

by Nerijus Kriauciunas

## Friendly Youthpass meets the world of *Винни-Пух*: discovering and recognising the learning in Eastern Europe and Caucasus

A few months ago I was asked to share my impressions about the non-formal education in the region of Eastern Europe and Caucasus (EECA region<sup>1</sup>). Luckily, a couple of weeks after I had received this request there was an annual meeting of SALTO EECA Resource Centre Multipliers Network<sup>2</sup> in Tbilisi held. I instantly realised that this meeting provided a perfect opportunity for me to talk with people actively participating in the Youth in Action programme. Plus they would still be in touch with other organisations and collaborators from the region. This article is based on three group interviews with multipliers from different countries on the subject of non-formal education and learning within Youth in Action activities.

My personal connection with the region, its countries and cultures comes growing up watching Vinnie Pukh (*Винни-Пух*<sup>3</sup> – the Russian version of Winnie the Pooh), learning the Russian language as my first foreign language, travelling from time to time to the countries in the region and also from actively cooperating with colleagues from organisations in the Eastern countries. The main objective of this article is to establish the links between the understanding of and experience with non-formal education shared by multipliers and my knowledge of the Youthpass process and my personal experience. Why exactly Youthpass? Maybe because in 2009 the decision was made to introduce Youthpass for Youth Exchanges and Training Courses organised in cooperation with Partner Countries, while Youthpass for EVS projects has already been available in the region since 2007.

I hope you enjoy reading the below impressions about non-formal education and learning in the region.



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### Thinking non-formal education? Think twice.

We started our conversation with the multipliers with a general question: “What do people from the region think of non-formal education?” The answer, as anywhere else, proved that the perception of non-formal education differs depending on the experience of individuals and organisations. Those who have not come across it, appear to know nothing on the subject. If they hear about “non-formal education”, their first impression is strongly influenced by the notion of “non-formals<sup>4</sup>”. This breeds further misconceptions that non-formal education consists in a series of not-quite-serious activities, a perception that

<sup>1</sup> Hereinafter the term “region” refers to the group of countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the Network of Multipliers in the EECA region see <http://www.salto-youth.net/eecamultipliers/>

<sup>3</sup> For the original of the Винни-Пух cartoon see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGIIHoIPZ\\_A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGIIHoIPZ_A)

<sup>4</sup> “Non-formals” (in Russian, «неформаллы») – the term that is used to refer to groups of people that differ from the commonly accepted norms in the way they dress, express themselves, behave or live; generally the term is associated with the subcultures or groups with unusual interests/hobbies; in general use, the term has double connotation – a positive one, when one wants to underline their exceptionality and strength to challenge the “norms”; and a more negative one used to stress the destructive attitude towards the existing norms. See more in the discussion on „non-formals“ at <http://www.lovehate.ru/Non-formals/1> (Google translator option is available)

most probably comes from abroad and often refers to the “playground” of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). No matter if these are young people, teachers or people from NGOs, when they first come in touch with a non-formal learning experience, their initial reaction is often scepticism. But with time people get interested and change their attitude, and often they literally fall in love with non-formal education. Of course, not everybody, as some find the non-formal learning experience challenging due to their limited competence so to speak in certain areas or their preference to rely on the knowledge written in books and passed down through traditional education. When asked, people also mention the impact of the hierarchical education practice inherited from the past, where the only recognised way of learning is the teacher bringing what s/he knows (or thinks s/he knows) to the student. It was emphasised that this way of learning does not encourage people to think for themselves. Contrary to this scheme, in the non-formal education setting, using interactive techniques, people simply need to think and act. Summing up, it appears that there is no “non-formal learning culture” existing on a large scale in the region.

In spite of rather reluctant first impressions with non-formal education, if people continue learning in the non-formal way, they often develop an interest in understanding more what is happening with them. As one of the multipliers explained drawing from her practice of working with youth: “At the beginning, they do not know what non-formal education is. For them, it is a school activity that gives a lot of possibilities. And when they really start to think that for example [international youth] exchange is not only for fun, they realise that there are possibilities to meet people from another country, but as a means of education. And at the end they find out that actually they have gained a lot. So, they might start to think that it is more than just plain fun.”

