



IFS Conference 22-26 May 2012

Workshop : Youth Exchange Models

Good morning,

First of all I want to thank you for your invitation. I work for the French Federation of Social Centres and Social and Cultural Centres, the FCSF which has no real English equivalent but is similar to what is called community centres. I will, during my presentation use the French direct translation : Social and Cultural centre since I'll be referring to the French practice . I am in charge of the follow up and network support, particularly in the field of cultural action, fight against discriminations and the opening to the international sector. The FCSF has appointed me to participate to these sessions and has asked me to greet all the IFS members.

The French Federation of Social Centres, FCSF, is committed in the years to come to mobilise other voluntary members or employees of our network to participate in either conferences such as this one or in partnerships of international projects.

You have asked me to speak about European Youth projects in Social Centres. I feel more entitled to speak to you about our national work guidelines, how international action is broached and the impact it has on youth action.

I propose to structure my intervention around the following points:

- 1.Short presentation of social or community centres
- 2.How youth action is put into practice
- 3.International action or practice
- 4.My own experience of Youth European projects in a Social or Community Centre.

Presentation of social centres of the FCSF

Brief historical facts

Social or Community Centres were born in England at the end of the 19th century, and became quite numerous in France at the beginning of the 20th century. They stem from social work or charity work which considered that workers had to organise themselves locally in order to take their life in their own hands.

The Community Centre's Federation or French Federation of Socio Cultural Centres (FCSF is the abbreviation) was created In 1922 during an international congress. The Federation was then considered of community utility in 1931 and received later its official accreditation becoming thus an entity of community education.

The State's engagement led to the development of socio-cultural centres after 1945. Their experience, their location at the heart of everyday spaces and environments, their local management and their practice of networking has led them to be gradually considered as actors acknowledged by public entities.

In 1971 The Family Allowance Fund (Caisse d'Allocations Familiales) decided to entitle them to a subsidy for their functioning called "a service funding benefit", later in 1984, a bill fixes the conditions for accreditation of socio cultural centres by the local Family Allowance Fund.

Since then, all centres creation is accredited on the basis of a three year social project contract, which is periodically renewed and evaluated.

In the year 2000, the FCSF adopted a Charter of federated social and socio cultural centres which links their action and public expression to 3 founding values: human dignity, solidarity and democracy.

Inhabitant's participation: the essence itself of Social Centre Projects

Inhabitant's whether as members, administrators or partners, participate to the life of their neighbourhood and to social development. They are the best placed to act and consider the changes they wish for their neighbourhood, becoming actors of their own evolution.

Inhabitant's participation in activities of socio-cultural centres can take various forms. They can engage in the different activities proposed such as homework assistance, organisation of the sector's or neighbourhood's party, organisation of exhibitions etc. They can also engage in the definition and implementation of projects of professional integration or entering the work market, fight against discriminations, access to housing....

Each community centre or socio-cultural centre proposes actions most suited to the environment they are in, leisure activities, educational activities, cultural practice workshops, financial and family counselling, vocational training, directed to the population of a given sector as a whole, children, youth, adults senior citizens....

These centres foster a better quality "of living together", the inter-generation link as well as the inter-cultural dimension.

Community centres or Cultural Centres are located both in urban and rural areas, and have varying sizes ranging from 2 to 3 employees to more than a 100 employees.

The missions of the French Federation of Social and Socio-Cultural Centres (FCSF)

- Communication with public bodies, partners, local deputies, public in general concerning the specificity of the participative project of socio cultural centres, as well as the wealth and variety of their networking.
- To support the development of federations and existing centres and accompany the creation of new social centres, or federations.
- Vocational training and qualification for network actors, employees and volunteers.
- To develop political strategies and prospecting concerning the future of social and socio cultural centres.

The network of Federated Social Centres in numbers.

Around 2000 social centres approved by the Family Allowance Fund, 1050 structures are members of the French Federation of Socio Cultural Centres; either through 44 federations or county or regional unions, or directly when no local federation exists.

80% of these centres are administered by an association, the rest are administered by the Town Council or by the Family Allowance Fund.

This network represents more than 30.000 employees and 60.000 volunteers.

The FCSF is administered by an Executive Council made up of 36 persons, a team of 14 employees carry out the follow up of various sectors: cultural action, ageing, youth in civil service, family holidays, training of volunteers and professionals, communication, access to media etc.

How is youth action put into practise

Youth action varies according to the centres and territories, teams and community or socio cultural projects. Actions include sport and culture , holiday programmes, with socio cultural professional organisers, prevention and education activities with social workers, job training activities with vocational trainers.

Young people's participation was a weak point.

Acting on member's request; the French Federation of Social Centres (FCSF) launched a National workshop on education in 2009, with the strong desire to question the educational dimension of activities carried out by social centres. At the outset, the question of the educational specificity was at the centre of workshops, little by little the question of youth came to occupy the chore of exchanges and debates. Thus in October 2010 a work group presented a National Strategic Youth Plan, concerning the capacity to act or participate of children and young people, .

