Document généré le 12 oct. 2024 01:00

International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies

Promoting Youth's Self-Empowerment in Residential Care — the Influence of the Organisation: The first year of the project "Creating Futures" and its Swiss–Hungarian Community of Practice

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Volume 11, numéro 4 (1), 2020

First of Two Special Issues Based on the 2019 FICE Congress in Tel Aviv: "Better Future Opportunities for Children and Young People in Multicultural Societies"

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1074821ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs114202019937

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

University of Victoria

ISSN

1920-7298 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Schmid, A. (2020). Promoting Youth's Self-Empowerment in Residential Care — the Influence of the Organisation: The first year of the project "Creating Futures" and its Swiss–Hungarian Community of Practice. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, *11*(4), 29–53. https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs114202019937

Résumé de l'article

In the project "Creating Futures", youths, staff, and leaders from youth homes in Switzerland and Hungary collaborate in a Community of Practice. Their goal is to develop organisational innovations that allow each of the youth homes to more effectively promote the self-empowerment of young people: their ability to take charge of their own lives and realise their own ideas of the future. This paper reports results, learnings, and first impacts regarding both the topic and the collaborative process in the project's first formalised year, 2019. In developing its ways of working, the Community of Practice aims to engage as many persons as possible in each youth home. Through focus group discussions, a literature review, and a Young Expert Exchange, organisational factors that promote self-empowerment in residential care have been identified. Representatives of each youth home have selected those of most interest and have begun to assess their existing good practice as well as needs and potentials for innovation. The article includes the voices of participants as it reflects on the requirements for, and benefits and challenges of, youth participation and collaboration within a highly diverse Community of Practice.

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International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies (2020) 11(4.1): 29–53
DOI:

PROMOTING YOUTH'S SELF-EMPOWERMENT IN RESIDENTIAL CARE — THE INFLUENCE OF THE ORGANISATION: THE FIRST YEAR OF THE PROJECT "CREATING FUTURES" AND ITS SWISS–HUNGARIAN COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Anna Schmid

Abstract: In the project "Creating Futures", youths, staff, and leaders from youth homes in Switzerland and Hungary collaborate in a Community of Practice. Their goal is to develop organisational innovations that allow each of the youth homes to more effectively promote the self-empowerment of young people: their ability to take charge of their own lives and realise their own ideas of the future. This paper reports results, learnings, and first impacts regarding both the topic and the collaborative process in the project's first formalised year, 2019. In developing its ways of working, the Community of Practice aims to engage as many persons as possible in each youth home. Through focus group discussions, a literature review, and a Young Expert Exchange, organisational factors that promote self-empowerment in residential care have been identified. Representatives of each youth home have selected those of most interest and have begun to assess their existing good practice as well as needs and potentials for innovation. The article includes the voices of participants as it reflects on the requirements for, and benefits and challenges of, youth participation and collaboration within a highly diverse Community of Practice.

Keywords: creating futures**,** child, youth, care leaver, residential care, empowerment, participation, protagonism, community of practice, organisation, development, innovation, Hungary, Switzerland, international

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Motivation and Problem Identification

International research shows that a considerable number of young people with experience of residential care do not succeed in establishing sustainable lives for themselves. More frequently than their peers in the general population, they are affected by unemployment, homelessness, delinquency, and self-harming behaviours (Burgund & Rácz, 2015; Gabriel & Stohler, 2008; Stein, 2014; Stein & Munro, 2008).

Youths' ability to take charge of their own lives and create and realise their own ideas of the future is one of the main prerequisites for their success in creating sustainable lives for themselves. Youth homes in Switzerland and Hungary want to be able to promote this self-empowerment of young people more effectively. With this purpose, they have formed a Community of Practice (CoP) where youths, leaders, and staff collaborate to develop concrete organisational innovations.

In 2019, funding granted by the Mercator Foundation Switzerland has allowed the project to formally enter its main phase. This article presents the activities, methodology, results, learnings, and first impacts of this year. The motivation for the Creating Futures project, the identification of the problem it addresses, and the overall project design have been described in a previous article in this journal (Schmid & Herczeg, 2018) and, therefore, are summarised only briefly here and with a focus on emerging aspects of the project. An overview of the project in German can be found in Schmid et al. (2020).

Project Members and Organisation

The CoP includes members from five organisations: the Swiss youth homes *Gfellergut Sozialpädagogisches Zentrum* [Gfellergut Sociopedagogical Centre] and *Stiftung Jugendnetzwerk* [Youth Network Foundation], together with the Hungarian child and youth homes *Cseppkő* and *Szilágyi Erszébet* of *Cseppkő Gyermekotthon Központ* [Cseppkő Children's Home Centre] in Budapest and the group homes of *Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Gyermekvédelmi Központ* [Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Child Protection Centre] in Mátészalka. The Swiss homes are attended by adolescents aged 14 to 17 and young adults aged 18 to 24 in residential and associated settings, and the Hungarian homes by children and adolescents aged 2 to 17 in residential settings, and young adults aged 18 to 24 in associated settings.

Over its entire duration, the project is designed to include active participation of approximately 400 youth aged 14 to 24, 20 first- and second-level leaders, and 300 staff members. Under the leadership of the author, the youth homes formed the CoP, which has defined a topic and goals, designed the project, and determined the central elements of its methodological approach. The CoP is currently implementing the project. A small binational scientific team, also led by the author, provides the CoP and project with the necessary empirical knowledge as well as scientific methods and services (e.g., moderating, analysing, and interpreting focus group discussions). At the beginning of March 2020, the project moved from its original location, ZHAW Zurich University

of Applied Sciences, to the International Federation of Educative Communities (FICE) Switzerland. Together with the Hungarian FICE expert network NENESZ, FICE Switzerland has played an important role in the project from the start, providing a sounding board, advice, contacts, and opportunities for disseminating the project nationally and internationally.