Another multiplier shared her observation that, during the first three days of a training course, people usually experience a sort of “click in their minds“. They start to understand that taking part in a training course is not about being a passive listener “one who comes to *read the training*”<sup>5</sup>. Only by the fourth or fifth day people learn to learn from each other and not from the trainer alone.

The two examples are illustrative of what people start to associate within non-formal education after having a bit of experience. The first statement shows that non-formal education is often confused with after-school or extra-curricular activities; and the second – that there still exists a perception that a real training course is the only way of doing non-formal education. Both attitudes have their own implications in the context of the region.

### Who are the “pioneers” of non-formal education?

Non-formal education as after-school activities has strong associations with the past. In the words of one of the multipliers: “The concept [of non-formal education] is not new to the region at all, because even in the Soviet Union they used it quite actively

with all those *pioneers*<sup>6</sup> and camps. But of course the logic was a bit of different... Anyway, I think it was a sort of non-formal education, so now, if you explained to people in a very simple way what does non-formal education mean, they would for sure get interested in it.”



“We are gathering everyone for the youth exchange ‘Scrap metal!’”<sup>7</sup>

Making references to the past is like two sides of the coin. On the one hand, people and NGOs do not want to be associated with the past political system. On the other hand, it is helpful to start from the existing perceptions in order to build up a new understanding.

Taking into account that the NGO sector in the region is relatively young, most of the youth work activities take place in schools or in close cooperation with schools. According to multipliers, the positive impact of such an experience is that not only the young people recognise the positive ben- ➔

<sup>5</sup> “Reading the training” is an expression in Russian that is used to describe the situation when people are attending the training course expecting to receive lectures as they are used to have it in the formal education setting.

<sup>6</sup> Interesting that people who are at the forefront of Youthpass and recognition are sometimes called the “pioneers”. In the context of the EECA region, a Pioneer movement is typically associated with an organization for children operated by the Communist party in the Soviet Union times. For more see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pioneer\\_Movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pioneer_Movement).

<sup>7</sup> A scene from a well-known cartoon “Тена и кульварстукас” (in Russian, «Тена и чебурашка») about the early attempts in the region to use non-formal education for inclusion. For more, see Youtube under “cheburashka”

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efits of non-formal education. Moreover, it is possible "to talk seriously with teachers, because they do understand what it all means, and most of the teachers support non-formal education, especially when it comes to very tricky topics, like tolerance or conflict management, something that is very hard to explain so you need to experience that". In other countries, teachers receive encouragement and attend training courses run by people with non-formal education background. There are more examples in the region of schools and educators participating in collaborative networks. Schools use the project-based learning to support the formal curricular activities. But, at the same time, multipliers acknowledge that teachers are lacking a better understanding of the non-formal education. They have limited possibilities to develop their competences, and the contribution of NGOs to the formal education lacks the recognition on the higher institutional level.

The close association of non-formal education with training activities has its own history and consequences. When asked "Where does the understanding of non-formal education come from?" multipliers identify a number of sources, but mainly they refer to training courses and seminars offered by the *Council of Europe*<sup>8</sup>, *SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres*<sup>9</sup> or through international cooperation with partners and, in some cases, to the internal training system within the organisation.

Before the Youth in Action programme came to the region, people could take part only in training courses and seminars, which in their nature and structure differ from the long-term non-formal education opportunities provided by, for example, youth exchanges or EVS within the Youth in Action programme. Of course, there have been other funding, structural and organisational systems in the region, but their priorities were directed primary at democracy building, conflict resolution or other issues, leaving the long-term youth work and non-formal learning at the second place at the best.

