

NEW CHALLENGES FOR NORDIC WELFARE SERVICES: *Emerging Cultural Diversity in Finnish Youth Work*

Abstract

This article summarises the results of a two-phase research project, which concentrated on leisure practices of ethnic minority youth and their expectations on multicultural youth services. The question is how youth work as “cultureless” principles of Nordic welfare universalism function in contemporary social conditions. Have youth workers and administrative authorities adopted multicultural demands of increasing ethnic diversity? The case of Finland is taken as a special example. The analysis of the data is based on a survey and thematic interviews. The current culturally diverse reality is seen as leading to new youth work practices, but this happens slowly and is disturbed by resistant attitudes.

Keywords

Youth work • welfare services • multiculturalism • equality • universalism

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1 Introduction

In Finland, the social services for young people have developed together with the wider Nordic welfare model, and are based on wide, principally equal access to the welfare services organised by the public sector. This advancement has leant on nation-state ideology, having universalism as its socio-political ideal (see Ahponen 2008; Anttonen *et al.* 2012; cf. Lister 2003; Phillips 2007)¹. Youth work has developed with the normative welfare strategy in the frames of larger social and cultural policy. The ideology behind youth work supports strengthening civic mentality: growing up as citizens of a mono-cultural nation-state. Universalistic principles, into which the Nordic welfare model was based for advancing social equality by means of social policy (see Esping-Andersen 1990; Julkunen 2006), suggest that the whole population has the same kind of cultural and religious backgrounds and needs in the national frames. However, in the multiethnic conditions of post-colonialism, uniform practices become insufficient and cultural diversity is now manifested as a challenge, obstacle or problem for the welfare distribution of the citizens (e.g. Ålund 1991; Heywood 2007; Keskinen *et al.* 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012).

Finland is an example of a society where the so-called problems of citizens' multiple backgrounds have been only recently discussed and noted. The emergence of transnational challenges has a dependency on the rapidly increasing number of immigrants in a country that was relatively closed for a considerable time and inwardly oriented. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the expansion of the European Union, Finland remained culturally relatively

isolated. Now the situation is changing: whereas the number of the foreign born nationals was 64,922 in 1990 (1.3% of the population), it was 248,135 in 2010 (4.6% of the population) (Statistics Finland 2011). This has resulted in a considerable increase of different ethnic minorities² within the social landscape influenced by consequences of globalisation.

Nordic youth research has focused on ethnic and cultural diversity as phenomena of everyday life, formal education, working life, sports and youth cultures (see Harinen *et al.* 2005; Vestel 2004; Sernhede 2007). The social and political surroundings of organised youth work, however, have remained relatively unexplored in the academic fields thus far. Group activities and co-existence at school, in the labour market and in fields of sports are often toned by competitiveness, which leads to different social hierarchies among those who are included and excluded. Ethnic diversity forms one focal dimension in the creation of these hierarchies (Gordon *et al.* 2000; Souto 2011; Wrede & Nordberg 2010; Zacheus *et al.* 2012).

We sum up the results of a two-phase research project concerning youth work and leisure in a rapidly changing society: *Multicultural youth, leisure and participation in civil society* (2006–2007) and *Changing civil society: Multiculturalism, young people and the Finnish civic culture* (2008–2010). The project concentrated on leisure practices and expectations of ethnic minority (mainly immigrant) youth³, as well as on multicultural policies of youth service providers in municipalities and youth associations⁴. This article aims at explicating how youth work as a part of welfare services proceeds

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in ethnically and culturally heterogeneous surroundings. First, we ask what kind of perspectives towards cultural diversity and ethnic minority youth there are among youth workers and youth work authorities. Second, we ask whether the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity is resulting in new practices and activities in youth work. Third, we question how the principles of equality are influencing youth work within the conditions of an emerging multiethnicity. We also consider how the sphere of youth work and the evaluation of its services tackle the question of the young generation being more and more heterogeneous when it comes to ethnic and social backgrounds of the participants of civic activities.

2 Welfare state universalism and multiculturalism

The tradition of Nordic welfare policies has been universalistic oriented rather than paying attention to the particularities of cultural differences (Anttonen *et al.* 2012). The turn to diversity is seen to cast a challenge to the Nordic welfare policy because cultural demands for equal rights of immigrants have been “a blind spot” (Siim 2013: 615–628). The fundamental principle of public services, motivating also the development of youth policy, has been to provide the same services for all. There has been a strong belief that the universalistic welfare policy principle guarantees a certain level of equality for all citizens, at least the equality of opportunities for struggling on fair positions in society. From the perspective of eliminating the socioeconomic impacts of income differences, this strategy was considered as more or less successful in the conditions of (imagined) cultural homogeneity of the post-war welfare state between the 1940s and 1980s (Kettunen 2001).