Project Goals

The project has two aims: to develop concrete innovations, and to cultivate an innovation process that, through its high degree of participation, stimulates and promotes sustained learning and development processes for all those involved on the personal, professional, and organisational levels. Innovations may concern any aspect (or aspects) of the organisation, such as the physical or organisational structure; interaction of staff with young people; the participation of young people in organisational matters; the selection, training, or supervision of staff; attitudes and values; and the interaction of the youth home with external stakeholders. Among the planned outcomes are:

- That youth homes will have greater capacity than before to promote the self-empowerment of young people and to make good use of their expert knowledge for organisational development and innovation; and
- That young people will have a greater capacity than before to take charge of their own lives, develop their own ideas of the future, and realise them actively and sustainably, and that they will do so to a greater extent and in greater numbers than before; furthermore, that they will have increased their capacity to actively help shape the youth home and thus part of their living environment.

Project Design and Methodology

The Creating Futures project was originally planned to run from January 2019 to August 31, 2021; due to the coronavirus pandemic, it will probably be extended into 2022. The project consists of four modules. Module 1 has the goal of gathering knowledge about the self-empowerment of young people in residential care and organisational aspects that promote it. It includes a literature review (see Appendix) and focus group discussions with young people, leaders, and staff in the youth homes. Module 2 has the goal of developing concrete organisational innovations to promote the self-empowerment of young people more effectively. Activities include the definition of a framework of analysis, and the identification of good practice, needs, and gaps regarding the promotion of self-empowerment in the youth homes, as well as the development and piloting of innovations. The framework of analysis is presented in the Results section of this paper. Module 3 will see the evaluation of the innovations observed, and of the processes in the CoP and the youth homes that have led to them; a final framework embodying these innovations and processes will be constructed. Module 4 will see the conclusion of the project as well as the dissemination of learnings, innovations, and experiences.

The project methodology is participatory and collaborative and, as such, is coherent with the project goals. It has the following main characteristics:

- Young people aged 14 to 24 collaborate on a voluntary basis in all parts of the project as "Young Experts": protagonists and experts of their own lives in and outside of the youth homes, together with leaders and staff. Their participation corresponds to the fifth through eighth degrees of the "ladder of participation" defined by Hart (1992): 5: "consulted and informed", 6: "adult-initiated, shared decisions with children", 7: "child initiated and directed", and 8: "child-initiated, shared decisions with adults" (pp. 12–14).

- The CoP harnesses the diversity of different persons (Young Experts, leaders, staff), youth homes, and country contexts to learn from each other and with each other, reflect on current practice, widen horizons beyond each youth home's daily practice, inspire new ideas, develop concrete innovations, and support each other as "critical friends" in the process. This is in keeping with the definition of a CoP by Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015), and Wenger's (2009) recommendations regarding CoPs as learning spaces.

- A participation model defines three different modes of collaboration by young people, leaders, and staff of the youth homes. First, delegations from the five youth homes, each consisting of one leader, one social pedagogue, and at least one Young Expert, form the CoP Core Group. As Core Group members, they jointly collaborate in: (a) the planning, organisation, and steering of the project; (b) the reflection on results and learnings; (c) dialogic knowledge development; and (d) the evaluation of the participatory, collaborative learning and development process, as well as its results, learnings, products, and impacts. Importantly, as leaders and catalysts of the project in each youth home, the CoP Core Group members work on ensuring the involvement of as many Young Experts, leaders, and staff from their youth home as possible, keeping them informed and making sure that their impulses, ideas, and feedback are shared in the Core Group in a mutual exchange with the representatives of the other youth homes. Second, in each youth home, Young Experts, leaders, and staff from the homes actively collaborate as "Experts" in the project, participating, for example, in: focus groups, Young Expert exchanges, the analysis of good practice and development needs, the development and testing of concrete innovations, and the dissemination of results and learnings. Third, all remaining staff, young people, and leaders of the youth homes are "Observers". They are informed about the project and its activities and may, at any time, contribute ideas, knowledge, and feedback, or choose to become more active in a project activity as "Experts". Wenger and colleagues (2002) describe different intensities of participation as typical of a CoP.

- The project does not strive for "one solution that fits all". Each youth home has its specific reality, conditions, possibilities, limitations, challenges, and potentials. Accordingly, each youth home, involving its three actor groups, organises itself, implements the project in its own way, and creates its own innovations, guided by the general project design and

methodology, and by supportive reflection and exchange with the other youth homes as "critical friends". Importantly, each youth home documents its activities, methods, and results in order to share learnings and reflect on them with the other youth homes in the CoP.

Literature Survey

In processes of self-empowerment, people take matters into their own hands, become aware of their abilities, and learn to use their individual and collective resources to establish self-determined lives. Based on this definition, self-empowerment must be considered a prerequisite for a life led independently and sustainably. The promotion of self-empowerment of young people in the context of residential care can only take place in "co-production" between staff and youth (Herriger, 2010, pp. 16–20). A clear challenge for youth homes that promote young people's ability to "take charge of their own lives" lies in the fact that the lives of young people in residential care are, to a great extent, in the charge of others. The young people have not usually chosen to be in a youth home, nor can they determine the structure and rules of daily life and practice in the youth home.

For information on youth homes as organisations, readers may refer to Schmid and Herczeg (2018). Creating Futures embraces a systemic understanding of organisations as open and contingent entities as described in the New St. Gallen Management Model (Rüegg-Stürm, 2005), which is in common use in German-speaking countries. The model views the organisation as a whole, describing it in terms of six dimensions: environmental spheres (society, nature, technology, economy), structuring forces (strategy, structures, culture), stakeholders, processes (management processes, core processes, support processes), interaction issues (resources, norms and values, concerns and interests), and modes of development.

