

Study Visit Vietnam

1. General Info

Dates: 22 March 2017 - 12 April 2017

Participants:

Veroniki Krikoni - Inter Alia

Saloum Bodian - Federation Dimbaya Kangalen

Minh Duc Do - SJ Vietnam

Mong Linh An - SJ Vietnam

Venues: Hanoi, with short visits (day trips) to other provinces as Hai Duong, Nam Dinh and Ha Nam.

2. Field Research (Interviews)

The team conducted interviews with **10 youth workers, 3 small-medium entrepreneurs and 4 policy-makers**. The interviewees were mostly Vietnamese people, with the exception of an Italian youth worker acting as volunteer for SJ Vietnam for a period of 6 months. Most of the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese language with the interpretation facilitation by Minh Duc Do and Mong Linh An. We interviewed not only professionals but also volunteers who are acting as youth workers and leaders of youth clubs.

Below, the various findings from the field research on different levels:

Youth work is well established and developed in Vietnam, both at state level (with distinct youth policies and laws) and within the education system with specialized trainings in order to become a youth worker. There are two ways to become a youth worker and practice the profession:

- a. through an official, formal path which is through the Academy of Youngsters and the particular courses in the school and universities depending on the major and the orientation of the students;
- b. in a non-formal way, through personal experience and learning by doing.

The main concern of a youth worker is to constantly enhance his skills, be updated about the youngsters' needs and improve their knowledge. The different methods to get trained as youth worker depend on where one lives and the possibilities that he has in his province, district, community or remote area. There are several vocational centres or specialised training centres, such as the South Youth Centre and the Hanoi Youth Assistance and Development Centre. Furthermore, the two official state departments of Youth Work, the Youth Union and the Hanoi Department of Education, are organizing often various activities that enhance the skills of youth workers. However, it is interesting to mention that young people who act as youth workers via volunteerism in their University Youth Clubs are not aware of the official ways that exist for getting trained as youth workers.

Youth work in Vietnam is closely related to the need of young people to acquire practical skills in order to improve their living conditions, to better integrate into the society and to increase their professional options and perspectives.

In the society all activities organised for youngsters are closely connected with their community integration and socio-economic insertion, the promotion of social work and youngsters' personal

development. Special attention is paid to youngsters that live in remote areas and / or disabled children. In general, the support to youngsters focuses on:

- a. young people ranging from 18-35 years old;
- b. teenagers (school students); and
- c. children.

In specific, youth work is connected to the job market. Major difficulty for youngsters in Vietnam is that they have a lot of theoretical knowledge gained through their studies at the University, while they lack practical experience, leaving a gap between the academic world and the labour market which needs to be reduced. This is also the reason why in Vietnam there is a great effort both by the state and the civil society to promote volunteerism and involve as many youngsters as possible. Through volunteerism in different youth organisations or small and medium size enterprises the youngsters discover their abilities and learn about the socio-cultural values which allow them afterwards to be recruited by job centres, enterprises, and factories.

Volunteerism and social entrepreneurship are closely related and play a key role for the promotion of youth work in Vietnam. Most of the young people who volunteer to a social enterprise afterwards have increased chances to get employed by them. Many foreign volunteers work in the social enterprises too, while English learning becomes all the more an important priority for youngsters. Thus, we can say that the social enterprises play a significant role in the skills development of young people in Vietnam.

In particular, the social enterprises we had the chance to visit, had a special focus on recruiting people with fewer opportunities. They have well-established partnerships with international or local youth organizations that could provide them with international and local volunteers for running the business. The benefits from this practice are multiple:

- a. The youngsters develop practical skills, while increasing their chances for a better positioning on the labor market;
- b. The enterprises gain advantage from the interchange of experiences between international volunteers and local professionals;
- c. Vietnamese social and economic stability is empowered;
- d. Start-ups are enhanced;
- e. Full use of sustainable development is made.

Nevertheless, it is an important finding that civil society organizations often have more flexible working structures in comparison to the state institutions which makes it easier for them to establish cooperation with international organisations and benefit from working with young people from other countries. On the contrary, the government offices seem to have more conservative structures which makes it complicated for them to cooperate with international organisations and this is why they mostly focus on local level activities and community development.

Networking with local organizations and use of all government official channels of communication (radio, TV, community speakers) are the two most powerful tools to attract youngsters and promote youth work in Vietnam. Online (social media, mass media, fan page) and offline tools (posters, banners, activities and workshops) play a secondary role in the promotion of youth work.

