

Occupational ethics in youth work contains two types of main 'ethical theses': those concerning young people and the main ethical theses concerning the environment of youth work.

18 Source: EACEA Youth Wiki, available at https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/estonia/10-youth-work

19 EACEA Youth Wiki, see more in Chapter 1.2. and Chapter 10.4

Table 3: MAIN ETHICAL THESES CONCERNING THE ENVIRONMENT OF YOUTH WORK

A youth worker is honest and open to exploring the objectives and methods of youth work.	Therefore, in their work a youth worker: ⦿ guarantees that youngsters have access to information that allows them to make conscious choices about participating in youth work activities and in their lives in general; ⦿ conducts activities publicly, explaining and justifying the objectives of youth activities and the choice of methods, and enables young people to give feedback; ⦿ conducts activities transparently and reasonably, understanding the need and duty to report their actions to young people as well as to their parents or guardians, employers, donors, and the general public; ⦿ is not subject to any legal restrictions concerning working with children or young people.

Table 3: MAIN ETHICAL THESES CONCERNING THE ENVIRONMENT OF YOUTH WORK

A youth worker treats youngsters equally and has a respectful and tolerant attitude towards their opinions and world views.

Therefore, in their work a youth worker:

- attempts to understand young people's real situation, its development and influential factors; shows empathy toward youngsters' viewpoints; is tolerant of differences and encourages young people to be tolerant and mutually respectful;
- appreciates all opinions and does not undermine any viewpoints, regardless of the young person's age, gender, nationality, religion, abilities, personal traits or any other circumstances;
- supports and respects young people's right to make independent choices;
- is not active in prohibited or extremist groups and is neutral when communicating with young people;
- treats the youngsters' opinions and positions according to confidentiality principles, only using the information entrusted to them for the purpose of initial exchange of information. Ignoring the confidentiality principle is necessary if the youth worker assesses there to be a clear danger to the young person, other people or society in general.

Table 3: MAIN ETHICAL THESES CONCERNING THE ENVIRONMENT OF YOUTH WORK

A youth worker should follow the principles of equal partnership, youth work and its organisation.	Therefore, in their work a youth worker: ⦿ involves youngsters in decision-making and enables them to cooperate; ⦿ encourages youth entrepreneurship and aims to involve all youngsters, especially those who have fewer opportunities to be active due to reasons concerning their financial status, geographical location, nationality, health or reasons stemming from other circumstances; ⦿ applies the principles of youth work and its organisation and follows the national priorities for youth work.
A youth worker bases their work on the youngsters' opinions, ideas, and world views.	Therefore, in their work a youth worker: ⦿ chooses appropriate work methods and objectives according to young people's situation, interests, and needs; ⦿ dedicates time and attention to getting to know the real situation of youngsters; is up to date on their attitudes and problems, society's tendencies concerning young people, and the regional situation; ⦿ is informed about the dispositions and main problems in European and international youth, youth policies, and youth work.

Table 3: MAIN ETHICAL THESES CONCERNING THE ENVIRONMENT OF YOUTH WORK

The environment in which youth work is conducted is acceptable to the young person and supports non-formal learning.	Therefore, in their work a youth worker: ⦿ conducts youth work in an environment that is acceptable to the young person; ⦿ creates an environment that is accessible and available to the youngster, keeping in mind those who have fewer opportunities to be active due to reasons concerning their financial status, geographical location, nationality, health, or reasons stemming from other circumstances; ⦿ pays attention to activities, including those initiated by young people, that are supposed to allow youngsters to obtain new knowledge, skills and experiences and to learn from them, and creates conditions for acknowledging the process.

Table 3: MAIN ETHICAL THESES CONCERNING THE ENVIRONMENT OF YOUTH WORK

Youth work and its environment should be safe, high-quality, diverse, innovative and aimed at creating new (added) value.

Therefore, in their work a youth worker:

- considers the principles of developing and applying social equality, lifelong learning and a sense of perspective, becoming more knowledgeable and skilful at the same time;
- designs the environment of youth work based on an all-encompassing worldview and sense of responsibility;
- seeks feedback and assessment from participants and co-workers concerning the quality of the activities and constantly updates their knowledge and skills base;
- understands when additional knowledge and skills are needed and looks for training opportunities;
- takes responsibility or only participates in activities for which they have the right to take part and sufficient knowledge and skills;
- actively looks for cooperation opportunities with colleagues and professionals in other fields.