According to Howaldt et al. (2016),

> a social innovation is a new combination and/or a new configuration of social practices in certain areas of action or social contexts prompted by certain actors or constellations of actors in an intentional targeted manner with the goal of better satisfying or answering needs and problems than is possible on the basis of established practices. (p. 27)

Creating Futures aims to develop such innovations in the youth homes as social contexts and within the larger social context they are embedded in as well as in their specific areas of action. These innovations will better satisfy the need for promoting the self-empowerment of young people than the currently established practices do. The new combinations or configurations may concern any of the dimensions of the organisation described in the New St. Gallen Management Model (Rüegg-Stürm, 2005) mentioned above. Howaldt and colleagues (2016) pointed out that nowadays, "customers no longer serve as suppliers for information about their needs (as in traditional innovation management); they make contributions to the process of developing new products to resolve problems" (p. 27). This involvement of addressees not only helps to ensure the fit between

their wishes and needs and the innovations, it also increases the diversity of perspectives and thereby promotes innovation (Hewlett et al., 2013).

According to Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015), CoPs are groups of people brought together by a "shared domain of interest" and "competence". They "engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner. 2015. p. 2). CoPs "organize themselves, meaning they set their own agendas and establish their own leadership" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, para. 9). Members participate in a CoP to different degrees of intensity, usually either in the core of the community, in active groups, or in the community's periphery (Wenger et al., 2002). A CoP, when it works well, is a "quintessential example of a social learning space" (Wenger, 2009, p. 3). Wenger (2009) considered enabling social learning spaces, and inspiring the learning citizenship these spaces depend on, to be an art. Describing those who do so successfully, he wrote:

> Social artists tend to be collaborative. They care that people feel ownership of their learning space. They listen to others and are very good at including multiple voices. They create social containers that turn conflict into learning opportunities. They are patient with social processes. They do not seek control and are comfortable with a high level of uncertainty. They can tolerate chaos, dissension, and negotiation.… They care about making things happen. They will (gently) twist arms if need be. They will inspire people to do things these people never thought they would do and end up feeling good about doing.… Social artists help others discover new part of themselves. (p. 9)

Wenger-Trayner (2014) elaborated a framework for assessing, planning, and social learning in CoPs with the following elements:

> (1) A network [community] member participates in a network [community] activity that generates interest or excitement (immediate value); (2) This participation creates an insight, strengthens his or her [the member's] resolve or forges a new relationship (potential value); (3) The member returns home and does something with this new insight, inspiration or connection (applied value); (4) … which leads to an improvement in [practice] … (realized value); (5) It might even lead to transformation in the way business [practice] is done (transformative value). (p. 3)

Present Investigation

Module 1: Raising Knowledge

Module 1, which was implemented from January to August 2019, had the goal of gathering knowledge about self-empowerment of young people in residential care and the organisational aspects that promote it. It also saw the first months of collaboration of the CoP in the project's

now-formalised setting. Table 1 shows the main activities of Module 1 and the main topics of knowledge raised. In addition, self-designed and self-directed project activities took place in the participating youth homes throughout the module. The activities and their results are described in more detail below.

Table 1. *Main Activities of Module 1*

Activity	Topic
First binational CoP Core Group Meeting, Zurich (3 days)	Structure of the child and youth care systems in both countries, especially residential care Information and participation processes in the participating youth homes
National CoP Core Group Meeting, Budapest and Zurich (0.5 days each)	How to recognise concretely that a young person in the youth home has taken charge of their life
Young Expert Exchange, Budapest (3 days)	Characteristics of the "ideal" youth home where all young people take charge of their own lives Recommendations for other young people, leaders, and staff regarding how they can promote young people taking charge of their own lives
Focus group discussions and literature review; internal report	Organisational aspects that contribute to, or hinder, the promotion of self-empowerment of young people in residential care

CoP Core Group Meetings

Table 2 shows the composition of each CoP Core Group meeting that took place during Module 1. With a few variations, the same Core Group members participated in all CoP Meetings. All meetings were facilitated by the author and co-facilitated by two Hungarian members of the project's scientific team, both trained psychologists from one of the youth homes who also served as translators.

Table 2. *Composition of CoP Core Group Meetings*

	Young Experts		Leaders		Staff				
Core Group	HU	CH	HU	CH	HU	CH	Female	Male	Total
Binat. CoP 03/19	3	8	3	3	3	2	13	9	22
Nat. CoP HU 06/19	2	-	4	-	5	-	9	2	11
Nat. CoP CH 07/19	-	6	-	2	-	4	4	8	12

Note. HU = Hungary; CH = Switzerland.

Methods used in CoP Core Group meetings are: (a) content-based forms of exchange and getting to know each other, (b) forms of sharing and producing knowledge (e.g., presentation of project activities and results in the youth homes, joint elaboration of definitions), and (c) reflection and feedback methods (e.g., discursive joint evaluation of learnings regarding project content, process, and methodology, aggregated by youth home or by actor group, and joint elaboration of recommendations). The CoP Core Group members collaborate in the selection and design of

methods, often deciding for themselves when working on a topic which subgroups and which methods they will use.

The first binational CoP Core Group meeting in March 2019 served as the official start of the project. On the process level, the results were that CoP Core Group members had become better acquainted with each other, had learnt about the participating Swiss youth homes through visits, had had first experiences of collaborating in the formalised setting, had discussed roles and taken decisions on communication in the project, and had discussed next steps. On the level of content, the participants had increased their knowledge of the child and youth care systems in both countries and of aspects of management and coordination in each youth home.