The expansion of immigration and cultural diversity since the 1990s introduced the major pitfall of the traditional welfare model in the Finnish society: As far as problems of equality were considered as mainly socially inclusive issues, they were not interpreted in cultural terms; in other words, as based on ethnic, lingual or religious differences. Consequently, there were neither special services available for minorities nor mechanisms to encourage or invite newcomers to existing services and no quotas in service organisations or consulting organisations for people belonging to minorities. Hence, discrimination and cultural obstacles for both newcomers and even for some citizens who represent ethnic minority groups (e.g. the Roma and Sami people) were left without acknowledgement (Pfau-Effinger 2005). Only recently, implementation of practices to improve their discriminated situation has taken place, and at least partly because of EU regulations.

Along with increasing cultural diversity, the needs of young people inevitably become more manifold. Universalistic policies, based on the equality of needs, may not recognise minority perspectives and inequalities in potential resources of participants. Differences in language skills and ethnicity-related socioeconomic cleavages lead to inequalities in service usage. It has thus been claimed that a universalistic stance eventually reverts to the perspectives of the national majority (Runfors 2009).

A governmental shift toward selective universalism in welfare services leads to application of diverse and particular practices and means (e.g. Carmel & Papadopoulos 2009). Multiculturalism and post-colonialism are widely discussed recently in the Nordic welfare context also (e.g. Alghasi *et al.* 2009; Keskinen *et al.* 2009). Recognition of the problems of welfare universalism has often led to a small-scale particularism – to an idea that there is a special

need for consideration of minorities in policies and public service production (cf. Modood 2007). This aspect enables minorities to maintain their own cultural features (*ibid.*). Examples of efforts towards particularism in the Finnish multicultural politics and policies are: 1) Integration Law for newcomers with an introduction of services which are usable for them; 2) Special legislation for Sami people and their culture; 3) Municipal service centres for immigrants and refugees; and 4) Special funding for associations or individuals with migration backgrounds. It is, however, noteworthy that in youth policy the principles of particularism have become formalised mainly in programmes and strategies but not in practical actions (Kivijärvi & Harinen 2008). The ideal of equality of differences is problematic to put into practice (Ahponen 2008: 134).

There is a difference between the terms multicultural as an adjective and multiculturalism as a noun. Multicultural practices do not always refer to multiculturalism as a liberal political ideology, which is used in controversial ways (Modood 2007; Stevenson 2003: 47–54). In this article, “multiculturalism” refers to policies where ethnic and cultural diversity are regulated, recognised, valued and promoted (Hall 2000). Multicultural policies challenge the existing universalistic principles in the public services. In other words, in this context, multiculturalism is not only defined as an essential state of things (ethnic/cultural diversity in a particular territory) but as a political aim with transforming practices.

Young people’s leisure arenas can offer a sphere of life where multicultural dialogue develops (Parekh 2000: 341–343; Kymlicka 2001: 311–312). The goal of multicultural youth work is to diminish inequalities based on cultural and ethnic backgrounds of and in participant groups, to develop anti-discriminatory working methods for welfare services, to recognise rights of different minority groups and to create platforms for interethnic and intersectional dialogues. These elements are explicit in the political-normative documents regulating youth policies (the Finnish Youth Act 72/2006; the Child and Youth Policy Programme 2012–2015).

Our interest lies in the everyday reality of youth work, and particularly how and with what implications multiculturalism as a political strategy challenges the reality and conventions of the hidden agenda of youth work. Youth work is a fruitful empirical context for testing the scrutiny of multicultural policies. Being an arena of voluntary activities, it is a loosely regulated welfare sector as compared with the formal education and social work, and its possibilities in creating new action methods are more open than those of other welfare institutions (Komonen *et al.* 2012: 10).

3 The context and data of the enquiry

Youth work is characteristically coordinated by governmental institutions and organised by municipalities in Finland. Being included in the welfare policy, it has both civilian and institutional targets, like other cultural political domains, in order to strengthen the readiness of citizens to contribute to society (Ahponen 2009). Although municipalities are financed by the state, they are the ones that put services into practice, and legally they have strong independency in local decision-making. Throughout its history, municipal youth work has been justified with arguments of the welfare support it provides for its young clients (Cederlöf 1998: 10). Young people participating in youth work activities are not just customers who choose welfare services – they are future citizens to be educated towards active citizenship. The ideological base of youth work throughout its history has leaned on the discourses of citizenship and civic education for young people.