Multipliers say drawing from their experience: "people know the methods and it seems that non-formal education is most often associated with trainings and with trainings combined with lec-

tures... it actually is just like formal education". This clearly identifies the limits of training activities in providing a long-term, relation-based, non-formal learning experience and, in a way, in revealing the complexity and resource-demanding nature of non-formal education. One multiplier brought an interesting insight from own country experience, where in the formal education sector "[teachers] try to use non-formal education as an extra-curricular activity for children and young people, but unfortunately they do not want to use this approach anymore in a formal learning system. They use better lectures, regular classes... and I can understand, because it is more work for them."

In general, people feel that the understanding and recognition of non-formal education is slowly changing for the better, of course taking into account its various pathways in different countries of the region. It might be concluded that, to some extent, people and organisations involved in youth work and non-formal education manage to facilitate the understanding of non-formal learning on the individual level and, in some countries, also on the institutional one. This helps to create, to some extent, social recognition within the limited circle of influence, particularly when cooperating with schools. But still it is far from the situation that would allow NGOs to access the much-needed resources, to offer long-term non-formal education opportunities for young people in the region. Better institutional recognition on the political level is needed in order to support the development of non-formal education. But the challenge in the region is that the official institutions may be quick in formalising the non-formal education without preserving many of its essential qualities. Multipliers gave examples of how in some countries the governmental regulations changed, demanding from organisations implementing educational activities to obtain a license. The requirements needed to qualify in order to possess a licence are more suitable for the nature and practice of formal education and is difficult to apply in the non-formal education setting.

People from NGOs feel that promoting non-formal education thinking in the region is a pioneering activity (in another sense of its meaning). In practice, they meet with a different understanding of the notion "learning in a non-formal way". However, Youth in Action activities open new opportunities to experience non-formal learning in the region.

### Understanding non-formal education. Learning in action.

We continued the conversation, focussing more on: "What do people understand by the term 'non-formal education'?" and "What does it entail, for example, within the Youth in Action programme?" One of the first answers was the metaphorical explanation of parallels between the non-formal education and the non-traditional medicine: "There is the traditional medicine where everything is prescribed with caution and in full seriousness, there is the case management conference of doctors who have expertise in specific fields, there are plenty of books written on the subject, qualifica-



<sup>8</sup> For more information see at <http://youth-partnership.coe.int/youth-partnership/training/europeancitizenship.html>

<sup>9</sup>For more information see at <http://www.salto-youth.net/courses/>

tions are gained at universities, and there are standards according to which people are treated. And then there is the non-traditional medicine that approaches the treatment of people – patients – in a different way than traditional medicine does; it is not as much about curing people as about a healthy way of living. So, for me, non-formal education is like a healthy way of living, an approach to life that in principle does not hinder the formal education.”



*“Reaching the most challenging young people with the non-formal education approach”<sup>10</sup>*

The immediate next question was: “What point of view should we take when speaking about the understanding of non-formal education?” There are various actors involved: governmental structures, NGOs, general population, youth, and all of them in a different way perceive and understand – or don’t understand – the concept of non-formal education. We decided to continue on the subject from the perspective of NGOs and, where appropriate, making reference to other stakeholders in the field.

Drawing from their organisational practice, multipliers mentioned a variety of activities that are covered by non-formal education: work camps, debate clubs, competitions, workshops, information and communication technology (ICT) projects, journalists’ clubs, peer education programmes, simulation games, meetings, video making, theatre forms, training courses and seminars, coaching groups in developing local and international initiatives, sports activities, youth exchanges and EVS projects. But the list of activities by itself still does not say much about the deeper understanding of non-formal education: “What characteristics does the non-formal possess? How do organisations in the region describe their non-formal education practice?”

It is interesting that people often do not use the term itself but they practise non-formal education in everyday life. In one way or another organisations recognise the importance of learning

that takes place outside of the formal education system. But, because people in organisations up until now have had limited possibilities to develop their competences in non-formal education, the internal recognition in the organisation is missing. More often they learn through practice, by networking with colleagues or attending trainings and seminars. When it comes to the work with youth, people immediately think that the non-formal education comes down to the specific methods used. But, apart from the methodology itself, multipliers also underline the importance of implementing the essential principles of non-formal education: voluntary participation, interest from the youth, decisions and responsibility taken by the young people, learning by acting and from experience, focus on the integrity in learning. In the context of the region, many organisations perceive the non-formal education as a way of learning that “teaches to think. Especially taking into consideration the present education system in the region, [the non-formal education] is an alternative that teaches to think, teaches to exchange ideas, teaches to analyse things, and teaches to search independently for something. This alternative education is needed in the region”.