These guidelines were confirmed in 2011

–With a documentary about youth in social or community centres highlighting the different dimensions of youth action in the social centres (portrayed on the FCSF's web site)

–The launching of a national bench test: The network of Young Groups of Social Centres

–The French Federation of Social Centres' (FCSF) implication at the centre of the programme of Junior Associations.

–Contact with the National Family Allowance Fund (CNAF) concerning a bench test or experimentation on adolescents

What is the Network Youth Teams of Social Centres?

Various facts led to this bench test: many centres receive young people, mainly through activities proposed. Some go further proposing project support, but it mainly consists of self financing projects for holidays trips. We wanted to go even further. How could we do more than self centred projects in order render benefit to the whole community ?

We are convinced that young people can engage on projects of common interest, provided they are given the opportunity; that we change our perception of them ; that we stop considering them as a source of problems and rather as a resource.

We are carrying out an experiment or bench testing since 2011 concerning at the moment about ten centres in France. These centres are already working with this dimension of youth engagement or wish to develop it. This experiment should give them the opportunity of testing methodological tools we have prepared together. This experience is the opportunity to enact the three values of the Charter of Social Centres: A democratic procedure which respects everyone's opinions and wishes in solidarity projects . These tools propose a methodology centred on group dynamics.

The idea consists in organizing once a year a get together of all the youths in these teams. We consider that getting together young people of different horizons, giving them the opportunity of exchanging their worries, their wishes and their ideas will lead to a thread which will be the driving force of their commitment. A first national encounter of around a hundred young people who will constitute these first teams took place in February 2012 in Ile de France, a second encounter will take place in the autumn 2012.

b)Junior Associations

Junior Association gives under 18 year old youths, the opportunity of organising themselves in a

dynamics of an association and to practise between peers democratic organisation and citizenship. The National Network of Junior Associations proposes an accreditation valid for a school year and it can be renewed.

There is no need to fill in an accreditation at the prefecture (or official authorities): The National Network of Junior Associations (RNJA) provides the legal framework necessary which enables young people to be actors of a collective project . The National Network of Juniors Associations also proposes a follow up, through networking with all Junior associations.

The FCSF is a founding member and partner to this network together with four other federations of community education (cf the brochure in English).

The international sector

The existence of the international sector of the French Federation of Social Centres, FCSF, is more than ten years old, it has nevertheless been suspended during difficult times in the life of the federation. Various periods in federal experience up until 2010 have given the opportunity to discover a whole diversity of initiatives around the European and International dimension carried out by centres or federations in the framework of social development projects and the participation of inhabitants.

These projects are carried out with the support of European programmes in which all our associations are as yet not yet well acquainted and familiar with, although these programmes give the possibility of having an impact on social problems which are the everyday activity of centres and inhabitants such as for example: an approach to ageing, sustainable development, fight against discriminations, social imbalance, educational questions...

Many of our associations have a know- how concerning the drafting of projects of proximity or vicinity and beyond borders partnerships, supporting participative and civic minded approaches, linguistic and inter cultural learning...which deserve to be known and acknowledged in order to affect public policies.

We must underline the curiosity, but also the obstacles or objections which arise within our network : **This is not for us, How do we go about it? What impact does it have on our local situation? On people's lives? Which linguistic learning?**

All these differences,resources and needs have led the French Federation of Social Centers , FCSF, to direct its action towards an awareness rising of the network, training, informal educational practice exchange (Grundtvig), and the support of European projects which need the collaboration of various regions. I will give you two examples: the experiment of a training-action programme, and the Young Ambassador's programme 2011. In this context I had the opportunity to go to New York and meet our colleagues of the IFS.

a) The Training-Action cycle

During 2011 five modules took place in four regions of France based on the practice and partnerships of employees and volunteers of centres and federations.

This Training-Action cycle was proposed to federations wanting to support and counsel the centres in their network in the elaboration of European or International actions within the framework of projects of associations which in turn have people ready to act as relays or multipliers.

This training experimentation led to the constitution of a group of reference persons or resource persons for Centers and the local Federation, whose function has to be still defined with their association and depending the local federal context.

It gave participants the possibility:

- . To get a grasp on the way of integrating the European dimension as well as inter-cultural learning in actions led by Social Centers.
- . To be acquainted with existing mechanisms, their practical functioning in the service of actions led by Social Centers
- . To support Centers or Federations in the drafting of projects
- . To contribute eliminating obstacles to European and International mobility
- . To share and pool practices.

All the results and tools have been put on line in a platform called RECCO, and is at your disposal upon demand (USB Key). Participants met again two days in February 2012 to carry out an evaluation report and perspectives of regional and national initiatives. They now participate in a national working group, one of the missions is to consider how the European dimension can be integrated in the programme of the congress in June 2013. Another task is to regularly pool progress on work carried out at regional and national level.

b) Programme Young ambassadors 2011

The Embassy of the United States launched a programme called "Young Ambassadors" , in 2009 L'Agence Nationale de Cohesion Sociale or National department for National Cohesion (ACSE) joined in. Both entities, two years later, have decided to carry out an evaluation of the programme's practical aspect in order to achieve more impact and efficiency and they called upon the French Federation of Social Centres (FCSF) to do this in 2011.

