

An EGL Roadmap - Conversation with Koen Lambert

01/03/2021 - Actions in EGL



The increasing demand for structured and continuous European cooperation to develop and strengthen youth work across Europe confirms and reinforces the significant role Europe Goes Local (EGL) plays in the youth work community of practice. As a distinguished European cooperation platform for quality development, EGL focuses on advocacy, knowledge exchange, peer learning and networking as well as offering quality tools and opportunities for collaboration and partnerships, to strengthen youth work and diversify and deepen the connection within and between local and European level.

With the establishment of the European Youth Work Agenda and the political framework, agreements and commitment set forth by the youth work community of practice during the 3rd European Youth Work Convention held in December 2020, EGL continues to consciously fulfil its role of a unifier and multiplier in its endeavor to push boundaries and elevate the collective effort to strengthen youth work.

In 2021, EGL enters its second programme period, after an unprecedented year that challenged the way we work and live, presented obstacles and setbacks as well as highlighted opportunities to evaluate, adapt, invent, connect in new ways and redesign, where necessary.

To discuss all things EGL, look at its vision and planning for the next programming period

and reflect on its role and envisioned future impact, we sit down with Mr Koen Lambert - director at JINT vzw, (the Belgian-Flemish National Agency of the Erasmus+ Youth Program and the European Solidarity Corps) and Chairperson of Europe Goes Local Steering Group.

<https://youtu.be/2zl7uSyXhIU>

Q: Mr Lambert, what were some of the biggest milestones for EGL in 2020?

KL: There were quite a few milestones. Of course, we can't talk about 2020 without talking about the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected our work. However, I am quite happy with how we succeeded in making the switch from the plans and activities that we had in mind initially so that at least we could continue our work and use the online possibilities that everybody discovered and is now familiar with.

So that is something that is really a change of the setting, we all have been working in. I think it will also serve as a **learning experience that we certainly will build on in the future**; on the knowledge that we have gathered now to run online meetings and that knowledge will also play a role in the future. When it comes to **reaching out for local youth work, for local municipalities, when it comes to communicating and making people aware of the knowledge**, instruments and the tools we have - this kind of online communication and online events will stay there for this purpose in the future, it will be used and we will certainly build on that further. So that's a general point, which was one of the highlights.

I was also happy that throughout this difficult period we have been able to **keep our network together with lots of people and organizations committed** to what we are doing together. We managed to **discuss further our plans for the future** in the seminar that was supposed to be held in Paris but was instead held online, to discuss the future planning of EGL as one of the major activities and laying the foundation for ideas to go further. In the autumn we also had, and I think this is a big achievement and a real step that we should develop further - **the online launch of the Changemakers Kit connected with information on the European Charter on Local Youth Work**. That was a really good experience. And I think one of the highlights is to bring people together for an event, to have people connect. In a (physical) event, you could bring about 200-250 people together. Online, even though it is not the same as a real-life event, it is still very useful and valuable because we still could connect with everyone. And with that connection, we reached out to more than 250 people. Discussions are different, of course, it's another way of communication but I think the reach out for the event was in a couple of thousands of people that have been reached or connected with one way or another or engaged in the event itself. This is an outreach that is much higher than the outreach you'd have if you held a physical event. In that sense, that was a very encouraging and successful experience and it's certainly one of the highlights for 2020.

And then of course, what is also very important, at the end of last year, on the European level - **the European youth programs were approved**. A political agreement was reached for both the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps - extremely important because it is the basis for our work. And at the end of 2020, we had the **European Youth Work Convention** and discussions and political agreements on the **European Youth Work Agenda**, which sets a framework for the future development of youth work in Europe. Also, that is quite an important political boost for everyone concerned with the future of youth work in Europe and Europe Goes Local, which is very much part of that and

committed to it.



The European Charter on Local Youth Work and the Changemakers Kit

Changemakers Kit Introductory video

and exchange of experiences and good practices

WHAT IS IT FOR YOU?
Why should you use the Changemakers Kit?

USER GUIDE
How to use the Changemakers Kit?

BACKGROUND TO THE CHARTER
How was the Charter created?