In a similar spirit, but more on a personal level, one of the participants in the conversation described the non-formal education as “a dialogue, because young people and educators speak the same language and they reflect together on different issues, on values. In order to speak about tolerance it is not enough to have classes and lectures, you need to find a common solution at least in this particular group. And of course, it is the way of life”.

With all this positive understanding and practice, multipliers regret that non-formal education experience often stays within the NGO sector. Although they also gave some positive examples of how formal education is attempting to remodel itself. Mostly from the experience in different countries, multipliers mentioned that “there are attempts to set up a new methodology, something unconventional, learning by doing, turning theoretical into practical. With a national education reform, the new objectives are set and guidelines are introduced, but it is not clearly said, in particular for the teachers, how to achieve what is decided.” Or: “the head of the parliamentary commission on education acknowledges the need to take into consideration the different ways of learning and education.” Indeed, it is possible to talk to official institutions about the non-formal 

<sup>10</sup> A scene from a well-known cartoon “Доктор Айболит” (in English: “Doctor Aibolit”) about the early attempts to integrate the non-formal education approach within the international youth activities. For more, see Youtube under “doctor aibolit”

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education, especially if addressing the social concerns. Changes are slowly approaching.

### Non-formal education? Of course, I know about it and I can even say where it comes from!

“What happened with the understanding of non-formal education in the NGOs sector? Where does it come from? How did it develop in the minds and hearts of people?” In tracing the different influences, multipliers were explaining that the understanding of non-formal education in the region has developed in stages:

1) With the collapse of the dominant education system in the 1990s, alternatives became available, similarly like in other European countries, starting in the late 1960s/early 1970s, when other practices of education were developed, nowadays called non-formal education;

2) In parallel, mostly with the support and active programmes of the Council of Europe, opportunities have been developed and opened for people from the region to participate in. Through different training activities and seminars on non-formal education, as well as international youth work and youth policy development, a new youth policy movement has started

3) With the launching of the YOUTH programme in 2000, and later with the Youth in Action programme, people had real opportunities to apply in practice what they have learnt on non-formal education during the trainings and seminars, by organising youth exchanges and EVS.

As mentioned above, it is important to take into account the influence of the other contributing institutions and international participants present in the region, for example human rights organisations, humanitarian organisations, peace- and democracy-building institutions. But, on the subject of the Youth in Action programme, we asked: “What options of non-formal learning have been offered young people and organisations in the region?”

In line with what has already been said, the Youth in Action programme provides organisations and people with the resources to broaden their experience, knowledge and skills gained during the training activities. Organisations were given the possibility to send participants to other training courses organised by SALTO-YOUTH Resource

Centres, National Agencies or the organisations themselves. This scheme provides the necessary experience and motivates members of organisations to take a more active role in the organisation or to initiate international projects including non-formal learning as one of the quality components.



*Bonifacia goes to the intercultural training course to learn about youth exchanges!<sup>11</sup>*

When asked about their Youth in Action experiences, multipliers shared the good practices applied in their own organisations or those they know from successful stories of EVS volunteers. They referred to cases where personal development encouraged volunteers to take an active role in their lives and in the society. From the conversations held, it transpires that learning really happens in projects. And the recognition of learning often takes place in a very individual way. Still, some common trends may be seen, such as that the participants in youth exchanges or EVS often gain the understanding of non-formal learning and education along the way. In most of the cases, they start without being aware that what they do is non-formal education, because at the beginning they are interested in other things. But often, not for all, but for some of them, it happens that they develop an interest in it and stay with the organisation.