The main ethical theses are followed in the youth work environment. Therefore, in their work a youth worker:

- considers it important that their colleagues and organisation are up to date on and guided by the main ethical theses of youth work;
- pays attention to the activities and policies of colleagues or the organisation and proposes changes if they go against the established theses.

Types of relations considered by the ethical code and how they influence the development of quality youth work practice and policy in Estonia

Although the framework of youth work (e.g. human rights based, as in the case of Australia) has not been explicitly elaborated, there are various values and principles underlying ethical youth work practice, as illustrated above, e.g. transparency, accountability, confidentiality, respect, equality, tolerance, empathy, participation, competence, commitment, responsibility, etc. Furthermore, it is clear that youth workers are encouraged to understand, apply and actively improve/update the existing ethical standards (called 'the main ethical theses of youth work').

The occupational ethics in youth work in Estonia considers a wide range of relations, including:

- young people and youth workers (relationship, the main principles of the work);
- young people and youth workers and the environment youth work is conducted in;
- youth workers and youth workers (collegial issues and responsibility);
- youth workers and the society (acceptance of different world views, avoidance of being part of radical organisations, etc.).

However, young people and the relationship between youth workers and young people are clearly essential for youth work practice and policy in Estonia (as declared in each youth work/youth policy document); although, one can argue to what extent ethical codes influence policy making and vice versa.

According to the empirical data, ethical codes are important and becoming very important in Estonia. This is probably due to the general situation in the society, including hate speech, far-right extremism or political agenda, and, generally, the decrease of care and empathy in the society.

The main barriers for the implementation of ethical codes in Estonia identified by the key respondents are: how to make ethical codes more connected with practice and support reflective discussions on the topic? On the other hand, the main strength is the very existence of the ethical code and that it is rather well known among Estonian youth workers.

The key for overcoming the aforementioned barriers could probably be in encouraging more systematic reflective practice. There are currently joint efforts undertaken by the universities and the Estonian Association of Youth Workers to improve this.

Regarding the quality, ethical considerations are not clearly part of the Estonian youth work quality model (for local governments), so this could be considered as another implementation barrier. However, the main essence indicated above – what the relationship should be and that young people are in the centre of youth work – is evident in the quality model for youth work in Estonia which will be updated in 2021.

Support mechanisms in place for the implementation of the ethical code in Estonia

The main mechanism to support implementation of the ethical code into the youth work practice has for years been the possibility to apply for a certificate of youth worker (in the framework of occupational standard). The certification has been conducted for years by the Estonian Youth Work Centre (part of the Education and Youth Board of Estonia since 1 August 2020). The application for the certificate includes self-assessment (portfolio) and some of the questions are connected to the ethical conduct. There is an interview held with an applicant later and if the process goes well, the person subsequently becomes a certified youth worker. Additionally, in order to become a member of the Estonian Association of Youth Workers, one has to confirm that they approve of the ethical code and practices according to it.

The Estonian Youth Work Centre has been offering training and consultations within the process of certification – during the recent years in partnership with the Estonian Association of Youth Workers, who has undertaken the main role in introducing the ethical code to Estonian youth workers (webinars, posters, articles, case-studies, training). Some of the training is also provided by the Estonian Erasmus+ National Agency (also part of the Education and Youth Board of Estonia since 1 January 2021), related to the 'values and dilemmas of youth work'.

To further support implementation and dissemination, the Estonian Association of Youth Workers has created a poster[20] introducing an annotated and "closer-to-practice" version of the ethical code. The poster is downloadable by every youth worker.

20 https://enk.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/kutse-eetika_A35-1.pdf

The second mechanism to support the implementation of the ethical code into the youth work practice is through formal education of youth workers. Both universities teaching youth work – Tallinn and Tartu University – pay a lot of attention to the topics of professional identity, practice community, ethics, and value-based decision in youth work and reflective practice. Some of the student research has been also conducted on this topic.

