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Master's Degree Program in
Community Development and Conflict Resolution
Master of Social Services
Thesis, 2020

“I HOPE I CAN BE MYSELF”

Voices of young people in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia



ABSTRACT

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76 p., 3 appendices

November, 2020

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The aim of this master's thesis was to explore the young people's experiences of youth diaconia in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia and to listen to young people's ideas and visions on how youth diaconia could be developed. The purpose was to understand how the young people have perceived and experienced youth diaconia, what they may have learned or gained and what kind of impact youth diaconia have had on their lives. Moreover, the purpose was to understand how youth diaconia could be developed from the perspective of marginalized young people and to understand what the relevant issues or topics are for youth. In this way participation of young people can be increased in developing youth diaconia.

The last 30 years have included major shifts and transition times as well as one crisis following another in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict and migration are topics that have been and continue to be topical globally as well as in Central and Eastern Europe and in Central Asia.

This master's thesis was conducted together with International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action, Central and Eastern Europe (interdiac). The theoretical framework introduces three earlier research approaches relevant in youth diaconia: positive youth development, social inclusion and empowerment. This thesis was based on qualitative research methodology and the research was carried out through a content analysis. The material for the content analysis was gathered through individual and focus group interviews.

The performed content analysis presents three top categories linking together the experiences of the young people in the different countries: acceptance, social inclusion and being empowered. In addition, the content analysis suggests three top categories that capture the improvement and development ideas of the young people: supporting orphans and street-connected young people, building understanding between young people and adults and the churches and supporting young people in social inclusion.

Keywords: young people, marginalised people, social work of the church, diaconia, social exclusion, social inclusion, empowerment, content analysis

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1 INTRODUCTION

The World Youth Report on “Youth and the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development” (United Nations 2018) highlights the importance of engaging youth in sustainable development efforts to achieve sustainable, inclusive and stable societies. The report underlines several global threats and challenges that hinder sustainable development. Examples of these threats and challenges are unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict and migration.

Unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict and migration are issues that are topical also in Central and Eastern Europe and in Central Asia. The recent history of the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia have consisted of changes which some are still prevalent. The childhood and adolescence of the youth in this region have been influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transition time of the social system, the financial crisis in 2008 and now as the latest crisis the COVID-19 pandemic. On top of these changes and to some extent because of them there have been a lot of migration and some conflicts in the region.

The societal changes and crisis have influenced the developmental environment of youth both on the macrolevel of the societies for example through the societal structures and availability and substance of social services, as well as through the microlevels of the societies through the relationships in families. Although there has been positive development and successful achievements in the transition period, there are also evidence that some segments of the population in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia still experience social exclusion (UNDP 2011, i). Adolescents are however a heterogeneous group and therefore also the resilience and support systems of youth vary. Youth programs and policies can support social inclusion and the individual development of youth. The World Youth Report suggests that focusing e.g. on education, employment and empowerment youth development can be achieved (United Nations 2018).

Diaconia work of local Christian denominations in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia are possible actors in increasing social inclusion, participation and the

empowerment of especially marginalized youth in the region. The marginalization and disadvantageous circumstances are shown in young people's lives for example as homelessness, rough sleeping and street-connected life, unemployment or underemployment, difficulties in schools, substance abuse. This is also shown as unequal treatment and discrimination because of social status or ethnicity in the societal institutions, as well as deprived opportunities in life.

This master's thesis is conducted together with International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action, Central and Eastern Europe (interdiac). Interdiac together with its partner organizations have presented a need for youth research specifically in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Interdiac's partner organizations have realized the importance of youth diaconia with marginalized young people. Thus, the purpose of this master's thesis is to explore marginalized young people's experiences on youth diaconia in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia as well as to present the young people's thoughts and visions on developing youth diaconia for marginalized young people. The first research question of the thesis is: What are the young people's experiences of youth diaconia that they have been part of? The second research question is: What kind of ideas and visions do the young people have to develop and improve youth diaconia for marginalized young people? The research is carried out through a content analysis based on individual and focus group interviews with young people. The findings of this master's thesis will be utilized by interdiac and its partner organizations in the development of youth diaconia with marginalized young people.