Besides a wide public sector, Nordic societies have a long cultural tradition and history of CSOs (civil society organisations) as channels for shared interests and their manifestation. They distribute services and encourage “civilising missions” among young people (Konttinen 1999; Pyykkönen 2007a; Siisiäinen 1989). In the Nordic welfare states, the CSOs’ relationship with public power has been politically close, co-operative and mainly harmonious. In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture offers significant financial support to organisations dealing with youth issues and having young members. One current aim is to support leisure activities of youth organisations that promote multiculturalism and active citizenship. The strong bond between civil society and the state also emphasises that municipalities and some regional actors have been significant financiers of local youth associations. Traditionally, municipalities have produced basic, legislation-bound youth services, and CSOs have produced supplementary services, such as hobby and afternoon clubs. However, a growing part of municipal youth work is currently executed by CSOs due to the recent trend in the outsourcing of public services. Thus, CSOs today form an important sector for welfare services.

Concretely, municipal and organisational youth work includes activities such as youth houses with “open doors”, targeted group gatherings (e.g., for girls and vulnerable young people), workshops promoting youth employment, clubs supporting schoolwork, outreach work, counselling services and hobby clubs. One quite clear difference between these sectors is that municipalities usually hire educated youth work professionals but the activities in youth CSOs often lean on voluntary youth leaders. However, both sectors have emphasised the universalistic service policy in which the participation in activities are, in principle, equally open for all (Honkasalo *et al.* 2007: 31–34; Pyykkönen 2007a: 31).

The data for our analyses are drawn from the fields of youth work provided by Finnish municipalities and organisations. We treat the empirical context of the article as an example of Nordic welfare services trying to face the ethnic and cultural diversity of the clients. More exactly, the article is based on the following research data collected in 2006–2007.

1) *A nation-wide survey (e-questionnaire) among public servants* (n = 226) being in charge of municipal youth work. The questionnaire consisted of questions and statements concerning, e.g., cultural backgrounds of youth work organisers and participants in respondents’ municipalities, considerations of the importance of supporting interethnic dialogue among local youth, issues that make the execution of multicultural policies challenging, and how cultural diversity and discrimination have been considered when activities have been planned. The respondents were mainly leaders or managers – not people working predominantly with young people. The study aimed to reach the strategic level of youth work in municipalities and investigate how cultural diversity is seen among those responsible for directing the principal lines of action.

2) *A nation-wide survey (e-questionnaire) among CSOs arranging youth leisure activities* (n = 146). These organisations have a history of providing socially inclusive and equalising leisure activities for young people. They have governmental support and acceptance in terms of finance and guidance from the Ministry of Education and Culture. The respondents were organisational workers or activists (chairs, secretaries, coordinators) who represent different associational fields (political youth associations, religious associations, cultural associations, etc.). Third sector actors providing services for youth (among other groups) such as sport associations and parishes as well as those associations established

solely for immigrants were excluded from the sample as they are not part of the Ministry’s classification of youth CSOs. In all, 75% of the CSO respondents represented small or middle size organisations on the Finnish scale (membership < 5,000). They answered almost the same questions as the municipal respondents. Because of structural differences between the CSO and municipal sectors (e.g. how they are administratively organised), the various questionnaires included some different terminologies.

3) *Interview data collected from 83 youth workers*. Interviews were conducted during gatherings with youth workers who try to put in practice the general guidelines and strategies of municipal youth work. These data consist of both individual and group interviews from the 10 biggest cities in Finland. Most of these are located in the southern and western regions of the country, which means an exclusion of northern and eastern parts of the country from the data. This is, however, justifiable as people with ethnic minority backgrounds often settle in the largest towns (Ministry of Interior 2010: 4). A total of 57 female and 26 male interviewees participated in these interviews – almost all of them belonging to the national majority population.

The analysis has been both quantitative and qualitative. The survey data include two separate data corpuses, and although we present their numbers concurrently, no statistical comparisons between municipalities and CSOs are made. Instead, these data are analysed by means of non-parametric and descriptive analysis to give a general picture of multicultural policies in youth work. The interview data have been analysed through extensive content analysis. Notions from these data are used either to illuminate empirical experiences of individual actors or to open up a contradictory view to the picture presented by the quantitative data. In this article, we have distinguished authentic quotations from the qualitative data with italics.