How do the existing ethical codes influence relations of youth work with other practices and professions that work with young people in Estonia?

Youth workers in Estonia acknowledge the stakeholders involved in youth work and cooperate with them according to the underlying values of youth work (EYWC, 2018:7). Youth workers' relationship with other sectors starts and maintains because of their mutual interest in a young person's development. Youth workers foster good relationships with young people and co-workers; choose appropriate conduct and forms of expression; successfully communicate with people with different social positions, cultural backgrounds and world views; adequately evaluate their own needs and the needs of others; react adequately to unexpected situations (EYWC, 2018:15). They also keep themselves informed about the developments in youth policies at different levels and implement activities that echo the objectives of youth policies; cooperate with partners in the fields of integrated youth work; participate in shaping youth policies, etc. (EYWC, 2018: 21).

One example that illustrates the closest connection between the ethical codes of conduct between different professions is the teachers' ethical code, and the 'Values Game' which is created for teachers and used by youth workers (currently, the Centre of Ethics at the University of Tartu welcomes youth workers to the trainings where they introduce this game). This experience has opened some discussions on the similarities of the work teachers and youth workers do (and similar principles they use). The Estonian Association of Youth Workers has been discussing with the Centre of Ethics to develop the game for teachers[21] further and to add some practical examples from youth work practice – so far, there is positive readiness from both sides, but there is no funding to support this initiative.

21 https://www.eetikakeskus.ut.ee/en/methodological-tool-values-game-doctors-development

Besides, some of the trainings on children's rights issues have brought together youth workers, social workers, teachers, and the police, but it is not clear to what extent the ethical codes have been discussed there.

Case study: Serbia

Although youth work in Serbia has evolved over the years to a recognised profession[22], this country is classified among those where practice architectures in the field of youth work need additional development – to some extent (Kiilakoski, 2018a). This means that there is the legislative framework for youth work, given in the National Youth Strategy (2015-2025) and the Law on Youth, while a quality-assurance system or competence description has been developed by the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR)[23]. However, there is still a need for improvement of the recognition of youth work and opportunities for either vocational or higher education of youth workers.

Due to the weak legal and policy support to education and career pathways of youth workers in Serbia, the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) developed the Code of Ethics in Youth Work and formed the Council for Ethical Issues (CEI) in order to ensure that youth work practice is ethical and professional. These initiatives represent an important pillar for quality assurance of youth work policy and practice in the country.

Ethical frameworks and standards (values, principles, rules, and policies) identified in the ethical code in Serbia

The Code of Ethics in youth work in Serbia relates primarily to the moral and professional principles that youth workers are obliged to respect and provides the basis for uniformed and standardised principles in working with young people (NAPOR, 2017, p.2-3). The human rights-based ethical framework for youth work is only implicitly mentioned through various principles and values presented in the table below.

22 Besides the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the main body credited for the professionalisation of youth work in Serbia is the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR). Source: EACEA Youth Wiki, https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/serbia/10-youth-work

23 http://www.napor.net/sajt/index.php/sr-yu/

Types of relations considered by the ethical code and how they influence the development of quality youth work practice and policy in Serbia

The Code of Ethics in Serbia defines the following relations:

- between young people and youth workers;
- between parents of youth and youth workers;
- among the youth work community members;
- between institutions and youth workers; and
- between youth workers and wider society.

All these relations need to be professional and bonded by the Code of Ethics, and therefore, youth workers need to ensure that colleagues, employees, and young people are familiar with the ethical principles of youth work (NAPOR, 2017: p4).

Throughout these relations, youth workers are building bigger and clearer insight and trust towards young people, so they feel safe to speak up about their challenges in order to get adequate protection and support. Furthermore, working together with all of the different groups that are in some contact with youth creates space for a better understanding of the ethical practice, its improvement, and discussion on different ethical issues.