There is little research on the impacts and practices of youth diaconia in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Interdiac aims at increasing the research to benefit the development of local diaconia. Relevant for this thesis is to understand how the individual-context relationships impact on youth and their development. On a general level youth work and youth development have been researched for example from a human developmental perspective. Lerner and Lerner have researched how positive youth development is achieved and how it affects participation, learning and relationships. Youth diaconia can potentially increase social inclusion and empowerment. Social exclusion and inclusion have been researched by United Nations Development Programme suggesting efforts to increase inclusion. Empowerment is a central concept in diaconia and it has been researched e.g. by Addy.

2 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

This thesis is part of a research project carried out by the International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action, Central and Eastern Europe (interdiac). Interdiac is a network of organizations focusing on and developing diaconia and social action in Central and Eastern Europe and in Central Asia. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak) was part of the foundation of interdiac together with Silesian Diaconia and Helsinki Deaconess Institute in 2008. Currently interdiac has three research projects researching diaconia and social action in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia and this thesis is part of the research which focuses on marginalized young people.

2.1 International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action (interdiac)

Interdiac is a non-profit educational organization with the purpose to promote learning, networking, and research and development for diaconia and social action in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and a few Central Asian countries. Interdiac as an organization is a learning community for Christian social action and living in conviviality. (interdiac. About us. Introduction.) Conviviality can be summed as the ambition and striving of a community to live with diversity. (Addy 2013.) Interdiac's values are based on Christianity.

Interdiac works through a network of 15 partner organizations, two founding organizations and Diak as the university program supporter as presented in picture 1. Interdiac aims at developing educational programs that meet the need of the region for the development of knowledge and skills for diaconia and social action. It works through networking and therefore the research topics are chosen, and the education and development projects are organized in collaboration with the partner organizations to ensure that education is relevant for the specific regions. (interdiac. About us. Introduction.)



PICTURE 1 Map of interdiac's partner organizations (interdiac. Regional focus.)

The training programs and research in interdiac focuses on safeguarding and promoting the human dignity, seeking conviviality, emphasizing people as the subject of social, diaconal and community development, influencing social change, working for a society with diversity and fighting against social exclusion. When interdiac was founded, the emphasis was on education through workshops, seminars and in publishing learning materials for practitioners of diaconia and social action. The workshops and seminars aimed at a more comprehensive understanding in diaconia in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The perspective of interdiac's programs is both on institutional and congregational diaconia. (interdiac. About us. Introduction.)

In the years 2015 and 2016 the need for research rose. The executive board stressed in 2016 that for the purpose of developing the praxis and education of diaconia, comprehensive and relevant information and research is needed. Research, development and innovation could help with understanding differences and restrictions and with overcoming them. It could also lead to processes of change where societies and churches support the

well-being of their citizens or members. The hope was to find new models of diaconia and social action work. Research, development and innovations could also help in developing the education and training of diaconia and social action practitioners. In 2017 and 2018 interdiac held workshop seminars to form a research network and planning future research projects. (Porkka 2017.)

2.2 Background of the research

Interdiac's current research is carried out within three different research projects. The first of the research projects focuses on the theological understanding of diaconia and is based on data from 10 different countries. Within this research of ecclesiology and theological understanding of diaconia, the aim is to address ecumenical and inter-confessional diversity. There is a need for a deeper dialogue about different traditions and contemporary applications of Christian traditions in the region. (interdiac. Research platform; Prosvirnina 2020.)

The second research project is related to diaconia with migrants in four countries. This research reflects both on the challenges that refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants face in a context of migration and on the insights of professionals' perspectives on diaconia and social action on the diaconal practices with uprooted people. (interdiac. Research platform; Prosvirnina 2020.)