It depends on the experience of the organisation, the people and the quality of the project, how wide and large the practice of non-formal education is. Multipliers voiced their awareness of projects not quite up to a standard, ones in which the youth exchange programme is not clear, people are bored as they have nothing to do, visits are frequent and the only thing left is to party. They also noted that many of the EVS projects are hard for volunteers due to their different mentalities and expectations. In particular, the following issues were mentioned: different perceptions of the activity programme, the balance between the process and the results, or difficulties with cultural learning and adaptation. But, by stressing

<sup>11</sup> A scene from a well-known cartoon “Kanikuly Bonifacia” (in English, “Bonifacia’s holiday”) about the (early) understandings of what it means to go and learn in a training course. For more, see Youtube under “bonifacia’s holiday”

the importance of proper preparation and follow-up, multipliers suggested ways to ensure that the participation in the programme becomes a non-formal learning experience for people. As quoted by one of the colleagues: “it doesn’t matter if the experience is good or bad, what matters is what you do with it afterwards, no?!”

When talking to multipliers about the understanding of non-formal learning and its implementation in practice, there are no doubts that there is knowledge and experience in the region. The understanding does not differ from the common European sense of non-formal education. Youth in Action and other European undertakings play an important role contributing to the better understanding of the subject. In future, there are still many minds and hearts to win with non-formal education and its philosophy.

Next, we looked more closely at what happens when people meet with the non-formal education “thinking” and methodology.

### Meeting “the others”. Non-formal education and learning.

The word “others” evokes a feeling of not familiar, not known, but still not as different and distant as the word “aliens”. This is the underlying idea when exploring people’s reactions towards the non-formal education and learning in a different way. Undoubtedly, for many people, taking part in a youth exchange, EVS or a training course is usually their first contact with non-formal education. This new experience involves obstacles people need to overcome. So: “What are the important aspects to take into consideration when implementing non-formal education in such projects?”

When talking to multipliers, it seems that there are two groups having different attitudes towards non-formal education. On the one hand, there are young people participating in projects, and on the other hand there are educators from various backgrounds and educational settings. It is common for both groups that through the non-formal education they change their understanding of learning. During the process, people start to realise that learning happens not only in the teacher-to-student setting, but also through an exchange of ideas with others and by learning from own experience. This process is rather challenging due to a number of reasons. In formal education, people expect to get marks or feedback, they expect to be evaluated. The second difficulty people face in the process of non-formal learning is the reflection on and sharing of their own learning experience. People are not used to it and it is not easy for them to start talking about themselves and not about the others. According to those we asked, this is related to the people’s fear of unknown and of openness. Non-formal education changes the perception of what learning is and how people learn. One of the multipliers reflects on both the negative and positive consequences of discovering non-formal learning: “When I was participating in the non-formal activities, like trainings and seminars for the first time, and then went back to the university, I understood that life is not perfect and I was thinking that this formal education is not so great after all. I think that sometimes it is a problem when people get to participate in some non-formal activities and they think that

non-formal education is the key, but real life shows that it is not the only key. So, that is why it is very important to keep balance, because people are people and everybody is different”.

Drawing from their own experiences, multipliers suggested the establishment of a “supporting and encouraging learning environment”, creating the feeling of safety for people to improve their self-confidence. This is a long-term process, one that requires commitment, involvement and responsibility from the educators.

Now, from the focus on learners as participants we turn to the learners as educators.

### Non-formal education means methods! Is it really as simple as that?

The non-formal education methodology may sometimes seem tricky to teachers, youth leaders, trainers or educators. Multipliers draw the difference between the notions of “methods of activation in learning” and “non-formal education”: “Currently, we observe the trend that, even in formal education, there are many methods of activation in learning used, such as different games, role games, quizzes and workshops... And many teachers begin to say: ‘we also practise non-formal education, just by using the methods of activation in learning’”.