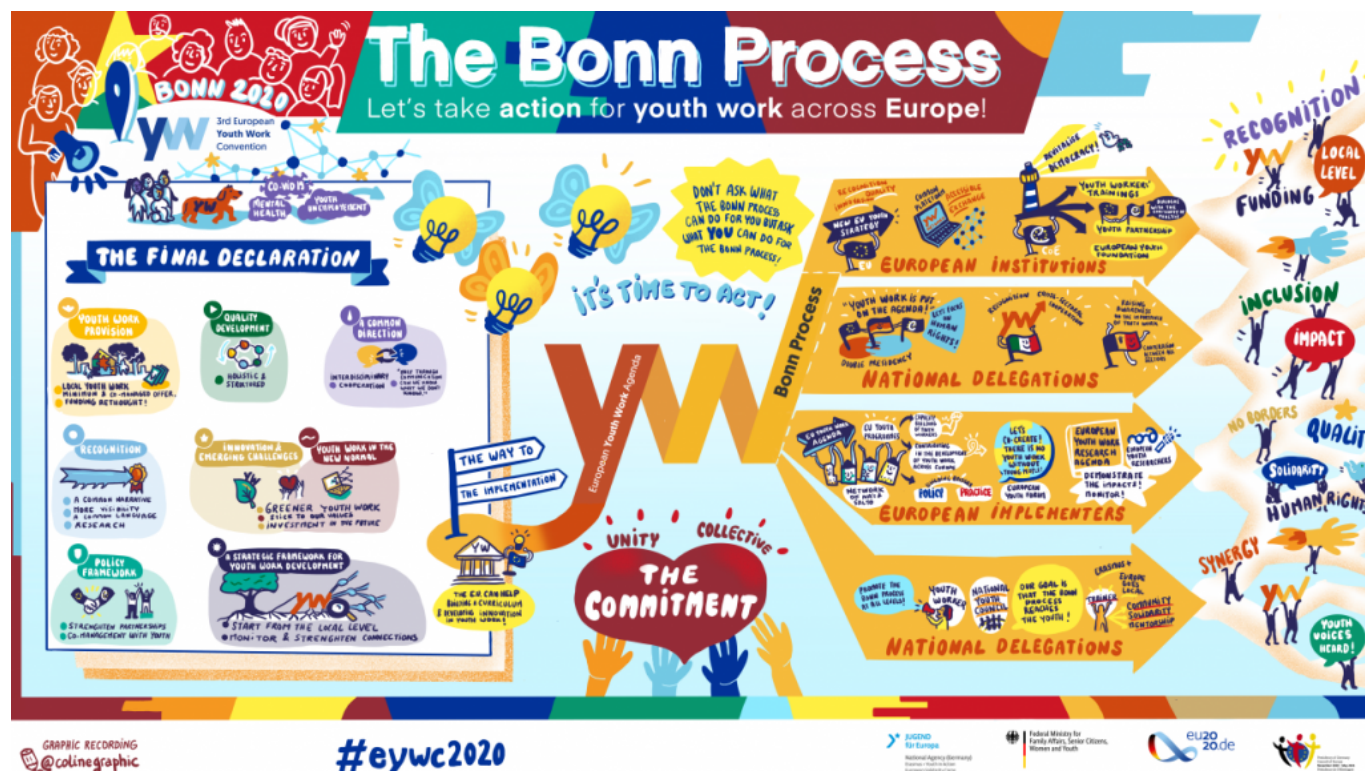
What is quality youth work? The Charter describes it and the Changemakers Kit will help you get there!

Q: EGL and the Charter were included in the Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention. What does that mean for EGL and does it give EGL a new role in the youth work collective?

KL: It means a lot. It doesn't give EGL a new role, it's more confirmation of its role - if you read what's in the Declaration - but it's also very much a role that is strengthened and reinforced by this Declaration because it makes clear that **EGL has a very strong role in connecting the European and the local levels in terms of different communities of practice that are active there.** The communities of practice that are dealing in each locality with the youth work and then the whole European development and the community of practice that is discussing on a European level. I think our role is very important to **bring these two together** and see how **Europe and the local level can be connected** but also how we can **connect the youth work community in different countries**, to connect with each other. That is also our role and as I said before, our whole learning experience with online events in 2020 will certainly play a role where we will be looking for strengthening our communication efforts and online efforts to reach out to youth workers, municipalities, local youth organizations so that **we become a channel to link the European and the local level with each other.** That is something that is very clearly **mentioned and indicated in the Declaration.** Of course, we will continue to build on our core business - quality development of youth work with the tools we have already - the European Charter on Local Youth Work and the Changemakers Kit. Building also on these tools the **necessary efforts to train people to use them and improve them.** That is still our core business that we will work on and where our further needs are and how we can further develop in the future.