The third research project is called "Voices of the young people in the 'M'". This project brings together participants from six different countries and partner organizations to hear the voices of the young people. The purpose is to work towards responsible and empowering practices with young people. (interdiac. Research platform; Prosvirnina 2020.) The need for research, especially connected to youth marginalization, rises from the prevalent situation where numerous adolescents are in. For example, many adolescents are out of the scope of social services and they lack the rights of the citizen, many are unemployed, the labor market does not function, and there are not much leisure time activities for adolescents and young adults. The situation is more difficult for adolescents and young adults in rural areas. Hence there are a lot of short-sightedness concerning the future and the migration is a lucrative option. (Porkka 2018.)

Diak's lecturer Jouko Porkka is the theme coordinator of the research project "Voices of the young people in the 'M'". The research coordinator is Oxana Prosvirina who works for interdiac. The research project aims at contributing to the development of new methods and approaches in the field of professional and diaconal work with young people in margins of their societies. The purpose of interdiac's research is to collect the experiences and development ideas of young people involved in youth diaconia and to map the existing youth diaconia working models in the organizations. The data for the research project consists of interviews with both young people and staff and volunteers of the diaconal organizations. In the light of the received data, analyses and research report, the professionals of the diaconal organization will reflect on and evaluate their working methods with marginalized youth. The ultimate goal of the research is to update interdiac's handbook on working with marginalized young people and organize further learning programs for youth diaconia. (Prosvirina 2019).

The organizations participating in the research are from six different countries in Central and Eastern Europe Central Asia and the organizations are all member organizations in interdiac's network of churches, faith-based organizations (FBO) and non-governmental organizations (NGO). The participants are St. Marianeh social center in Ashtarak Armenia, Relevant NGO in Prešov Slovakia, Living Hope NGO in Odessa Ukraine, NGO Bethel's Center of Pastoral Care of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tallinn Estonia, Children of Tien-Shan organization in Balykchy, Issyk-Kul region in Kyrgyzstan and Caritas Georgia in Tbilisi Georgia. These organizations have several functions in the research. Firstly, the organization and the staff members are part of the research group that was formed to conduct the research project "Voices of the young people in the 'M'" together with Porkka and Prosvirina. The organizations are interested in and committed to develop youth diaconia especially for young people in the margins. Secondly, the staff members in the organizations collected the data for the research and they are part of evaluating the analyses and the outcome of the research. Thirdly, the organizations are committed to develop and innovate new elaborate working models on working with marginalized young people. Moreover, the organizations chose the young people that were interviewed: the interviewees are part of or have been part of the activities and programs that the organizations have offered.

The “Voices of the young people in the ‘M’” research project included forming the objectives and goals, forming the research group with the participating organizations, deciding on the data collection ways and forming outlines for the data collection. The data for the research was collected through individual and focus group interviews. There are two sets of data: one that consists of interviews with young people and one with interviews with the staff members and volunteers of the organizations. The interviews with the young people were conducted in fall 2019 and in spring 2020. This thesis focuses on the analysis of the data related to the young people. The content analysis will be part of the research report composed in autumn 2020 for interdiac.

2.3 Introducing the organizations

This chapter introduces the different partner organizations (presented in table 1) that have been involved in the “Voices of the young people in the ‘M’” research. The organizations differ from each other in size, identity and function. Table 1 gives an overview on the names and countries of the organizations. Some of the organizations are clearly faith-based organizations (FBO), some are non-governmental organizations (NGO) and some are institutions or service providers but all of them have a connection to Christian diaconia and social action. Some of the organizations are strongly connected to a local church and the organizations represent different denominations. In this thesis, they are referred as organizations on a general level as none of them are state or municipality related service providers, but not all of them consider themselves to be institutions.