Finally, the research methodologies of the project in the background of this article were based on “a generational comparison”. Questions and statements in surveys and youth workers’ interviews have been composed by resorting to the results of our earlier survey (n = 1,385) and interviews (n = 39) having ethnic minority youth as informants⁵. According to these previous analyses, the main obstacles in participating in multicultural youth work services are the prejudices of native youth and youth workers as well as a lack of information concerning local leisure services. Regardless of the obstacles, many of the young informants were eager to participate in municipal youth work activities and promote their interests through the channels of CSOs. Furthermore, most of the young respondents and interviewees did not hope for targeted activities for migrant youth but rather joint pursuits and anti-racist stances (Harinen *et al.* 2009; Harinen *et al.* 2012). In this article, we look at the view of youth work organisers and how they respond to the issues highlighted by ethnic minority youth.

4 Ethnic minority participants in youth work

To begin with the analysis of the data, we focus on numbers of different participants in the youth work activities. Particularly in the urban milieus, local populations become ethnically and culturally manifold. Does this lead to heterogeneous communities that gather, interact and act together?

Attention has been recently paid to the ethnic dimensions of inequality of participation in Finland. Even though ethnic diversity is present in young people’s everyday life concretely at school or on

Table 1. Multicultural figure of youth work participants

Actors/participants	Municipal youth work ("yes")	Youth organizations ("yes")
Native youth in target groups	100%	100%
Youth workers with a Finnish background	100%	100%
Ethnic minority youth in target groups	42%	53.5%
Youth workers with an ethnic minority background	7%	– ^a
Youth workers specialized in issues of multiculturalism	0.3%	19.5%
Youth workers who have been offered education concerning demands of multicultural action	27%	38%

^aThe questionnaire for youth organizations did not include a direct question concerning the ethnic background of youth workers. When reading this table, it is obvious to note that the variable categories are not exclusive; youth clubs, for example, can have both native background workers and workers with minority backgrounds. Thus, the sums of columns need not be 100.

streets, multiethnic co-existence in youth groups is often challenging and efforts contain local tensions (Harinen *et al.* 2005; Perho 2010; Souto 2011).

Although multicultural equality has been recently highlighted at the strategic level in social and educational services, and also in youth work, the youth workers we interviewed repeated a consideration based on their everyday work: it is difficult to support group activities that tempt both majority and minority youth to shared activities. Overall, the difficulty of reaching out to ethnic minority youth can be seen in our questionnaire data. Less than half of the municipal youth services and just over half of the CSOs have ethnic minority youth as participants in their activities (Table 1).

One explicit aim of multiculturalism is inclusion – a process where mutual changes in attitudes are needed among both newcomers and natives, so that multiethnic co-existence, co-operation and friendships can become actualised (Modood 2007). It is noteworthy that the numbers of ethnic minority youth presented in Table 1 include young people who mainly participated in the activities offered to immigrant youth only but did not participate in shared activities with the majority youth. Thus, the percentages presented here do not exactly express cross-ethnic gatherings in youth work activities. Many municipalities (more than 30% in our survey) organise leisure activities particularly for immigrants. However, considering our interview data, it seems likely that many group activities originally planned to be multiethnic, in fact, turn into “immigrants-only” gatherings. In other words, the presence of ethnic minority participants seems often to implicate the absence of majority youth.

Table 1 contains nation-wide figures. A comparison between different localities shows that multiethnic gatherings among CSOs’ youth work are more common in smaller towns than in larger ones. The CSO respondents from the biggest cities reported a relatively low volume of ethnic minority memberships, although the ethnic minority population very much lives within the few large-scale urban areas of Finland. This result may be a consequence of a new trend in the third sector; in big cities, immigrants have actively founded their own associations (Pyykkönen 2007b). Other possible explanations can be found among our previous data collected from ethnic minority youth; in bigger cities, many favour to “hang out” in less organised and commercial spaces than the youth in smaller locales, having more leisure opportunities to choose from. Finally, it might be that in rural areas, small-numbered minorities have to orientate themselves

towards the majority population because their “own” groups do not offer wide enough social circles (Mouw & Entwisle 2006).

In the municipal sector, the comparison between different localities gives contrary results. Especially, municipal youth club services in big cities tempt ethnic minority youth more effectively than in smaller places. This trend correlates to local, formal service policies: in big cities, cultural diversity has been considered more systematically than in smaller cities or towns, for example, within formal multicultural working strategies and goal-oriented programmes (Honkasalo *et al.* 2007; Honkasalo & Kivijärvi 2011). In some rare cases, small municipalities can also orchestrate fresh practices and a commitment to multicultural policies – if only devoted youth workers were available.