Brief reminder of the goals:

- . To encourage associations' commitment by through the elaboration of a project.
- . To encourage associative leadership by spotting young people motivated by associative commitment.
- . To encourage international mobility for youths through an experience of associative volunteer ship in the United States.
- . To ensure functions of representation overseas.

The programme concerns 29 participants from 5 regions - Age : 16 to 18

An institutional and inter associative body has been formed : A National Steering Committee, participants are: The National Agency for Social Cohesion (ACSE), the Embassy of the United States, The FSCF, an inter regional coordination, a member of the DRJCS of Rhone Alpes (Regional State Department for Youth and Sports) in contact with the National Department for Social Cohesion (ACSE), a group of correspondents of the FCSF network of the regions participating: Bouche du Rhone, Nord, Île de France, Rhone-Alpes, Aquitaine.

The FCSF has appointed two employees (a project manager and a federal assistant) to the whole of the project which includes, choosing young people for that year, a three days training session in July, the stay in Autumn.

Two leaders have participated in the preparation and training and the stay, a leader made available by a Social Center from the Nord department or province, and a mission was entrusted to a former

executive of the network.

The stay took place from the 22nd of October to the 6th of November 2011

The first week was devoted to the visit and exchanges with Washington representatives of institutions and associations (State Department, Court of Justice, Embassy of France, Americorps, ARCH Development Corporation, EEOC (Equal employment Opportunity Commission), Community Relation Services, Chamber of Deputies...all this sprinkled with cultural outings.

The second week, Youths and staff were immersed in everyday American culture, they were distributed in two schools, Columbia Heights Educational Campus in Washington DC and Coppin State University in Baltimore, and were housed with families.

What we learnt from this experience

Goals concerning young people were generally achieved. They discovered commitment, they ensured roles of young ambassadors even though some were a bit too young. They went through a strong and rich inter-cultural experience which will leave an imprint in their future life. They have a clearer vision of inter-cultural, militant questions, on the role of civil society, of French and American institutions, but above all, they are aware the role they can play in the fight against discriminations, in favour of a more just and solidary society. Now it's up to them!

Partnership relationships were nevertheless very complex, even difficult, probably due to the nature of professional cultures, the diversity of territories, people's personalities...

This project has demanded the FCSF team and local correspondents an enormous amount of energy the whole year round, but it reaffirms the quality of support measures of youth initiatives and our network's solidarity.

In agreement with ACSE, the French federation of Social Centres will not renew its participation in the same way. We remain at the disposal of regions participating and local correspondents, concerning follow up of youth projects after the stay.

We prefer to devote our energy to the service of the network and the national sector as well as for other non governmental(ONG) networks at international scale.

My own experience of European Youth Projects

I will illustrate this last point from my own experience and my knowledge of the network. Before occupying the post of delegate of the FCSF, I was at the head of a social centre, and carried out international experiences for more than ten years.

Our European partners and ourselves have stated the existence of a deficit in youth's commitment, a lack of consideration by adults, lack of perspectives and the wish to do something on behalf of young people in difficult social environments. After various experiences with European projects (PJA/OFAJ/Inter-reg), hosting and sending SVE? We have been able to measure project's impact on youth, the group, the territory... on citizen's commitment.

Together with two partners in Spain (Cuenca) and Germany (Bad Wurtenberg) we have imagined a tri-national training programme for young volunteers of our associations. The training took place in three cycles; a week of basic training, a practice during an international stay, a more in depth training and the possibility of obtaining three certificates of volunteer leadership: Juleica, for the German part, BAFA the French certificate (study certificate for leaders) and a module of the Spanish diploma Monitor del Tiempo libre (Leisure Time or Activities Leader).

This cycle took place for various years and has led to the creation of a youth network who have been camp counsellors or leaders during tri-national holiday camps and youth thematic stays.

The last experience with these volunteers took place in 2008 : the organisation of a symposium with the representation of 18 countries, three youths per country, staff and activities solely carried out by young people. We were two adults , we had a role as counsellors in case of need. The goal of this encounter was the creation of an international network of young people in order to promote young people's initiatives, fighting against racism and xenophobia, to foster inter-cultural learning and dialogue between generations, a better knowledge of the European dimension etc. For some years young participants have continued to communicate and carry out projects with various partnerships.

As a conclusion I want to say that a great number of Social Centres are already engaged in Youth European projects. As a general rule, the first experience is the most difficult to grasp, but once this has been done others follow quite naturally.

For this reason at national level, we privilege the awareness raising, communication, training and networking axe.

I am at your disposal for those who might want to develop a partnership with social centres.

Thank You for your attention.

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