TABLE 1. Country and name of the organizations participating in the research

Country	Name of the organization
Armenia	St. Mariane Social Center
Estonia	NGO Bethel's Center of Pastoral Care of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
Georgia	Caritas Georgia
Kyrgyzstan	Children of Tien-Shan
Slovakia	Relevant NGO
Ukraine	Living Hope NGO

In Armenia the interdiac partner organization is the Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation. The research was conducted in Ashtarak's St. Mariane Social

Center. The center was established in 2014 and it implements social assistance, community development and environmental programs. The center works with vulnerable families in Ashtarak and surrounding areas. The beneficiaries are mainly socially insecure, orphaned or single-parent children, divorced women, as well as unemployed adults. Currently the center works with women from about 60 families and about 120 children and young people. The Center provides a variety of programs and activities both for individuals and for groups. The services include educational and professional training courses; cultural, educational and informational programs and professional orientation consultations for both adults, children and youth. Social workers and the clergy visits families to discuss concerning issues, that include family relationships and different problems. Domestic violence, socialization of children and parenting are topics that are discussed often in the meetings. The Center also organizes spiritual meetings with Bible reading and sermons. (Martirosyan 2020a, 2020b.)

The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Department of Diaconia and Social Action is the partner organization in Estonia. The Department of Diaconia and Social Action was founded in 2018, but diaconia work with youth started in Estonia in the 1990s with children and young people experiencing homelessness and street-connected life. In the beginning of 2000, the Social Centre was founded in Tallinn. The data to this research was collected at this center. The Social Centre is working with people with lower income and with the non-Estonian speaking population. The center is mainly helping people with the integration to the Estonian society and as well with material and moral support. The work of Bethel's Centre of Pastoral Care is primarily orientated towards risk group children and youth, supporting them with studies and involving them into socially accepted and safe activities such as youth clubs, hobbies and sports. The main goals are decreasing poverty and exclusion and preventing crime. There is a foster home and a day center run by the Church of Bethel that offer long term and short-term housing for young persons but also for families if needed. There are about 20 regulars enrolled in the foster home and day center and all together the Social Centre works with about 100 families in disadvantageous situations. (Bethel's Centre Of Pastoral Care. Home; Kesküla 2020.)

The research in Georgia was conducted in the Caritas Georgia 24 hour center for street-connected Children. Caritas Georgia was founded in 1994 to help disadvantageous families. Caritas Georgia Children and Youth program in Tbilisi focuses on 6-18-year-old

children and provides services for children from families living below the poverty line and services for children living and working on the street and children/youth without parental care. The center offers psychological services which aim at improving the children's physical and psychological situation including for example managing harmful substance, a medical program, socialization, and recreational therapy. The center also arranges non-formal education which focuses both on education for children with special need as well as on occupational training. The center supports the children and young people with skills for everyday life and for an independent living including conflict prevention and resolutions skills. (Caritas. Where Caritas work. Europe. Georgia; Gotsiridze 2020.)

In Kyrgyzstan the data was collected by interviewing young people from the Children of Tien-Shan organization. The organization was founded in 2000 in Balykchy, Issyk-Kul region to serve as a diaconia ministry. The main form of services currently provided by Children of Tien-Shan is support for families to prevent abandonment of children and preventing children ending up experiencing a street-connected life. The organization has been piloting and creating a foster care model in Balykchy for street-connected young people. This pilot eventually developed into a state level model. The work of the organization started with a shelter providing safe housing for children and young people, restoring social and family ties, restoring legal documents, assisting with medical services, supporting education and providing psychological assistance. Currently, the main focus is on supporting disadvantaged families. The organization has been working together with the national and local officials to promote the situation of the children and young people, to guarantee the educational and medical services they need and to build the foster care system. Children of Tien-Sahn worked also together with UNICEF to develop regulations on the foster model for the country. (Trofimova 2020.)