For the youth workers in Vietnam leadership, counselling and management are among the major skills that define them as professionals. In some provinces and specifically when working within the Youth Union Departments financial and time management are additional necessary skills as well as the ability to create working plans for the lower levels of administration. The know-how to design and organise activities along with communication skills and knowledge of modern teaching methods are central to the youth work. Lastly, most of the youth workers emphasised the need to act as a role model for the youngsters and their future orientation and development.

To sum up, all the interviewees could provide a clear and almost identical answer on the definition of youth work. However, they all pointed a very particular aspect of Vietnam which is to educate and orient the youngsters to adapt to the requirements of the Vietnamese society. It is important for the youth workers in Vietnam to understand, guide and educate young people according to the political mission of the communist party. So, even though they all agree that the mind and the needs of youngsters in all the world are quite similar, yet it is important to keep in mind that the differences between the definition of youth work in different countries depends on the working and socio-political conditions.

In turn, this affects the design and development of the youth policies. In Vietnam there is a distinct youth policy coming from the Government. There is the Law for Youngsters, the law for youth policies as well as resolutions for the development of young generations.

The law is unitary and all the policies are updated by the Central Government. The Directions come from the Assembly of the Government. In this top down approach the law first goes to the Youth Unions and the National Committee of Youngsters. Then, it is disseminated to the provinces and feedback is asked from all representatives. Youth Union has 8 centres that all follow the same strategy and give feedback to the National Youth Union which is responsible to produce a report that will present to the Central Government a common line between the departments.

There is a very clear distinction between the General Law for Youngsters and the Individual youth policies inside the Youth Unions. The former defines strictly the rights and the duties, while the latter aims to give orientation to youngsters and create activities that will improve their soft skills. The Youth Unions have specific policies for youngsters and the various charts have their own focus on the youth problems and youth development (defined as 16 – 30 years old), always based on the general rules and ultimately approved by the functional office of Vietnam.

In this process, there is a concrete and strong top down hierarchy from the State to the Province to the Commune and finally to the Smaller Units. This in turn means, on the one hand, that the Smaller Units have no saying in the decision making process, opposite to the upper levels that seem to feel they are having a more significant involvement in the decision making process. However, the Smaller Units have the power to define and decide on the local activities and youth policies inside their units under the condition that they respect the general law.

On the other hand, the upper levels of the Youth Unions aim at integrating the local needs within the general law. The local Youth Union leader can add parts in the law in order to specialise it, however the Central Government pays close attention and should always approve of any change or integration of different and/or new policies.

However, even though the policies are distinct for the law for youngsters and tend to follow the local needs, they do not present a significant diversity and there are small changes between the various departments and provinces. Also, when it comes to the Youth Unions inside the universities, it seems that the representatives are not involved in the decision making process. They can only

participate in the design of their own distinct policies that aim to improve the soft skills of the youngsters through local activities.

Youngsters are also indirectly involved in the decision making process, given that the National Youth Union organizes every year a training seminar for youngsters, where they have the opportunity to contribute on the definition of their needs regarding the youth law. The focus about youngsters' needs is mostly on their economic development and their support for jobs and start-ups.

Most of the interviewees agreed that the law must be developed and focus on finding best international practices which will be applied in Vietnam according to its societal needs. Also, it has been highlighted that there is a need to apply better methods of promotion so as more youngsters to be involved and be aware of the youth law. It is crucial that more and more people will understand and accept the law through greater interaction which will allow the policy makers to keep up with the modern lifestyle, yet respecting and promoting the tradition of the country.

3. Local Event

During the Study visit in Vietnam, a local event was organized in collaboration with the hosting organisation SJ Vietnam and the partner organisations Inter Alia and Federation Dimbaya Kagnalen. The event was held at the Foreign Trade University, one of the most prestigious universities in Hanoi. On this occasion more than 80 students attended it. It was given a presentation of the values of volunteerism and youth work as well as the opportunities for Vietnamese youngsters to go abroad under the Erasmus+ Programme. Also, the work of the participating organisations (SJ Vietnam, Inter Alia, and Federation Dimbaya Kagnalen) and the participating countries (Greece and Senegal) were presented.