Youth work arenas are not just spaces for young people and the composition of adult youth workers should also be considered. Table 1 shows that only a small proportion of municipalities hired youth workers whose national backgrounds were non-Finnish. These workers could however encourage ethnic minority youth to participate in local activities and also act as bridges to civic communities (Harinen *et al.* 2001). Our interviews, in turn, highlight both the workers’ wishes and their perspective on the issue: for youth workers, a multiethnic work community could create prerequisites for professional peer support and on-the-job-learning, where multicultural policies are developed and organised (Honkasalo *et al.* 2007: 14–15).

CSOs can organise different employment possibilities than those offered by municipalities. This fact has consequences on the ethnic background of their workforce. Even 92% of the CSO informants of our study mentioned that the work in their associations widely leans on the shoulders of voluntary workers. On one hand, this can open space for communicating with ethnic diversity: In CSOs, the main criterion for workers is not formal education, which still seems to be much more accessible for majority representatives than for ethnic minority citizens (Harinen & Sabour 2014). On the other hand, this non-professionalism can implicate a looseness of guidance and a lack of updating education concerning the issues of cultural diversity. Table 1 shows however that in Finland, this is not the case: CSOs organise and offer updating education to their activists more systematically than can be found in municipal youth services – maybe because they have no formal professional education for their tasks to lean on. The readiness to apply new practices is a special challenge for their work.

Table 2. Questionnaire of respondents' ideas about the nature of multicultural youth work

Statement: <i>Multicultural youth work supply is:</i>	Municipal youth work ("agree")	Youth organizations ("agree")
...important but difficult to organize	35%	28.5%
...work done with immigrant youth only	10.2%	4.5%
...done in order to support youth's civic competencies	83%	89%
...needed only for promoting the integration of immigrants to their new host society	12%	13.5%
...to pay attention to a manifold, general variety of young people	69.5%	74%

5 Multiculturalism: a strategy and practice of youth work

The main aims of the research projects *Multicultural youth, leisure and participation in civil society* and *Changing civil society: Multiculturalism, young people and the Finnish civic culture* were socio-political and practical. Their purpose was to map out and find a means to develop working methods that enhanced ethnicity-based equality and interethnic dialogue in youth work. Thus, the basic question presented to the informants was: What guidelines, contents and dimensions make youth leisure services and activities multicultural, from the points of view of participants and organisers? (see Honkasalo *et al.* 2007).

When seeking answers to this, the qualitative and quantitative data reveal different information. The quantitative data served to outline the general policy lines, whilst the qualitative data revealed the reality of everyday practices⁶. Concrete practices advancing multiculturalism are rare and it is typical that multiculturalism is not a topical issue in municipalities and CSOs working in localities not inhabited by immigrants. Table 2 presents a selection from the data drawn from the two questionnaires. An important notion is that these figures inform about the general ideas and attitudes of youth work suppliers – not about everyday practices or even experiences that arise from lived experiences of youth workers. Many questionnaire respondents were managers, secretaries or other officials who are responsible for general and administrative lines of services, and mundane problems and successes can be distant from such positions. We can see a wide gap between the administrative staff and field workers, as the survey respondents were often unaware of everyday practices and offered activities.

The general attitudes presented by the survey informants of both municipal and CSO sectors were mainly positive towards ethnic minority youth and multicultural policies. According to them, the participation of ethnic minority youth in joint leisure activities should be supported, and multiethnicity was not greeted with neglect or prejudice. The figures in Table 2 construct a quite open-minded picture of multicultural work, what comes to the respondents' general attitudes. Besides stressing multiethnic compositions of group activities, a considerable proportion of informants want to pay attention to a manifold variety of people as well as emphasise that their task is to raise young people to become tolerant and highly integrated citizens. When comparing these figures with our qualitative data, we note that this open-minded attitude comes out rather as a loose orientation, and not as a tight, longitudinal stance with systematic strategies that guide all action and is not dependent

on the presence or quantity of minority participants. Everyday connections and a concrete touch to youth work that were seen in our qualitative data, however, often challenge multiculturalism as a new culture and strategic orientation: "*in this small place there are so few immigrants, it'd be just stupid to make a multicultural strategy first and then begin to wait for a multicultural client*".

The analysis of the interview data, as well as the open-ended notions drawn from questionnaires, shows that among youth workers a usual way to approach the question of what makes youth's leisure activities multicultural is to monitor the "degree" of ethnic diversity in activities offered, and especially to evaluate the number of immigrant participants (cf. Kivijärvi 2010). Thus, in spite of our survey results that highlight the general importance of multiculturalism as a political perspective, concrete practices are easily reduced as a matter that does not concern the majority population (cf. Joppke & Morawska 2003: 12). This becomes obvious in the expressions seen in the qualitative data such as: "*we don't need to pay attention to multiculturalism as we've no immigrant participants in our supply*" or "*multiculturalism causes no problems for us as our youth are Finns only*".