Relevant NGO is a non-profit organization based in Prešov, Slovakia. The organization was founded in 2006 to institutionalize activities in the field of youth work and visits to children's homes that had previously been done through voluntary work by the Lutheran congregation in Prešov. Relevant NGO provides services called half-way houses for girls leaving foster homes. The services consist of a team of social workers, a psychologist and volunteers that help the girls every step of the way towards integrating into the society,

independence and responsibility. The youth work also involves organizing summer camps, trips, non-formal education activities, sporting and free-time events and hosting volunteers from abroad. The latest project by Relevant NGO involves launching a social enterprise to help the girls living in the half-way house integrate into a healthy social and work life. The NGO is starting a cafeteria connected with cultural open space, where young people can develop their working skills and habits as well as grow personally and spiritually. (Ilenin 2020.)

The organization in Ukraine is called Living Hope. Living Hope is a Christian NGO founded in Odessa in 1999. Living Hope offers young Ukrainians an alternative to a life on the streets, using drugs, living without perspective and staying uninvolved in society. To achieve this, three-day care centers for children and young people from socially excluded families are established. The centers aim to prevent children and young people from dropping out of school and community life by offering children and youth at risk a healthy, long-term environment for developing life skills. The day care centers also give assistance in emergency life circumstances, such as illness or death of a parent. Examples of activities in the day care centers are assistance with homework, preparing and eating meals together, leisure time activities, support in private hygiene and sanitation, teaching of Christian values, camps, family events, coworking with residential institutions for children and for elderly people, and international youth exchanges and voluntary programs. (Borisuk 2020.)

2.4 Societal context of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Interdiac focuses on researching and supporting the development of practice and theology of diaconia and social action in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The countries and societies have a lot in common with each other in their sociological and political history. However, the countries also have their distinctive cultures, languages, religious settings, and social and political context. As an example of the differences in the religious settings, Christianity is the minority religion within a Muslim majority in Kyrgyzstan, atheism is the majority worldview in Estonia and most people in Ukraine, Slovakia, Armenia and Georgia belong to different Christian denominations. The next chapter will give a short overlook on the sociological and political history of the region. (PEW

Research Center. Global Religious Futures Project 2016a, 2016b; UNdata A World Information. Statistics. Population by religion, sex and urban/rural residence. 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d.)

The last 30 years have included major shifts and transitions times as well as crisis following another in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The dissolution of Soviet Union and the time of transition affected the countries and the inhabitants. During the Soviet time, the social service system was centrally led and institutionalized. It meant for example that a lot of children were institutionalized instead of the social system encouraging families to take care of their children (Addy, Bănăruș, Borisuk, & Ghazaryan 2012, 15). In the 1990s, the quality of social services and utilities deteriorated rapidly. The societies started to decentralize the social services to local administrations but there were not always sufficient resources for the process, which lead to the weakening of the social infrastructure (UNDP 2011, 20). Social protection functions were transferred in many countries to family, community and similar informal providers, with adverse outcomes. There is still a persistent trend in institutional care for some groups such as children who are abandoned, orphaned or neglected, ‘at risk’ children or young people in conflict with the law, and children and adults with disabilities. (Addy et al. 2012, 15; UNDP 2011, 26.)

Because of the fall of the Soviet Union, there were also changes in the employment opportunities when companies and industries disappeared causing unemployment and further impacts on social exclusion. New opportunities rose to the labor market, but people did not necessarily have the sufficient skills. Without effective retraining opportunities, people with outdated skills found themselves vulnerable. In some cases, this process has led to the marginalization of whole groups. (UNDP 2011, 18-19.) Poverty increases people’s vulnerability to social exclusion in other areas of life. Income poverty limits the opportunity to participate in public life, particularly in periods of structural transformation when the old ‘non-monetary’ channels of inclusion have disappeared. (UNDP 2011, 17.) The situation is not the same in all the countries, but this overlook gives a glimpse of how great the structural changes were and what the governments and the people have had to deal with and that to some extent are still ongoing.