During this meeting, some seeming imperfections turned out to be seminal for collaboration and facilitation in the CoP. In a first example, several participating leaders and staff did not want to discuss a topic that the facilitator (the author) had proposed because they felt that it had been covered sufficiently in their professional training already. Faced with a choice between insisting on the preplanned programme and passing the reins to the participants of the meeting, the facilitator came to the conclusion that the latter was appropriate to a CoP setting while the former was not, and asked the participants for their suggestions on how to proceed. The participants readily made recommendations, underlining explicitly that their criticism was meant as a constructive contribution to the success of the meeting and the project. As the meeting continued, they actively collaborated in structuring it, with good results regarding content, in an enjoyable and constructive atmosphere. Ever since, the CoP Core members' ownership of the process and practice of collaboration has never wavered. A seeming imperfection of facilitation allowed this fundamental pillar of the CoP and the project to manifest itself and, consequently, gain further strength.

A second occurrence made apparent the existence, and the value, of differences between the CoP Core Group members, their organisations, and national contexts. The participants from each youth home were asked to write down the concrete steps they would take to ensure that everybody in the youth home knew about the project and that as many people as possible would get involved. At first, with statements such as: "It's obvious how to organise this, we do this all the time and there is no need to discuss it", some participants resisted. Assuming that such processes might differ between organisations and countries in spite of these statements, the facilitator asked one of the participant groups to give a short oral description of how they usually organised such projects. One of the Hungarian groups described their process. After the first few sentences, some Swiss participants expressed astonishment, since in their youth home the process would be different. The ensuing lively discussion resulted in descriptions of five different processes, one per youth home. All processes had in common the important role of Young Experts, who would inform and motivate their peers. The discussion of these processes led to the suggestion by participants to provide each other with an overview of the child and youth care system in each of the countries. In a self-organised manner, Young Experts, staff, and leaders from each country prepared such a presentation and discussed it with their counterparts.

In the two national CoP Core Group meetings — in Budapest in June and Zurich in July — the youth homes presented and discussed project activities that had taken place since the preceding binational meeting. In each youth home, two questions had been discussed with young people and staff: "How do I recognise a person who takes charge of their own life?" and "What helps, or hinders, a young person taking charge of their own life?". The main purpose was for the youth homes to engage youth and staff in active discussions about the topic as a preparation for further internal collaboration inside each youth home. In two of the Hungarian and one of the Swiss homes, the discussions with youths were led by the home's Young Expert Core Group member. One youth home had even involved a further two youth homes in the same administrative region. In another youth home, a cork board was installed at the initiative of Young Experts and used for continued exchange on the topic. In one of the Swiss youth homes, three Young Experts and CoP Core Group members were internal project leaders involved in running and documenting activities, and had chosen for their motto a quotation from the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi: "The future depends on what you do today". In both countries, Young Experts and staff were said to have felt touched and interested by the topic and motivated to continue working on it. In several instances, Young Experts enriched discussions with pointed, thought-provoking statements; for example, in the case of one of the Swiss youth homes: "If I take charge of my own life but do something that does not fit your [staff's, society's] ideas, then you [adults] think that I am not taking charge of my own life?"

In addition, first tentative results from the focus group discussions about organisational aspects that influence the self-empowerment of young people in the youth homes were presented at the meeting by Hungarian and Swiss scientific team members and discussed by the participants.

Young Expert Exchange

The objective of the Young Expert Exchange (YEE) was to develop ideas of what an "ideal youth home where all young people take charge of their own lives" would look like, and to develop concrete recommendations for leaders, staff, and other young people regarding the contributions that these could make to such a youth home. The results would serve as a kind of compass in the continuation of the project, helping to maintain the strategic direction of the innovation process, and ensuring the focus on the young people as protagonists of their self-empowerment and personal development. The original goal of discussing the results of the focus groups and literature review with the Young Experts could not be realised due to delays in the analysis; however, since then, these discussions have been happening directly in the youth homes.

The YEE took place in July 2019 in Budapest with 21 Young Experts (11 from Hungary, 10 from Switzerland; 9 female, 12 males; 8 aged 14–17, 13 aged 18–24) from all five youth homes. Among the Young Experts were several CoP Core Group members from each country. Six staff from Switzerland and three from Hungary accompanied their participants to help facilitate the meeting and provide logistic support. Two of the Hungarian staff members, who were also members of the scientific team, were co-facilitators of the meeting along with the author, and

provided translation. The meeting lasted three days, with the Swiss group staying for an additional day to enjoy the beautiful city.

The Young Experts from the CoP Core group began the YEE with an introduction to the project and its current status. The YEE continued with discussions and presentations in groups of differing sizes and compositions, partly self-organised by the Young Experts and self-led, but with the support of the facilitators and accompanying staff of the youth homes. Creative methods were used in the discussions, such as making collages and drawings. Short, fun games supported activation and focus. The fact that all those involved stayed at the same hostel and spontaneously organised free-time evening activities together further contributed to the exchange and collaboration among the participants.

Some aspects of the "ideal youth home where all young people take charge of their own lives" named by the Hungarian participants were: team-building among the young people of the same house group; more staff, with greater resources that allow them to pay attention and show affection to young people; stricter screening and selection of staff; the leader of the youth home acting as legal guardian (rather than the state-assigned guardians often perceived as too distant); a reward system honouring young people's achievements; youth advocating for their own interests through formal youth representation in the youth homes; and opportunities for the development of artistic talent. The Swiss Young Experts mentioned, among other things, that such an "ideal" youth home would have less turnover of young people, and admittance of a new young person to a group would be undertaken jointly by staff and the young people already present. Adolescents would organise interesting excursions together and decide for themselves how long to go out in the evenings, or on which weekend they would visit their families.