4. Job Shadowing

The participants visited and observed the work of SJ Vietnam and other organisations. In particular, the study visit team had the opportunity to learn how they empower youth and how they actively and essentially offer to the society and some vulnerable groups through social entrepreneurship.

SJ Vietnam

The "Mission Responsible" partner SJ Vietnam works for the promotion of volunteerism in Vietnam, which started being used as a term in 2004. SJ Vietnam hosts volunteers, holds work camps and other activities that aim at improving the living conditions of marginalised and vulnerable groups. They work closely with local, national and international partners, local and international volunteers and community stakeholders. The first initiative of SJ Vietnam was the opening of a youth centre in Hanoi for the poor children of the "Fisher Village" (a term invented in order to avoid using "homeless people") where they are taught English and mathematics. It also supports in kind and economically local community centres that work with vulnerable groups (for example the disabled children centre in Hanoi).

"Phuc Tae" Centre for Disabled Children

The Phuc Tae Centre is a self-owned and self-run centre that hosts 90 disabled children of different ages and different disabilities (autism, handicapped, light mental disorders). The Centre was founded in 2011 with the mission to recover mental health, teach and guide disabled children to suitable jobs,

help them to build self-confidence and learn how to be more independent in their everyday life. The actual evidence of being independent is the success story of the centre. It has poor infrastructures and limited finances and this is why they appeal to volunteers, while they depend on social innovators' companies' economic support and families' donations.

Hagar – the whole journey

Hagar is a Swiss-based organisation, with international action against human trafficking, sexual abuse and domestic violence against women and children. They run programmes in Cambodia, Vietnam and Afghanistan and they offer vocational trainings to the vulnerable individuals as well as housing and psychological support until they recover and are ready to live independently in the society. They undertake tailor-made activities according to the needs of each person. After their hosting in the shelter, Hagar keeps helping these people with finding a job and house. Besides, they organise Capacity Building Activities in order to raise awareness about trafficking in the countryside of the mountainous areas of Vietnam. Their successful action lies in their strategy to involve the local community in their work and to establish a strong network of partners with local organisations and authorities that makes it possible to approach the local victims and gain their trust. Their financial resources are not connected with their in-field activities. They cooperate with six supporting offices in Europe that do only fundraising for Hagar.

Dao's CARE

Dao's CARE is a social enterprise that promotes massage techniques and therapeutic treatments of the Red Dao people, an ethnic minority in the Sapa Mountains of Vietnam. Dao's CARE has established a social business model where all services offered contribute positively to the lives of others. They have established two partner collaborations: one with SapaNapro, a community-owned social enterprise with more than 100 shareholders; and one with Blink Link social enterprise which provides training and employment opportunities to blind people. Five blind people work now in Dao's CARE. This business model is fully sustainable.

Khac Centre

Khac Centre is a social enterprise that provides informal education to children by organising trips in remote areas of Vietnam, urging them to explore the nature in some agricultural areas and in the mountains. In addition, children gain practical knowledge on how different communities cohabitate in real life. Khac Centre's initiative draws from a gap in the Vietnamese society where education is very theoretical and the parents often choose indoor activities for their children, restricting them from their complete development. The main brand strategy focuses on collaboration with partners from an international network. For the local people it is more difficult to understand the importance of this initiative. The success story of the centre is the involvement of the locals in the activities.

Haiduong Continuing Educational Centre

This Centre is a state organization and functions as a night school under the auspices of Ministry of Education¹. The Centre provides a campus for the students that live far away as well as a guest house for the teachers. They have four main activities:

- Classes for students who have not finished high school;
- Training for government officers;
- Training for private companies depending on their needs;

¹ In the contrary, the schools of second chance in Vietnam belong to the Ministry of Labour.

- Class for children's orientation, encouragement and personal development.

5. Cultural Learning

During the study visit in Vietnam the working team had the chance to get in contact with the Vietnamese culture and to enjoy the landscape, also in the countryside. In particular, we discovered Hanoi city: the Hanoi old quarter, the temple of literature (which was the first university in Vietnam), Bat Trang ceramic village as well as some historical places and museums. We also visited Ha Long bay, which is a natural world heritage site, impressing with its beauty. Besides, we visited some SJ Vietnam's project sites in different provinces outside Hanoi, such as Hai Duong city, Nam Dinh city, Ha Nam province, where we got an insight of the living conditions and the Vietnam society that no tourists could have ever done.

For more information about the Study Visit in Vietnam ask Veroniki Krikoni:
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