But, in the above-described practice, the learning content comes mostly from the teacher. Another participant in the conversation added that “it is the lack of experience what makes people believe the methods of non-formal education are simple and easy. Often people think ‘I can do this too’, and so they just take a set of games, a set of exercises and run them with the young people or with the elderly... but they don’t really understand what to do with the process”. The danger here is that, without processing the experience through reflection and sharing, people might not become conscious of their own learning. They might make the experience meaningless and reduce the possibilities of translating it into real life. Multipliers admitted that the lack of knowledge of the methodology among the educators is caused by limited opportunities to develop competences needed to implement non-formal education. National or regional resources for that are not available or are scarce. Another problem is that non-English-speaking persons are not able to attend the training courses or seminars in the international context. The lack of a deeper understanding of the methodology leads to the misuse of non-formal education. Learning is accidental, not 

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planned, not facilitated and not processed. This is rather more like informal learning – there, learning happens without the intention neither from the learner’s nor from the educator’s perspective.

This brings us to the Youth in Action activities, where it is expected that planned learning would take place in a more or less structured way, including individual reflection and sharing of your learning experience with others. From practice, multipliers see the difficulties when, for example, group leaders from different educational backgrounds meet on a youth exchange and have individual approaches to planning and implementing the learning activities. There are also many cultural differences involved in the understanding of what planning is, what learning is and what the role of an educator is. As one person stressed, Youth in Action activities “are possibilities to see the different approaches, because when we work on the youth exchanges, sometimes we think that our approach is the best one and [the one of] the others is different. But when we start to work with the others we see different perspectives”.

This statement triggered a discussion among the multipliers on the need of and the dilemmas involving the standards of the non-formal education in general, and of the Youth in Action programme in particular. On the one hand, without clear standards the practice of non-formal education is more free, allowing for various ways of learning and possibilities for unexpected results. On the other hand, standards are needed to provide a reference for quality in non-formal education, enabling the evaluation not only from the properly prepared documentation and reports, but also during the implementation of youth exchange or an EVS project. The aspect of quality in non-formal learning depends on the experience and the existing understanding. For a multiplier active in the field, the Youth in Action programme “is actually a ‘visa’ for practising non-formal education, for my own and the participants’ development, for expanding the skills of my organisation. So, this truly is a learning process – and this is a clue for doing the projects. Because, and especially in the case of a Youth in Action project, it will not bring you a lot of income, it will not provide resources for your organisation... But this is an absolutely good way to learn, to learn about different cultures, countries, communication, whatever. If you don’t want to learn anything, don’t do a Youth in Action project”.

Summing up, for most people the first experience with non-formal education is a journey of discovering a new way of learning. This process is both

challenging and rewarding. Non-formal educators have a role to support people in their learning-to-learn process by empowering them to recognise the value of non-formal learning.

Let’s see what opportunities and challenges the introduction of Youthpass to the Youth in Action activities will bring to the region.

### Meet the Youthpass. Where do we go?



*The land of Vinni Pukh – where to go with Youthpass?*

In this section, I would like to draw some conclusions from the conversations about non-formal education recognition in the region. But firstly: “What is Youthpass?” To start, Youthpass is a process and an instrument for the recognition of the value of non-formal learning and its benefits on the individual and social level, and for the employability of young people and those involved in the youth sector. Introducing Youthpass into the Youth in Action programme opens opportunities in different areas:

- ▶ strengthening the learning component in the project experience;
- ▶ raising the awareness of cultural differences encountered during education and learning;
- ▶ fostering the institutional recognition of non-formal education on the political level;
- ▶ offering a more formal document confirming the participation in a non-formal education activity.

The Youthpass process puts emphasis on the benefits of personal reflection on learning, the importance of dialogue and support for learning to learn. The multipliers during the interviews addressed most of the elements when speaking about the non-formal education in the region. The Youthpass process also introduces the Key 

<sup>12</sup> For more information, see the official document on Key Competences at [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf)

*Competences*<sup>12</sup> to support the participants when describing individually what they have learnt. The formal education, vocational education and training sectors are already implementing changes in line with the recommendations of a common reference framework of Key Competences for life-long learning.