Hungarian and Swiss participants sometimes differed in their recommendations. The Young Experts from Hungary more often mentioned material support (state funding for young adults, easier access to higher education, support finding a job and a place to live when leaving, etc.), and being taught practical life skills, as preconditions for self-empowerment. This may be due to their group including a higher number of young adults than the Swiss group. However, it may also reflect different conditions for residential care in the two countries, such as differences in the finances available to the youth homes and young people, or in unemployment rates.

Regarding the recommendations for how leaders, staff, and young people could contribute to such a youth home, the Young Experts from both countries directed some of their advice to all three actor groups equally. This suggests that they indeed perceive the three groups to be co-creators of daily life in the youth home. The Swiss Young Experts emphasised that leaders, staff, and young people should all be open to new things, communicate and collaborate well with each other, be motivated, never lose hope, and "create big things by taking small steps". The Hungarian Young Experts recommended team building for all three actor groups as well as a focus on affection, or "love". The Young Experts from both countries also emphasised the necessity of good relations between leaders and youth and closeness of leaders to daily practice with statements such

as: "Leaders should go to the youth home groups more and see their reality. They should reconsider the rules for living together more often."

Throughout the exchange, the Young Experts, of their own volition, discussed, and were fascinated by, differences and similarities between their countries, cultures, youth care systems, and youth homes. On the last day, the Young Experts presented their results to a larger audience in one of the Hungarian youth homes. They were impressed that, in addition to the three leaders of the Hungarian youth homes, the Director General of the Hungarian Directorate General of Social Affairs and Child Protection attended the presentation and welcomed the results of the Young Experts as being of great interest and importance. Several staff members and some young people from the Hungarian youth homes who had not gone to summer camps were also in the audience. Due to the fact that the short film (Mayer, 2017) about the exploratory 2017 YEE that took place during the project's preparation phase had been successful in promoting the project within the participating youth homes as well as in attracting project financing and presenting the project in the wider expert community, the 2019 YEE was also documented in a short film in English, Hungarian, and German (Mayer, 2019).

Focus Group Discussions and Literature Review

The goal of the focus group discussions and literature review was to explore which aspects of the organisation promote, and which hinder, the self-empowerment of young people in residential care, based on the explicit and implicit knowledge of Young Experts, leaders, and staff, and on generalised empirical knowledge retrieved from the scientific literature. These aspects would be used to define the framework of analysis in the subsequent Module Phase 2a. Focus group discussions were chosen in order to make visible the knowledge available in the participating youth homes themselves, led by the assumption that recognising the great and diverse knowledge resources already present in the three actor groups would stimulate and strengthen their ability to carry the innovation process forward.

The focus group discussions were held in the manner suggested by Krueger and Casey (2015). An interview guide was used, containing a few open subquestions to the main question, "Which organisational aspects of the youth homes promote the self-empowerment of adolescents and young adults, and which hinder it?" Young Experts, staff, and leaders participated in separate groups. The discussions lasted about 90 minutes each and were moderated in the local language by a psychologist from the scientific team in each country (in Switzerland, by the author). Participation was voluntary. A total of 13 discussions took place: one with Young Experts and one with staff in each of the five youth homes, one with all the leaders from the Hungarian youth homes, and one each with the level 1 and level 2 leaders from the Swiss homes. A total of 69 people participated. In Hungary, 10 adolescents aged 14 to 17 and 10 young adults aged 18 to 24 participated, and in Switzerland nine adolescents and five young adults; the youth comprised equal numbers of males and females.

In addition, a systematic search of the scientific literature in German and English published between 2004 and 2019 was completed in Switzerland, using the relevant scientific publication databases Web of Science, Eric, Proquest, Ovid, Fachportal Pädagogik, and Publisa, with search strings such as `((empowerment) AND ("youth home*" OR "residential care" OR "care leaver*" OR "children's home*" OR "children in care" OR "institutional care"))`. This wide search yielded only 14 texts that referred explicitly to at least parts of the question posed (see Appendix). Search strings that included the term "organisation" or subterms thereof yielded no hits whatsoever. There was even less Hungarian literature explicitly addressing the topic of empowerment in residential care; this remained true when the search was extended to project reports that had not appeared in scientific publications. The results of the review confirm that even though organisational aspects of residential care both enable and constrain empowerment, there is a paucity of literature that explicitly addresses the connections between youth empowerment in residential care, and the organisational aspects of the institutions in question. Clearly, Creating Futures is an innovative project, as it brings these topics together, producing both knowledge and the application of that knowledge in practice.

Methods of Data Analysis

The sound recordings of the focus group discussions were anonymised and transcribed. Together with the literature found, they were coded as suggested by Kuckartz & Rädliker (2019), using the software MAXQDA in a content-structuring qualitative content analysis.

Two members of the project's scientific team, Hungarian researchers from the University of Pécs, analysed the Hungarian data. They developed different subcategories from their material than did the Swiss team. This had the advantage that the thematic focuses relevant to each country became apparent but meant that the results could not be directly compared. The advantage was considered to outweigh the disadvantage, as the project's methodological focus is to use diversity for the reflection of own practice and as inspiration for new perspectives and ideas.

