

“Going back to the roots”- the Roots project in Leuven, Belgium

15/10/2020 - Actions in EGL



As a strategic partnership that supports municipal level local youth work, Europe Goes Local (EGL) not only aims to raise the quality of youth work development but also create and influence a multiplier effect through identifying and promoting diverse activities of and to its members, partners and stakeholders. Thanks to the quality of its cooperation, EGL has become a rich platform of activities and practices that showcase the diversity and success of local youth work in various local settings and contexts.

As we are counting down the days to the official launch of the Changemaker Toolkit, which is designed to support working with the European Charter on Local Youth Work, we have decided to select and present to you 5 good practices that highlight the importance, creativity and impact of local youth work and look at the ways they align to the Charter's principles and promote its values across Europe.

In the hope that you might get inspired to implement a similar approach in your own country or learn more about what others are doing successfully, today we present to you **Roots Leuven in Belgium** with their good example of youth participation and inclusion people of refugee background in city life and in the Belgian culture through organizing mentorship programs and cultural activities.

<https://youtu.be/KEE2QxEQCyk>

- **Name of the good practice:** Roots Fest
- **Location:** Leuven, Belgium
- **Organization:** Roots Leuven
- **Organization Profile:** Roots organizes leisure activities for people with a refugee background in Leuven. The goal is to encourage them to participate in the city life of Leuven. The youngsters are often at high risk to fall through the gaps of society. Therefore Roots Leuven focuses on youth welfare work and is at the centre of prevention work, youth and integration work.

Oftentimes, the newcomers have multiple worries and they need to share and express their concerns and frustrations. Roots Leuven puts a lot of effort in creating a secure environment from where they can explore the city of Leuven and their possibilities. It also serves as a counterweight against loneliness. Through the development of people' with refugee background talents and qualities, Roots tries to empower the youngsters in a new and unfamiliar, oftentimes strange environment. This way they develop their own voice in this society and city.



- **Purpose of the activity:** Empowerment of young people with refugee background and facilitating integration

Weekly, on Wednesdays and Fridays from 17h to 21h, Roots Leuven organizes two evenings of activities with and for the youngsters (18y – 35y old). Those activities are free and need no

subscription so that they are fully accessible for all. The activities cover many disciplines like sports, cooking, cultural events, meeting other people, discovering new places, etc. Roots Leuven offers young people the chance to begin anew and have a fresh start. Young people with refugee backgrounds are not viewed as an administrative number but as people with talents and dreams, like every human being.

One of the key pillars of the work of Roots Leuven is providing opportunity to young people to do voluntary work. Through it, young people learn how to connect with peers and further develop work ethics. It also offers the opportunity for Belgian citizens to connect with the refugees. Oftentimes, working on a project brings people closer together and they realize they don't differ that much from one another. Also, voluntary work gives young people of refugee background the chance to explore different sectors in employment possibilities, how they can earn a little extra money and practice their Dutch.

Throughout the year, Roots Leuven organizes multiple cultural events to empower the connection between citizens of Leuven and the newcomers. It is also a chance for them to celebrate, relive and remember their own culture in this new place. And it provides a chance for citizens of Leuven to 'travel in their own city'.

Essentially, the purpose of all of our activities is that young people feel at home and are strong enough to see and grab the opportunities lying in front of them. Roots Leuven empowers them to develop knowledge, attitude and competences to work on their future perspectives as well as those of their future generations.



- **Challenges in implementation: Management of stress in a new culture and fostering motivation**

The people of refugee backgrounds participating in Roots-Leuven activities are flexible and adjustable and they possess willpower and resilience. However, what could be challenging is that they first need to work on meeting their basic needs, they are constantly thinking about home - all of which is causing consistent heightened stress. Because of the latter, their participation can be difficult at first, let alone being able to mobilize and organise activities for their peers. Because of that, Roots-Leuven started 'De Nomade' - a physical place in Leuven where the youngsters can feel at home, connect with each other and the neighbourhood and start to discover, develop and evolve their talents. To facilitate this process, other social organisations were invited into the building as well. The abovementioned organisations include other city services and external organisations responsible for disciplines like employment, housing, youth welfare, integration and citizenship, etc. By providing access to all these competences in one building, Roots-Leuven ensures a safe and accessible hot spot where the youngsters can fully focus on their future. For the social organisations it means that they can align their methods and trajectories with each other. This provides continuity for the progress of the youngsters. For Leuven citizens, it also means that there is a physical place where they can meet the youngsters. Because of all this, 'De Nomade' is a place of encounter, discovery and development.