It seems that the traditional universalistic principle of welfare services is still guiding the Finnish youth work reality, especially at the municipally organised level of action (Peltola 2010). This premise is strongly present in the interview data, through expressions like "*in youth work, we put all in the same line*" or "*multicultural children and youth are Finns for us, we aim at inclusion in each issue – the less there are such prefixes in our services as 'special', the better*".

Conventional understanding of universalism and social equality to cover citizen rights on the basis of similarity, as well as attaching multicultural policies to the presence of immigrants, are probable reasons why multicultural action strategies are difficult to make practices in many municipalities. The absence of strategic thinking and management can be seen especially at the administrative level of public sector youth work: only nine municipalities (0.4%) in our research stated having an explicit strategy of multiculturalism for their youth work. Among CSOs, the equivalent amount is somewhat higher (10%). These cases were, however, more usual in big cities than in small towns or villages – a fact which correlates with the uneven distribution of ethnic minority people in different areas. Furthermore, multilingual information concerning local leisure possibilities as well as youth workers' personal contacts with immigrant families, co-operation with multiethnic school classes or immigrant organisations or reception centres was uncommon in the data.

The loose connection between multiculturalism as an ideology and practical youth work services implies conditions in which the

planning and realisation of multiculturalism are often defined as a responsibility of certain workers. They have been recognised as people declaring the importance of multiculturalism and are ready to work for their ideals without sparing personal efforts. Both the quantitative and qualitative data of our analysis suggest that multiculturalism as a concrete working policy and orientation often narrows to “special” activities for “special” youth done by “special” workers. These few workers seem to have burdensome position as they have to create new practices among changing everyday surroundings and without any wide organisational support (Kivijärvi 2010: 207–209).

Our informants explained the lack of practices supporting multiculturalism mostly by referring to the scarcity of resources. Besides, many organisations providing youth activities consider multiculturalism loosely and as a part of their international work⁷. Multicultural issues in CSOs are seen to come up in making international contacts and providing international awareness training. This goal is in line with the general political atmosphere in Finland but contains no ideas of how to turn these principles into action in the local leisure spheres of youth. Also, in localities where there are immigrant associations, other associations seem to consider the issue of multiculturalism as “*a business that does not touch us*”.

As youth organisations very often evolve around some special pursuit and hobby, the CSO actors of our survey widely shared an idea that this joint interest is enough to create a communal gathering where the participants’ backgrounds lose their disjunctive meaning. In some ways, the CSO respondents’ stance is in line with that of ethnic minority youth: they do not wish to organise separate activities for migrants or for youth representing “foreign” cultures but want youth with different backgrounds to join in their activities – this was mentioned as an aim of 78% of CSOs in our survey (cf. Harinen *et al.* 2012). Many of the CSOs behind this attitude were organised around some hobby (bird watching, folk dance, drone clubs, etc.). In spite of this widely shared belief, studies on sports also indicate that a common interest or goals do not always lead to the collapse of ethnic boundaries (Elling *et al.* 2001; Walseth 2008). Moreover, in some cases, “intra-ethnic” groups can be important for ethnic minority youth, for example in the sense of leaving space for cultural expression, guaranteeing reciprocal trust (Spaaij 2012) and functioning as a stepping stone toward the majority’s organised clubs (Zacheus *et al.* 2012).

6 Open doors versus participation obstacles

The pattern of general openness of youth work action at municipal and CSO levels seems to be ignoring the informal psychological and social participation obstacles from the perspective of ethnic minority youth that can take place in almost invisible ways and exclude, for example, those defined as different ones. As the leisure field in the overall society is wide and its local applications are manifold, for a newcomer it is also difficult to access enough information or to become familiar with potential leisure possibilities. For example, the lack of face-to-face contacts and multilingual briefing is a significant barrier for the participation of minorities in youth work today. This notion was also confirmed by ethnic minority youth who reported that for them, the “grapevine” is the main source of leisure service information (Harinen *et al.* 2009; Harinen *et al.* 2012).