Results

The results of the focus group discussion and literature analysis were summarised in a 50-page internal CoP working paper in both German (Schmid et al., 2019a) and Hungarian (Schmid et al., 2019b). Rather than aiming to formulate a final answer to the question posed (an inappropriate endeavour within the constructivist and contingent paradigm of the organisation), the working paper presents the panorama of knowledge raised, structured by country and source (Young Experts, leaders, staff, literature). The results of the analyses of the focus group discussions and literature reviewed were grouped into 11 main categories and their subcategories, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Categorisation of Key Points from Focus Group Discussions and Literature Review*

Main category	Subcategory
Structural characteristics of the youth home	Location, size, structure, bureaucracy
	Structure of youth home as hindrance in itself
Sociopedagogical staff	Availability of staff
	Characteristics of staff
Education and training of staff	Expert knowledge
	Self-reflection
Staff management	
Sociopedagogical processes	Duration and termination
	Individualised, gradual, transition process
	Fit of setting
	Stability
Approaches and methods	(Self-)Empowerment through self-determination
	(Self-)Empowerment through co-production
	(Self-)Empowerment through being able to try out by oneself
	Formal education
	Promotion of professional, personal, and social skills
	Focus on strengths
	Promotion of critical thinking, independent opinion
	Individual attention to the person
	Understanding of trauma
	Time and space for reflection
	Situational application of thought models and methods
Staff attitudes	Belief in skills, potentials; “meet at eye level”
	Deficit-oriented attitude
Young people’s relationships	Family
	Peers
	Sociopedagogical staff
	Problematic relationships
	Mentors
	Network
Young people’s own resources	
Identity, roots, own life history of young people	
Further aspects	Society
	State
	Limited financial resources
	Diversity

Several findings from the focus group discussions and the literature reflected the inherent paradoxes in residential care that youth homes have to navigate continuously: structures defined by the youth home versus spaces and opportunities for youth taking charge of their own lives; youth protection versus youth empowerment; collective setting versus individualised attention; remunerated job versus a requirement for staff to have high intrinsic motivation and personal, even affective, commitment; and so on.

Since this article aims to give an overview of the project activities and results of a whole year, we will not attempt here to illustrate each category and subcategory with the rich and diverse knowledge gathered. Categories and knowledge raised were discussed in detail in the binational CoP meeting in September 2019 and continue to be discussed and further specified in the CoP Core Group and in each youth home throughout the project. In a major milestone, the CoP Core Group has used the categories to create the framework of analysis in Phase 2b of the project. In doing so, it observed that different actor groups and different youth homes set different focuses (see Table 6).

Interestingly, when the author correlated the above results with the New St. Gallen Management Model's dimensions of an organisation (Rüegg-Stürm, 2005), it became clear that the model includes several internal and external aspects of organisations that in the youth homes could potentially impact the promotion of youth's self-empowerment, yet these had barely been mentioned, or were not mentioned at all, in either the focus groups or the literature reviewed. These aspects are shown in Table 4.

Even though these aspects were not mentioned, or barely mentioned, it is likely that they, too, impact the self-empowerment of young people in youth homes. For example, a young person attempting to realise their own ideas of the future has very different opportunities in a flourishing economy and a truly inclusive society compared to a difficult economy with a high unemployment rate, or a highly prejudiced society. A youth home, therefore, must be prepared to customise its approaches and conditions in order to promote a particular young person's self-empowerment. This principle can be applied in many ways. A youth home that seeks collaboration with young people's families and other relevant parties as important stakeholders will have more opportunities to promote the self-empowerment of young people than one that does not seek such alliances. A youth home that involves young people in redesigning its mission statement or pedagogical concept will be better placed to promote young people's self-empowerment than one where young people can merely choose the colour of paint for the walls. The organisational aspects summarised in Table 4 were communicated to the CoP in the working paper, with the suggestion that the youth homes consider exploring them further in their reflections and analyses.

Table 4. *Additional Categories, Derived from the New St. Gallen Management Model*

Main category	Subcategory
Environmental spheres	Economy (e.g., jobs, apprenticeships)
	Society (aspects promoting self-empowerment, e.g., support, potentials, chances)
Stakeholders	State as lawmaker, financier, administrator/supervisor of the youth home
	Family
	Competing organisations (e.g., re: finances, staff)
	Cooperating partner organisations (school, health services providers, etc.)
	Private donors
	Media
Interaction issues between youth home and stakeholders	Norms and values (e.g., norms, values, and expectations of families or young people)
	Concerns and interests (e.g., expectations of private donors)
Processes: Management processes	Normative management (development of vision, mission, concepts, etc.)
	Strategy development, taking into account the different stakeholders and interest groups (e.g., involving the young people)
Processes: Support processes	Administrative processes (e.g., entry process of the young person into the youth home)
	Human resources processes (e.g., staff recruitment processes)
Structuring forces: Structure	Infrastructure of the youth home (single or shared bedrooms, shared living spaces, garden, sports area, etc.)
Structuring forces: Culture	Explicit and implicit cultures and subcultures in the youth home
	Young people's subcultures in the youth home
	Diversity
Organisational development modes	Optimisation (development in small steps based on past experience)
	Renewal (development in big steps, redesigning parts of the organisation, e.g., introducing a new sociopedagogical model)

At the second binational CoP Core Group meeting, described in the next section, the members received the results of the focus group discussions and literature review with great interest. Several members pointed out that it was particularly helpful to see the youth homes' own specific knowledge rather than "only" the knowledge from literature which, with its higher degree of generalisation and abstraction, they perceived as somehow more distant from their realities.

Module Phases 2a and 2b: Framework of Analysis and its Application

Held during three days in September 2019 in Pilis, Hungary, the second binational CoP Core Group meeting had the goals of (a) assessing and understanding the results of the focus group discussions and complementary literature review, thus concluding Module 1; (b) jointly creating the Framework of Analysis of Module Phase 2a; (c) kicking off Module Phase 2b, the analyses of good practice and innovation needs and potentials in the youth homes; and (d) planning the project activities to take place in 2020.