Finally, I would like to share some of the insights on what benefits or challenges the introduction of Youthpass into the Youth in Action activities might bring to the region:

**1)** Learning to learn is a key element in the Youthpass process, through which participants are encouraged and empowered to reflect on their personal learning process – and to recognise that above all they are the owners of their learning experience. This should also involve the shift in the balance between the input (non-formal education) and outcome (non-formal learning);

**2)** The long-term approach and the large diversity of non-formal education activities mean that empowering the learners to learn is a long-term process and often subjective in nature. It is necessary to recognise it not only outside the non-formal education sector but also inside the NGO sector, in order to see other forms and means of non-formal learning apart from the widely-used trainings and seminars;

**3)** Thinking of non-formal education means thinking strategically – it seems that many organisations in the region implement non-formal education activities but not necessarily are aware or name it like that. Encouraging NGOs to reflect on the non-formal education in their work would foster internal recognition and should enable an organisation to demonstrate the educational value of its activities. Organisations might benefit not only from the use of Youthpass as a tool in their activities but also from using the *European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders*<sup>13</sup>;

**4)** The non-formal education experience and knowledge are present in the region but lacking a wider recognition. The situation is somewhat similar to other European countries. International cooperation and networking could contribute to an undertaking aiming at a wider recognition of non-formal learning, particularly through the exchange of good practice and consolidation of the resources;

**5)** Formal education in the region, at schools or universities, sees the “signs of change” and sometimes acknowledges the need to develop. In some cases, institutions turn for consultations, trainings or good practice to the NGO sector active in the non-formal education field. Youthpass in the Youth in Action programme could provide good examples of benefits and value of non-formal learning;

**6)** In terms of cooperation with governmental structures, it is important to maintain good relations with them, as there is a trend observed that some of the European solutions reach the key decision-makers in the countries of the region. Awareness of the wider context of Youthpass and its links with other education and training policies would be beneficial. Also, common policy

events, where different players meet and discuss the educational developments, should be encouraged. Considering that sometimes there is a governmental practice of over-formalisation, Youthpass could become a “safe practice” protecting the NGOs and maintaining the essential qualities of non-formal education.

**7)** Quality and standards – being aware that non-formal learning is one of the quality areas and priorities in the Youth in Action programme brings up the question of quality standards. Standards involve both positive implications, such as raising the awareness of the importance of non-formal learning, but also negative consequences related to the fear of formalisation and excessively high entrance barriers.

Clearly, the above-posed conclusions need more reflection and discussion amongst the people concerned about the recognition of non-formal education and learning. I believe that it is a good reason to focus on non-formal education and learning, starting from the Youth in Action activities.

I am grateful for the contribution of thoughts, opinions and experience of all the multipliers who agreed to talk with me. Through the conversations we held, I have learnt much more than I have ever expected. I became more aware of the non-formal education in the EECA region, all the very positive practices and the key aspects of the important role of non-formal education in the process of developing youth sector in different countries. ○

*п.с. «...внеформальное образование, юф эхчейн-жи, ивиес, юфпас...», дорогие мультипликаторы, перестанте жрать ЛСД!!!<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>13</sup> In 2007, the Council of Europe introduced the European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders to support the people and organisations working in the youth sector in gaining: a) an internal recognition; b) organisational recognition; and c) wider recognition for non-formal education and learning.

This instrument combined with the Youthpass opens opportunities for this process. For more information, see [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Resources/Portfolio/Portfolio\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Resources/Portfolio/Portfolio_en.asp)

<sup>14</sup> p.s. “...non-formal education, youth exchanges, EVS, Youthpass...”, dear multipliers (if translated to Russian directly the word “multiplier” means cartoon-maker) stop eating LSD! LSD stands for Learning Space Dynamics. For more, see [http://www.salto-youth.net/find-a-tool/662.html?&date\\_from=2003-03-01&date\\_to=2009-03-31&search=LSD+Pre-departure+Panic&pagerCurrentOffset=3](http://www.salto-youth.net/find-a-tool/662.html?&date_from=2003-03-01&date_to=2009-03-31&search=LSD+Pre-departure+Panic&pagerCurrentOffset=3)