Accordingly, the main strengths of the implementation of the Code of Ethics in youth work in Serbia are the recognition of the importance of the ethical issues among youth workers on the local, regional, republic, and international levels; willingness to talk and promote ethical principles; recognition of the practitioners who share good examples of ethical practices; and evaluation of the ethical practice in an organisation as part of the accreditation process. On the other hand, the main barriers are reflected in the lack of institutional recognition of youth work, and therefore, the importance of ethics in youth work; and the lack of projects with an aim to create space for practitioners and organisations to work together and share their practices regarding ethics.

What support mechanisms are in place for implementation of ethical codes in Serbia?

The empirical data show that the ethical code and supporting mechanisms are very important in ensuring the quality of youth work practices and policies in Serbia: to be able to provide real support to young people and respond efficiently to the work related challenges, we need to have a clear vision on ethics and the related issues. Further, we need to establish policies and mechanisms to help us and everyone around in ensuring the quality of youth work[24].

Apart from the Code of Ethics, the National Association of Youth Workers has established the Council for Ethical Issues (CEI) as an independent body in the NAPOR which ensures that the Code of Ethics in youth work is respected and improved. The CEI continuously works on promotion of ethics in youth work, among youth workers, leaders, young people, and their parents in order to ensure ethical practice in youth work in Serbia. In 2015, in accordance with the Statute, the CEI adopted the RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE NAPOR COUNCIL FOR ETHICAL ISSUES.

Article 24 of the Statute (NAPOR, 2015), for instance, states that the Council for Ethical Issues has the responsibility to build communication and partnership with all significant institutions for the protection of children and youth in youth work, and to build sustainable mechanisms for responding to cases of violation of the Code of Ethics and human rights (NAPOR, 2015: 9). Also, Article 26 stipulates that the CEI reserves the right to react in cases of violations of the Code of Ethics and human rights (e.g. in case of unethical practices and unprofessional behaviour), by the Institutions of Public Importance to young people, youth workers, and other institutions in charge of youth issues. In accordance with its competencies, the CEI reacts in the form of issuing recommendations and appeals to the member organisations, or opinions to the organisations which are not members of the NAPOR.

Furthermore, the education and validation programmes for youth workers held by the NAPOR, both on A and B levels, have modules and practical exercises that are connected and created to raise awareness of the importance and real-life practice of the Code of Ethics.

24 Note: this statement reflects the views of NAPOR.

How do the existing ethical codes influence the relations of youth work with other practices and professions that work with young people in Serbia?

The existing standards in the Code of Ethics recognise and accept diversity and different kinds of engaging with youth; recognise the importance of other professions and practices as well as their work. It gives a great background for youth workers to cooperate with them in order to ensure the overall wellbeing of young people. It emphasises the importance of quality ethical practice and defines the standards that need to be respected when working with youth.

Conclusion

The review of the literature and ethical codes identified in the selected countries (i.e. Australia, Estonia, and Serbia) reveals that these documents are perceived as very important and valuable tools for supporting quality youth work from the perspective of youth work practitioners and policy makers, although there is room for improvement of awareness about ethical standards and their role among the stakeholders.

The development of the majority of the codes of ethics is initiated by youth work associations, youth representation bodies, and/or public authorities and implemented through an extensive consultation process involving youth workers, youth service organisations, youth work educators, employers of youth workers, and young people themselves in order to build the sense of ownership among the relevant actors in the youth sector. This participatory approach is supposed to ensure that the code becomes a 'living' document supporting the professionalism and ongoing development of the sector.

In this regard, the ethical standards undoubtedly support the recognition of youth work and help to clarify what youth work is about – both for youth workers themselves and for those who come into contact with youth workers, such as young people, parents, community members, and other professionals. However, looking into the types of relations addressed in the codes of ethics, it is clear that most of them are focused on young people and the environment/context, while understanding the relationship with 'other professions' providing services for youth within the welfare system deserves further attention.

The codes of ethics are usually voluntary because they equally refer to all qualified youth workers and to others working with young people without a youth work qualification, although some of these codes are more focused on occupational and professional quality standards for ethical youth work (e.g. YACWA, WAAYW, 2014b in Australia; NAPOR, 2017 in Serbia; and EYWC, 2018 in Estonia) than others.