The composition of participants in the second binational CoP Core Group meeting is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *Participants in the Second Binational CoP Core Group Meeting in Hungary*

	Young Experts		Leaders		Staff				
Core group	HU	CH	HU	CH	HU	CH	Female	Male	Total
Binat. CoP 09/19	3	3	4	2	3	2	9	8	17

Note. HU = Hungary; CH = Switzerland.

The methodology of the meeting was equivalent to that of the previous meetings, albeit with a greater degree of self-organisation of the group. One group member, a social pedagogue with one of the Swiss youth homes, had designed outdoor activities to introduce and focus on some of the topics. The meeting was facilitated by the author and co-facilitated by a psychologist and a social pedagogue from one of the Hungarian youth homes, both members of the project's scientific team, who also served as translators. The two researchers from the University of Pécs were in attendance to present and discuss the results from their analysis of the Hungarian data.

Module Phase 2a saw the definition of a Framework of Analysis. This framework consists of all aspects mentioned in the working paper (including those not mentioned in the focus group discussions and literature) and, for each youth home, a subset of aspects that its CoP Core Group members chose as a starting point for their analysis of Module Phase 2b. The youth homes will further extend their basic frameworks in the implementation of their analyses.

First, each meeting participant chose those topics from the working paper that they felt had the most potential for developing innovations in their youth home that would more effectively support the self-empowerment of young people. Interestingly, the choices differed somewhat according to actor group and country, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. *Topic Choices by Actor Group and Country*

Actor group	Hungary	Switzerland
Young Expert	Relationships, network Young people's own resources Identity	Structural characteristics of the youth home Sociopedagogical staff Young people's own resources
Leader	Work, profession, finances Structure of the youth home per se hinders self-empowerment Training and education of staff	Sociopedagogical staff Leadership and management Approaches and methods, especially regarding trauma
Staff	Independence (practical life skills) Focus on the strengths of young people Relationships, network	Stability in sociopedagogical processes Promoting an understanding of trauma Believing in the abilities and possibilities of young people; interaction "at eye level"

The team from each youth home (Young Expert or Experts, leader, staff member) then agreed on the subset of aspects they would use as a starting point for their analysis, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. *Aspects Chosen by Each Team as a Starting Point for Analysis*

Youth home	Aspects for analysis
Youth home A (Hungary)	Independence (practical life skills) Relationships (especially outside the youth home, in the family) Own resources of young people (with particular focus on those who seem "undermotivated")
Youth home B (Hungary)	Independence (practical life skills); own resources of young people; identity, roots, own life history of young people; focus on strengths Relationships (family, peers, staff, mentors, network) Staff training, structure of the youth home
Youth home C (Hungary)	Independence (practical life skills) Identity, roots, own life history of young people
Youth home A (Switzerland)	Staff (availability, characteristics) Staff attitudes such as belief in the abilities and possibilities of young people Methods and approaches
Youth home B (Switzerland)	Methods and approaches, especially regarding trauma Staff: Recruit and choose suitable workers; keep them "fit" Own resources of young people, "make them shine"

The comparison between Table 6 and Table 7 shows that aspects chosen by the Young Experts were adopted by each youth home.

To start Module Phase 2b, the team from each youth home next planned a schedule and selected methods for analysing the chosen aspects to determine areas of existing good practice and areas where innovation is most needed or has the greatest potential benefit. They also planned how to involve as many Young Experts, staff, and leaders as possible. A wide range of methods was suggested, including questionnaires and group discussions. For example, three Young Experts from one Swiss youth home offered to make a short version of the 50-page working paper as a basis for the analysis.

The team from one of the Hungarian youth homes announced that they would continue involving a further two youth homes from their region, extending the project to a total of 44 house groups (raising the number of young people involved by approximately 200). Both the analyses and the creation of the first proposals for innovation would be completed by means of a competition that each house group could enter. The review board would include three Young Experts, three staff, and three leaders; entrants were to present their ideas at an open forum, and the winning house group would gain use of the youth home's vehicle for a day trip of their choice. Regarding their existing good practice, the team emphasised their active promotion of Roma language, music, and dancing in collaboration with members of the large local Roma community.

The group from another Hungarian youth home mentioned creating and using "manga" cartoons and board games to support activities related to the promotion of self-empowerment. Also, they would launch an "advocacy forum" where they would bring together authorities, youth, staff, leaders, and parents for an analysis of their good practice and their innovation needs and potentials.

The whole CoP Core Group together defined principles for the analysis phase and for the remainder of the project:

- Permanent reflection is important.
- Each and every person has something to say.
- Work on the assumption that everybody has talents, both for this project and for their lives.
- Try to involve young people who seem "unmotivated": they may have the most relevant insights to contribute.
- Use infectious ideas to attract people to collaborate in the project.
- Identify "champions" of the project among young people, staff, and leaders to help spread the project in the youth home (= potential contribution to leadership and staff development!).
- Ensure consequent leadership that stands behind the project.

The Young Experts additionally suggested:

- Involve respected Young Experts to, in turn, involve other young people as experts.

General Discussion

Evaluations regarding project goals and processes take place regularly during the project. Overall, all actor groups in the CoP have expressed that they are happy with the collaboration and the progress of the project. Comments from these evaluations are summarised in the following discussion, which is structured using Wenger-Trayner's (2014, p. 3) framework for assessing and social learning in CoPs, as described in the Literature Survey above.