An open-door policy raises doubts or even reluctance towards “positive discrimination” and targeted forms of youth work. Young people are seen as individuals or clients of services rather than

members of distinct, yet possibly underprivileged groups. This means that at both municipal and CSO levels, youth work is seen as a culturally neutral service space, where participation of everyone is equally possible (cf. Modood 2007: 18–30). However, the general openness and a neutral stance easily disregard the existing group divisions, exclusions and inequalities between young people. For example, youth clubs gather somewhat homogenous crews of young people and particularly in big cities, they tend to be divided into separate clubs for “foreigners” and “natives” (Honkasalo *et al.* 2011). In spite of the open-door policies, a significant part of the questionnaire respondents in this analysis recognised many obstacles to the participation of ethnic minority youth. These obstacles are presented in Table 3.

The figures in Table 3 allude to the notion that CSO respondents recognise fewer obstacles than their colleagues in the municipal sector. The difference in numbers can partly be explained through missing cases: the rates of missing cases here extended from 16 to 18% in the municipal data, and from 25 to 30% in the CSO data. Particularly, respondents from big organisations skipped statements concerning participation obstacles – probably because their working tasks consisted mainly of administrative duties and their contact with the everyday field of youth work was thin. Otherwise, the views of CSO and municipal respondents were quite congruent. The main obstacles according to respondents are attached either to a demarcation between different groups of youth, or a lack of societal knowledge on the part of immigrant youths and their parents. The respondents have also been self-critical: youth workers’ lack of cultural knowledge concerning immigrants or inadequate information delivery was notable participation obstacles.

When scrutinising the differences between CSO and municipal sectors, there are only two statements more frequently agreed by CSO representatives: youth workers lack of (multi)cultural knowledge and the fact that offered activities are not differentiated according to gender. The interpretation could be that CSO respondents consider ethnic minority youth more determined by their cultural backgrounds than representatives of municipalities. Municipal officials, in turn, explained the absence of ethnic minority youth rather by general prejudices of both the majority youth and ethnic minority youth themselves.

The interviewees were congruent with the quantitative data: the absence of ethnic minority youth was explained by the notion that often certain groups of young people “take over” youth clubs and restrict participation of others. This is often done by an informal creation of a hostile and excluding social atmosphere, either with verbal insulting or with non-verbal condescension. Furthermore, more cultural explanations were given for occasions where the reason for the scant presence of ethnic minority and Muslim girls was pinpointed towards their allegedly traditional parents (cf. Honkasalo 2011). At the same time, explanations of interviewees were often rather mundane. For them, the low proportion of ethnic minorities in offered activities seems to be determined by chance, as free willing and choosing young people often just randomly find their ways as clients of youth work services. This also meant that the interviewees spoke a lot about young people’s own fault: “the general ignorance” of youth keeps them far from provided services.

The young informants of our previous analysis (Harinen *et al.* 2009; Harinen *et al.* 2012) raised racism and cultural biases as the main topics of discussion when obstacles for collective leisure participation were placed under scrutiny. Still, many actors in the organisations and associations of our CSO survey (61%) liked to avoid “ugly words”⁸ and did not mention racism as an enemy to

Table 3. Participation obstacles

Obstacles for participation of multicultural youth in shared activities	Municipal youth work ("agree")	Youth organizations ("agree")
Youth's own cultural 'cliques'	48%	40%
Immigrant parents' lack of knowledge of Finnish society	39%	26%
Youth worker's lack of multicultural knowledge	27%	30%
Immigrant young peoples' lack of knowledge of Finnish youth work	28%	27%
Prejudices of the native youth	35%	19%
Lack of multilingual information concerning offered activities	26%	25%
Prejudices of ethnic minority youth towards Finnish youth	25%	14%
Religious principles of ethnic minority youth	24%	13%
Lack of youth workers interested and committed in multicultural work	19%	14%
Ethnic minority youth's prejudiced views on Finnish youth work	17%	10%
Negative attitudes of immigrant parents towards offered activities	18%	8%
The fact that offered activities are not differentiated by gender	9%	11%
The fact that ethnic minority youth see youth workers as prejudiced towards them	9%	6%

joined gatherings. Instead, they were willing to speak about cultural tolerance as a new educative task for CSOs. Also an anti-racist stance was neglected. However, racism was still acknowledged as a general problem disturbing shared youth activities, and most of the organisation actors of our survey (68%) seem to continuously end up battling against it. For organisations having explicit anti-racist strategies and campaigns (only 10% in our survey), this battling implied efforts to actively influence young people's conceptions and prejudices.