Although the ethical standards (values, principles, rules, and policies) and clearly embedded in the human rights framework, this fact is sometimes emphasised and elaborated in the codes of ethics (e.g. in Australia), and sometimes indirectly reflected in the nature of values and principles included in the document (e.g. in Serbia). Either way, clarity about the

purpose of youth work and the relationship of values and principles help youth workers to develop and carry out professional youth work practice in various contexts. The principles apply the general values more directly to youth work practice and define the essential activities of enabling young people's voluntary participation and actively seeking accountability to them and their communities. In this sense, some ethical codes differentiate between:

- ethical principles, which include the way that youth workers should treat young people (with respect for their right to make choices, without discrimination, for example) and the kinds of values that youth workers are working towards (such as a just society); and

- professional principles, suggesting how youth workers should act in the role of a practitioner with certain types of responsibility and accountability in order to apply the broader ethical and professional principles.

Other codes (YACVic, 2007, 2008) describe 'the practice responsibilities' of youth workers that ensure the highest level of professionalism, referring to key elements of what youth workers do when guided by the youth work principles, which are the essence of youth work practice and are important in youth workers fulfilling their responsibilities.

Although there are various support mechanisms identified in the selected countries – including certification and education (e.g. in Estonia); establishment of the steering body (CEI) in Serbia; and establishment of the strong cross-sectoral infrastructure in Australia – the analysis of these documents shows that in-depth investigation of this area needs further attention in order to facilitate knowledge transfer. It naturally raises the question of what kind of quality-assurance criteria there are to support the implementation of ethical standards and the development of ethical youth work practice and policy.

To support further investigation, it is worth mentioning that one model of integrating ethics into policy formation at the agency level includes e.g. diversification of the wider principles from day-to-day practical questions

through separating 'Codes of ethics' from 'Codes of practice' and 'Codes of behaviour' (Sinclair, 1996 in Sercombe, 2010):

- Codes of ethics, at the agency level, represent the standard professional codes for youth work; or they could be specific to the agency, composed of usually general clauses.

- Codes of practice (or "practice principles"; Banks, 2003 in Sercombe, 2010) refer to the way that ethical clauses play out in a particular context – still at the level of principle but firmly applied to a particular situation.

- Codes of behaviour refer to actual actions and activities of youth workers.

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ANNEX 1: Semi-structured Interview

1. What ethical frameworks, principles, standards, rules, and policies are contained in the ethical codes of conduct supporting youth work practice/policy in the selected countries (i.e. Australia, Estonia, and Serbia)?

2. What support mechanisms are in place for the implementation of the ethical codes? What are the main strengths and barriers for their implementation? To what extent are these mechanisms and/or ethical codes important in ensuring quality youth work practice and policy (i.e. very important/important/moderately important/slightly important/unimportant)?

3. What type of relations (e.g. between young people and youth workers; among the youth work community members, etc.) are considered by the ethical codes identified in the selected countries and how do they influence the development of quality youth work practice/policy?

4. How do the existing ethical codes/standards influence the relations of youth work with other practices and professions that work with young people?

The key informants included in the interview were experts from Australia, Estonia, and Serbia covering different backgrounds (e.g. youth work practice, research, education, and policy making).

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NAPOR

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MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

NYCA National Youth Card Association

IDIZ
Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
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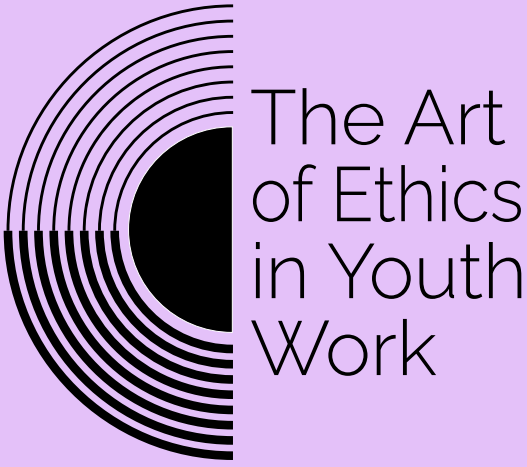
FINNISH YOUTH RESEARCH SOCIETY
FINNISH YOUTH RESEARCH NETWORK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