A community member participates in a community activity that generates interest or excitement (immediate value): Young people, leaders, and staff in both countries have shown an impressive amount of interest and engagement in the project, which is evident in their feedback, their drive in self-directedly rolling out the project in each youth home and collaborating in the CoP, their voluntary investment of many work hours, and their energy and creativity. Some of the reasons given by the actor groups for this enthusiasm are: the fundamental relevance of self-empowerment for both young people's lives and the mission of residential care (all actor groups), "feeling good" during activities and "proud" as a participant (Young Experts), the opportunity to "make a difference" and "have an impact" (Young Experts), and the potential and hope of achieving real change (all, especially Young Experts). Among further motivators cited is the chance to meet and collaborate with "great people" from another country, and to get to know the other country and its youth care system (all, especially Young Experts). Different perspectives and roles among CoP members are considered a great resource (all), as evident in statements such as: "I can meet people, I hear different stories, I see different points of view" (Young Expert); and, "It is a great experience to have theory and practice meet around a table" (leader). "Being heard" was mentioned as important by all actor groups: "I liked that I, as an adolescent, could participate truly actively, and that I was heard" (Young Expert); "Young Experts are treated as equal partners, which is an excellent way to encourage them to cooperate fully.… At the same time, both the leaders' role and work and the importance of the youth are acknowledged in this project" (leader); "The faith in the youths, involving them on a 100% equal footing, is an unusually valuable experience for them. An experience they have mostly had the opposite of in their history" (leader); and, "In my 37 years [of working in the youth home], this was the first time that somebody asked me at all what I consider to be good or bad, and what could be done" (staff).

The participation creates an insight, strengthens the member's resolve, or forges a new relationship (potential value): As reported above in the descriptions of CoP Core Group meetings, YEE, and the focus group discussions and literature review, a wealth of insights regarding the promotion of self-empowerment was created in 2019. The focus group discussions made Swiss staff aware that, "we have meetings, but rarely do we have opportunities to go beyond our roles and the hectic everyday life, which is always about 'putting out fires', and converse with each other about important, fundamental topics" (staff). Further insights are currently being created in the analyses of good practices and development needs and potentials in the youth homes. For example, one of the Swiss youth homes has a whole corridor full of posters put together by one of their Young Experts from the CoP Core Group showing first results from all their house

groups as well as from staff. According to the CoP Core Group members, many young people and staff in the youth homes in both countries want to participate in the project. They are of the opinion that awareness of the topics of self-empowerment and participation has increased in the youth homes due to the project. The Young Experts participating in the YEE showed resolve to continue in the project, as exemplified by the statement: "Now we go back home and encourage others!" According to a Swiss leader, the project

> is a big win for the young people: to be part of an intercultural exchange, to reflect on their own situation, to be able to get away from everyday life in the youth home. The adolescents have come back from [the YEE in] Budapest and the encounters there very impressed in many ways and also a little humbled. For me/us an important legitimation for participation in the project is that especially the adolescents and young adults, profit from the project process. In this regard, I am more than positively surprised.

New relationships were forged between members from all actor groups. Hungarian Young Experts called both the Hungarian and Swiss YEE participants "fantastic people", whereas the team from a Swiss youth home has described the acquaintance with their Hungarian colleagues "heart and mind opening", "very edifying and inspiring", and their warmth "a wonderful experience for the heart". They also said "It takes a great personal calling and much *Herzblut* (literally "heart blood", i.e., passion) to do social work in Hungary; it is valuable to feel this", and it "inspires appreciation and humility for all [the resources] we have [in Switzerland]".

The member returns home and does something with this new insight, inspiration, or connection (applied value): This element is in itself part of the project design. Beyond the directly project-related activities, CoP members have done, and are doing, a range of things that have been inspired by the project. A staff member from a Swiss youth home confirmed that: "In daily life in the group, we think much more often about self-empowerment now. When we do something, what does it mean for the self-empowerment of the young people?" Hungarian participants stated: "A new way of looking at things has emerged, which helps us to reflect together with the young people that we care for". A Young Expert from Hungary reported that, due to the project, many more young people in the youth homes now want to learn English. Swiss staff spoke of youths' "great gains in social learning and empathy". A group leader from Hungary reported that, together with the other group leaders, she has started conversations with staff and not only adolescents but also younger children about "taking charge of one's own life". Among Young Experts and staff in both countries, several persons are particularly active, showing leadership regarding the project. A Hungarian Young Expert has drawn inspiration from the project for his bachelor's thesis in social pedagogy about "dreams of young people in residential care" and has brought impulses from it to the project. According to the three actor groups from one Swiss youth home, Creating Futures as a joint project "at eye level" between staff and youths is a big gain and strengthens relationships.

… Which leads to an improvement in practice (realized value): This element is also part of the project design, especially in the upcoming Module Phase 2c, when it will be assessed. Some seeds have already been planted. For example, new formats have been established for involving young people and obtaining their input and feedback in the youth homes, and the two Swiss youth homes are planning to include the learnings from Module 1 in their upcoming revisions of concepts.

As the Young Experts stated at the YEE: "It is a breakthrough that we are all here, and that the topic is important to all of us. The project is a breakthrough in itself". Module 1 and Module Phase 2a were completed successfully in 2019, Module Phase 2b has started and is being maintained despite the hindrances of the COVID-19 pandemic. At least once a week, a CoP member from one country or the other contacts the author with the assurance that motivation for the project is still high. Challenges remain. A good online collaboration platform is still needed. The concept of capturing the innovation process must be refined. The knowledge raised must be kept alive in constant application to and feedback from practice. Good ways must be found to increase involvement among those young people who seem to be "less motivated" or have "more difficulties" as their success will ultimately be the most meaningful reflection on the project. The logistics for the binational meetings are complex and labour intensive. Working in three languages is a challenge, but the CoP gets better and better at it. At the time of writing, it is five years since the first encounter of the initial Hungarian and Swiss partners. The developments of 2019 described in this article are the fruit of the engagement and voluntary collaboration of a diverse CoP of many people striving for common goals. It is a great privilege and joy to serve this Community of Practice for which the author is deeply grateful.

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Appendix

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