Characteristic to the post-soviet countries is that the engagement in voluntary work is different compared to the rest of Europe. Volunteering during the transition decreased in

Central and Eastern Europe because of the requirements demanded by the communist state concerning the free time and effort contribution for common social, cultural, and political causes. The development of the civil society in the 1990s was a new phenomenon just as democracy. It took some time before volunteering started to be a desired activity. The democratization and the rising of people active in volunteering is a result of globalization and westernization. (Silló 2016; Voicu & Voicu 2009.)

During the last 10 plus years the economic crisis of 2008 and now currently the COVID-19 pandemic have had effects on the economies, societies and communities of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. All in all, the economic crisis caused majority of European countries to cut down social services in wide-ranging austerity-measures. This has meant for children and young people for example a high rate on youth unemployment which was 17% in 2008. With only limited employment opportunities, young people are often forced to take low-skilled employment, to leave the labor market, or to migrate to another country. (UNDP 2011, 20.) There are current estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic hits hard on young people in the form of unemployment. The pandemic also influences the lives of young people in a vulnerable situation because some of the social and community service were forced to close or limit the services during the beginning of the outbreak of the pandemic. (Stakelum & Matthiesen 2020.)

On top of the regional and global crisis described above, some of the countries in the former Soviet bloc have also experienced different armed and violent conflicts as well as political eruptions that create instability. Examples of these are nationwide riots that have ousted presidents, elections that have been assessed not to follow the democratic procedure, occupations of areas by foreign governments, ethnic violence, territorial tensions because of interstate conflicts and conflicts over government and separatist movements. (UCDP. Start. Country. Armenia; UCDP. Start. Country. Georgia; UCDP. Start. Country. Kyrgyzstan; UCDP. Start. Country Ukraine.) The Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia is a vast region and some of the countries within the region are vast in geography. Therefore, the abovementioned conflicts and political eruptions might not affect individuals and organizations similarly.

The lack of employment opportunities and military conflicts have led to migration both abroad and within countries (UNDP 2011, 33, 75). According to the surveys in Central

Asia, most labor migrants are men. In other countries, however, migration has become more feminized (UNDP 2011, 78). Migration affects also young people's lives. As families migrate for example because of seasonal work, children and young people migrate as well. Seasonal migration is linked to agriculture work as well as to tourists flows. Seasonal migration is also part of the realities of street-connected youth. (UNICEF 2018, 23.)

2.5 Marginalization of young people

The theme for the "Voices of the young people in the 'M'" research is how youth diaconia can support the young people living in the risk of marginalization or the prevalent experience of being marginalized. Marginalization occurs when an individual or certain groups are pushed aside from the economic system, the social system and the decision-making systems of the society. (UNDP 2011, Rodriquez Nygaard 2017, 168.) The social systems that people live in are multilayered consisting of a macrosystem, a mesosystem and a microsystem. The macrosystem serves as the political system, the mesosystem represents institutions and the microsystem is seen in close relationships. People can be at the margins in one of these systems, but not necessarily in all of them. However, being at the margins in macrosystems often has an impact on all the other levels. (Rodriquez Nygaard 2017, 166-168.) People can be marginalized in multiple of ways and marginalization can be a cumulative process, worsening over time (Backwith 2015, 49).

In defining and researching marginalized youth, the term "not in education, employment or training" (NEET) has become popular. The term describes more widely the context of marginalized youth. In Eastern Europe in 2011 38,3% of the youth were part of the labor force and the unemployment rate was 17,9% (International Labour Organization 2020, 13-19). NEET is used especially to describe the marginalization of youth in Europe and determining the problem of marginalization most often in relation to the fiscal sustainability of the welfare state. The needs of marginalized youth can also be discussed in relation to more fundamental issues such as social cohesion and social stability, racial and gender inequality, weak state performance and a dysfunctional education system (Swart 2018, 3).