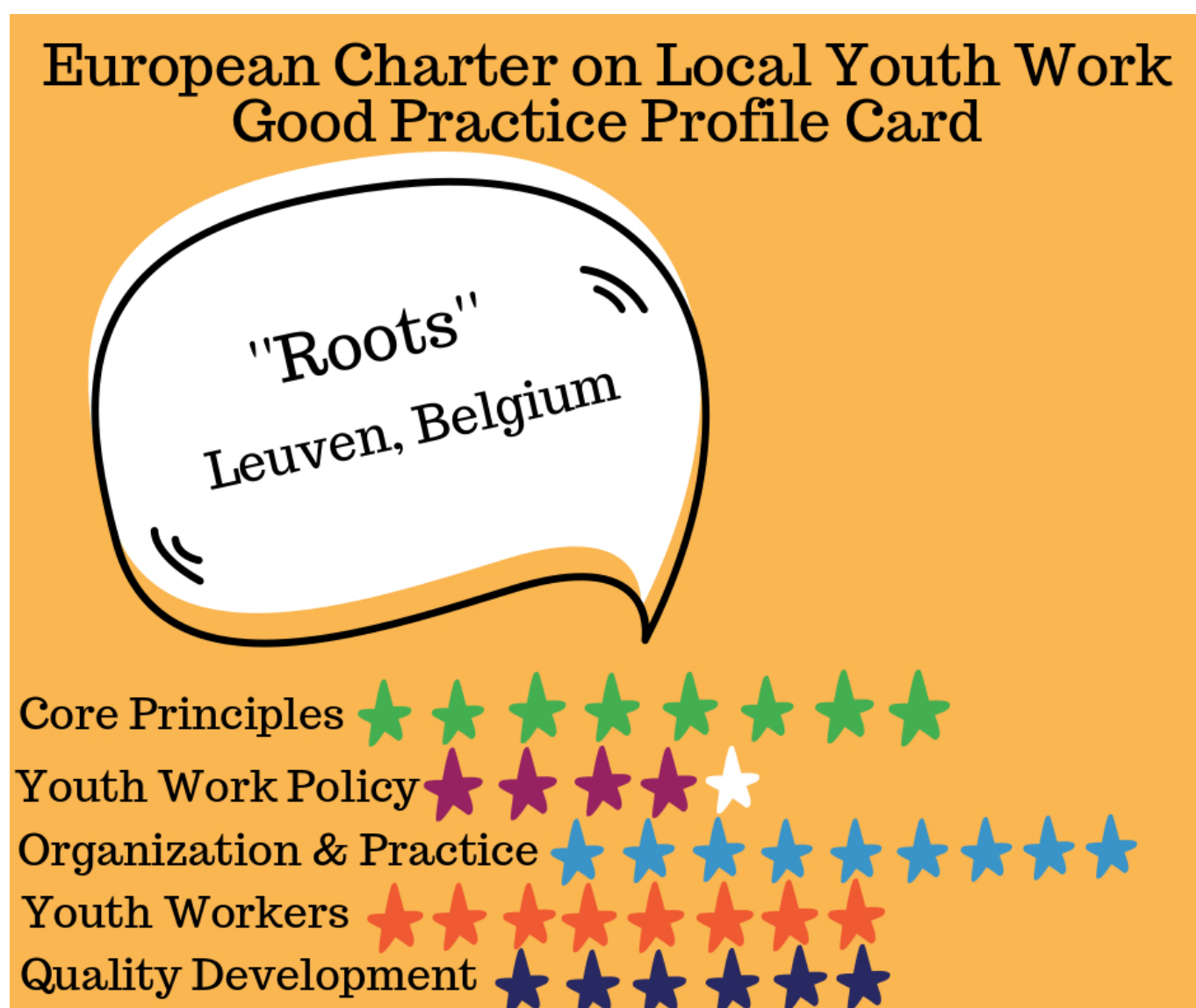


- **Impact:**

Young people: the youngsters start to realize and tap into their potential. They can grow and grab opportunities so they understand that they are able and hold the key to their own future.

Society/Community: they see that they are part of a group and that they can proudly be a part of this society.

Applying the European Charter on Local Youth Work*: All principles inscribed in each section of the Charter that the Good Practice applies in the design and implementation of this activity:



Further references and contact:

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Update 14/12/2021: ROOTS has become a partner in a larger project called 'De Nomade'. This is an open reception house for newcomers where, in addition to leisure activities, they also offer assistance in all areas of life in collaboration with various social partners from Leuven.