When comparing further the perspectives of ethnic minority youth and the mostly majority adults of this survey, one significant contradiction arises. The main obstacle of participation according to minority youth was that (majority) young people and youth workers are seen as being prejudiced (Harinen *et al.* 2009). However, the prejudices of the majority representatives were not conceded as a significant problem in the data of youth workers. Moreover, youth workers stressed conflicts and racist attitudes of ethnic minority youth towards other minorities and the majority youth as well. These differing perspectives seem to mean that intergenerational dialogue, commonly shared anti-racist policies and practices and investments in multicultural communities are required to overcome these problems.

7 Discussion

In youth's lives, approving peer communities form a significant frame of reference for cultural identification. Loneliness and exclusion from peer networks usually lead to bitter feelings of externality (Harinen 2008). At its best, youth work can create arenas for social inclusion of different people. Our analysis shows that this task has been recognised by actors offering and organising youth services but there is still a long way to go before the goal is achieved.

According to our results, actors from municipalities and CSOs providing youth work services in a culturally diversifying welfare society consider multiculturalism as an important ideological aspect of contemporary youth work. These actors also see themselves in an important position at the front of a new societal task. One special mission they recognise is to promote capacities of ethnic minority youth for active citizenship, and to support circumstances for civic inclusion and equal membership in society. However, the informants of our studies share a consideration that ethnic differentiation in local leisure groups creates tensions in concrete youth work environments. Optimistic discourses of multiculturalism are quite rare in connection with aims of full citizen rights.

A clear majority of youth service organisers see young people with ethnic minority backgrounds as a special target group for youth work. However, this approach mainly remains on the level of a general remark. Only a minority of youth service providers have organised special practices to actively get minority youth involved in their leisure services. This contradiction between principles and practices is explained firstly by a lack of resources and the difficulties in bringing young people with different backgrounds together. Secondly, it gets its justifications from the universalistic "normal-service principle", which means that selective universalism is applied. Municipal youth services and youth organisations see open-for-all practices as the most functional and equal, aiming at integrating "newcomers" to the prevailing conditions.

Positive discrimination in forms of special services for some cultural groups or immigrants, or multilingual communications, is not yet appreciated. This reflects the Nordic welfare tradition: services are defined as equal when no distinctive socio-cultural group is paid any special attention. The Equality Act of Finland (21/2004) talks about, for example, "indirect exclusion" and "demands of special treatments", but their applications in everyday services are still rarely implemented.

Multiculturalism, particularly in the municipal youth work, seems to be something that becomes actualised and necessary only with “foreign” people, difference, deviance and otherness. Multiculturalism is often seen as a futile ideology until “strangers” enter a youth club. This can be a challenge for including those young people who try to be recognised in the changing societal and cultural environment. Multicultural questions concern not only the minority young people, but the field of youth work as a whole and anti-discriminatory practices should be promoted among all young people and youth work professionals as well. As their best, multicultural policies lead to multiethnic co-existence and solidarities. The success of this striving, however, depends on conscious reflection and clear strategic orientation in promoting multicultural working methods.

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Notes

1. Formal education forms an exception to this principle as special education has turned into a strong institution of its own in the Finnish welfare society.
2. The amount of foreign-born population is still small when compared with most European countries and even to other Nordic countries.
3. With *ethnic minority youth*, we refer here to young people who or whose parent or parents have an immigrant background. Russian, Estonian, Swedish and Somali people form the biggest and most visible ethnic minorities in Finland (Statistic Finland 2011).
4. In the research project, those central youth organisations (and their regional and local associations) were included, which gained general subsidies from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Due to the definition of the MEC, this classification of CSOs consists of political youth organisations, youth interest groups, youth cultural and hobby organisations, religious youth organisations, sub-teen organisations, youth work service organisations, and other youth organisations. This use of a readymade classification leaves out many civic instances of organising youth work, such as parishes and sports associations. The difference, however, is that all actions of the organisations included in the classification we have used are targeted at youth and children.
5. The research project began with a survey investigating multicultural young people's leisure practices, their participation possibilities and hopes concerning shared activities. A total of 1385 questionnaire responses were received from different parts of Finland from young people between 13 and 25 years of age. After that, 39 interviewees were selected among those respondents and individual thematic interviews were conducted as a second stage of the project.
6. We can certainly ask as to what extent the survey data are toned by aspirations to answer in a ‘correct’ way in order to give a positive picture of youth work as a profession carried out by competent professionals.
7. In the Finnish youth work ‘internationalism’ usually means intra-European exchange programmes (e.g. European voluntary service) or reciprocal group visits (e.g. camps) with different European countries.
8. In Finland, where the general tendency is to create an image of a modern, multicultural society with international capabilities, discussion around racism has become embarrassing, as it has connotations to a culturally closed, ‘old-fashioned’ society.

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