Marginalization can also be linked to street-connected life. UNICEF has conducted research related to street-connected children and youth in Georgia together with Caritas Georgia, which is one of the organizations participating in interdiac's research. There are six recognized main factors causing children and youth to experience street-connected life: 1) parents' poverty and involvement of children in child labor, 2) parents' forced migration causing difficulties in providing for children, 3) a parent's death, imprisonment, illness and/or substance abuse, leading to child abandonment or neglect and a need for the child to provide for him or herself, 4) domestic violence leading to the child preferring to live outside of the home, 5) strict discipline in rehabilitation or service institutions, foster family care or closed juvenile schools, leading children and youth to prefer street life and 6) socialization among children and youth, leading children to reduce the time spent in the home and increasingly spend more time with other street-connected youth. (UNICEF 2018, 16.)

Marginalized youth has been studied recently in an international research project 'Youth at the margins: A comparative study of the contribution of faith-based organizations (FBOs) to social cohesion in South Africa and Nordic Europe' (YOMA) (Swart, Rabe & De Beer 2019, 1). The study shows how churches and FBOs seem to make very little difference in the conditions of permanent structural social exclusion and marginalization, but at the same time the research shows that churches and other faith-based structures were able to compensate for the lack of state intervention by meeting some young people's basic survival needs. (Swart et al. 2019, 10-12.)

In the case of interdiac's research and this thesis, marginalization relates to disadvantageous situations such as poor connection to the society and to not being employed or part of education. Marginalization is also connected to the experiences of street-connected life, experiences of inadequate foster care, deprivation from social services and inadequate services in supporting independent life after growing up in foster care or in institutions for orphans.

3 APPROACHES ON WORK WITH MARGINALIZED YOUTH

The organizations taking part in the research and development project lead by Interdiac all work with young people who live in the margins of their societies or are in the risk of marginalization. Interdiac and the organizations have assessed the importance of youth diaconia in their local settings and with youth. There are different approaches in working with young people in the risk of marginalization. Firstly, working with young people is related to the human development and growing as a young person. The characteristics and patterns of positive youth development (PYD) may guide youth diaconia in practice. Secondly, working with young people is connected to the structures of a society where youth diaconia may act with an attempt to support social inclusion and social justice. Thirdly, youth diaconia may strive for empowerment of marginalized youth.

3.1 Positive youth development

Positive youth development (PYD) is a developmental systems theory that tries to describe the conditions where positive development can occur in a young person's life (Lerner & Silbereisen 2007). The PYD theory builds on the idea that all young people have assets and that young people ought to be seen as resources and not so much as a sum of their risk behavior or the disadvantageous situations young people are in. This theory is thought to guide youth workers, social workers and policy makers to create environments that support PYD, and not undermining the realities of young people. The PYD model has been elaborated in the context of a longitudinal research led by Richard M. Lerner. That research focused on identifying the individual and ecological relations that may promote positive youth development as well as prevent risk behavior (Lerner, Bowers, Minor, Boyd, Kiely Mueller, Schimd, Lerner 2012, 373). The relations between the individual and the ecology refers to Bronfenbrenner's theory.

As a basis for the construction of the PYD theory serves Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The ecological development systems theory of human development is built on the idea that all human development can and should be understood through looking at the whole ecological system in which the

individual lives in. The ecological system is constructed of five social subsystems which support and affects human development. The social subsystems are the individual in the center and with microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem surrounding each other. (Bronfenbrenner 1979.) The social subsystems is presented in the figure 1.