One thing also that we have in mind is to try to **engage more municipalities as actors in European youth programs.** There is already a lot of activity there on a local level, yes, of course, certainly from all kinds of youth organizations but these programs also have a bigger potential for municipalities to use them as a kind of basis for youth work development and activities that are needed, as they see it in their local context. That is for sure a role we would like to fulfil in the future. It is very much about connecting European and local levels, connecting actors on the local level throughout Europe, **connecting municipalities to the European youth programs and as such contribute to the reinforcement of local youth work in the coming years.** We will also do that with our own network and

stakeholders. The whole idea of the European Youth Work Agenda and Declaration is much about organizing a common, structured, coordinated effort for all stakeholders to work on the further development of youth work. So we will play our parts but we will do that in coherence with the efforts of other partners. There is still a way to go because the Declaration calls on the community of practice to get organized to do so. We will contribute to that because I think that with our background and our stakeholders we can do that, we can play a part in it.



Q: How will EGL contribute and be part of the Bonn Process?

KL: We can play our part from our own strength, with our communication, our stakeholders, the core business that we are running and is at the centre of our activities. But we have to do it in a common effort with other partners and stakeholders on a European level. Networks are dealing with trainings of youth workers. The European institutions and policies that they have developed - the EU with the European Youth Strategy and the Council of Europe with its Youth Sector Strategy - both have created that political context so we are certainly working in that context together. We will also see what can be done on a national level. We have our national working groups - the National Agencies participating in our project. National authorities are as well responsible actors and stakeholders in this whole process. I know that in some countries there will be efforts to run a kind of a Bonn process. To see how can we use this momentum and appeal to start something to renew, to innovate to strengthen, whatever the choice is - that will be happening in some counties. So we will be able to contribute to those efforts and whenever there is an opportunity we will certainly do that. We will certainly also do that within the network of National Agencies for the youth programs where now we have plans for several projects - network-wide strategic cooperations. EGL is one of them but there are plans to develop strategic cooperation on digital youth work, competencies of youth workers. There is the European Academy on Youth Work as a place to discuss and search for innovation in youth work. There are a lot of other ongoing efforts in the network of National Agencies in support of

youth work and of course, we will look to make sure that these efforts are coherent, that they work together, that they serve the common goals that have been formulated. In that context also, EGL will work very closely with what other colleagues in other National Agencies are doing and in strategic cooperation in the network.

There is a lot of work to do. We know what we will do with ELG as our plans for the coming years. We are very much open for cooperation and will be actively looking for it to get to that coordinated effort that is asked by the European Youth Work Agenda and by the community of practice.



Q: How does 2021 look for EGL and its members? What are some exciting and new things to expect this year?

KL: The most exciting thing would be that we will be able to meet again in person and that we will have the possibility in 2021 to have a 4th EGL event that, if everything goes well, could take place in Romania. That would be the biggest excitement to look forward to. It will be very nice to bring together and see colleagues and all the people committed to EGL not online but in reality. So yes, we are looking forward to that.

The next step would certainly be to work towards that - to reinforce our national working groups and our national context to reinforce the project with maybe new stakeholders on a European level. To make it a true platform where all European stakeholders that can contribute to strengthening local youth work can find each other and work together. That is certainly one of the things to work for and strive for. We are building our training strategy to create a group of ambassadors for the Charter in

those counties that need it and want to do it, to train youth workers to use the Changemakers Kit - that is an ongoing effort that we will have. We are very much looking forward to seeing how we can work together with the different institutions, certainly with the European Commission, once the new programs are on track again and the whole transition is a bit digested (as there is always a transition from one program period to another). Once this is digested we are very much looking forward to working with the European Commission on the further development of EGL and also reach out as it is part of the Youth Work Agenda for cooperation with the Council of Europe or partnership between the two institutions - I think this is a very important focal point to keep in mind - to orientate our work for that. I think everybody can be glad that our network is still growing, we have new partners joining, a new interest which is also very encouraging for the future of EGL.

In conclusion, I would like to say that it is very important to keep in mind and focus on that aspect for EGL from last year - COVID-19 has come and is still here. We cannot say when it will be gone. There are hopeful signs but nobody can really foretell the developments, so everybody knows that with measures and lockdowns and curfews - this is very hard for young people and is also affecting a lot of youth work at the local level where young people cannot meet, they have to face restrictions, where youth organizations cannot reach out to young people. So what we can do from European Level, we could also be aware that a lot of young people are suffering from it and it will affect their lives not only now but will have effects in the future. **And maybe with EGL we can also contribute to reflect on that, to see what we can do to help with the situation, to support young people and youth work that supports young people, how to handle it and see clearly what the effects might be and how to handle that with the youth work actors that are dealing with young people at the moment. This is a new aspect and something we have to focus on currently.** Also, not only taking on board the idea of how youth work will be in post-Covid times and what it should do to recover itself but also to support young people in overcoming the effects of how they had to live during Covid.