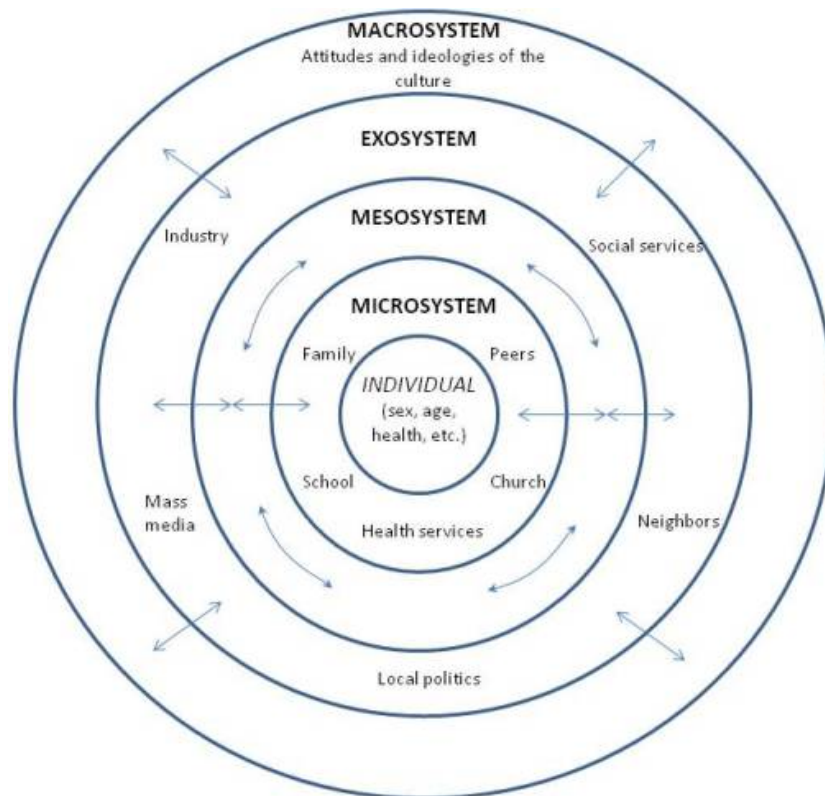


FIGURE 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Hchokr, 2012)

The different subsystems and the individuals, communities, institutions and attitudes within the subsystems influence each other. The ways of influence are pictured in the figure with the arrows. The subsystems influence each other both to and from the individual. Bronfenbrenner's model shows how the development of an individual is inseparable from the environment. (Bronfenbrenner 1979.) In youth diaconia the ecological theory helps to consider the impact of the society to children's and young people's development. To be able to produce services or activities that support the development of individual young people, it is necessary to assess how the different spheres of the society influences children and young people. It is also necessary to assess how youth diaconia can potentially influence the wider society to change to a positive direction for young people. Youth diaconia needs to reflect for example over how the employment situation of parents influence the young person, how the school system or the other available social

services influence the young person, or how the attitudes of the public towards children in trouble with the law or in foster care or living on the street affects the young person. (Crawford & Walker 2007, 19-21, 64-68.)

The core idea of the Positive youth development theory is that positive youth development is achieved in those kind of surroundings where participation, learning and enduring relationships takes place. The PYD by Lerner and his fellow researchers emphasizes the individual \leftrightarrow context relation in the development of individuals. Therefore, the relation between an individual and the surroundings of peers, adults, institutions, norms and values may promote positive development and thriving and as well have a preventive effect in regard to risk or problem behavior. (Lerner et al. 2012, 373.)

Within the theory of PYD, and through longitudinal research components of effective youth programs have been found and summarized in the concept named Big Three (Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Phelps, Naudeau, Christiansen 2006, 11). The Big Three consist of three characteristics that need to be fulfilled in youth programs for positive youth development to occur. These criteria are:

1. Opportunities for youth participation in and possibility to take leadership roles in activities; that
2. Emphasize the development of life skills; within the context where
3. A sustained and caring adult-youth relationship is formed. (Lerner et al. 2012, 373; Lerner et al. 2006, 11.)

Participation and active leadership roles offer and increase the participation in positive social activities. This can build competencies and give recognition to the individual. The life-skills for a young person means skills in creating positive goals for life, abilities to choose the means to attain these goals, and compensation skills to demonstrate resilience in difficult situations in life. The sustained and caring adult-youth relation refers to relations between a young person and an adult who is competent, caring and continually available for at least a year for example as a mentor, coach, teacher. The characteristics of PYD need to be simultaneously present and integrated in the youth programs for positive youth development to occur. (Lerner 2018, 270.)

Lerner further conceptualizes positive youth development by defining the developmental characteristics that a young person needs in order to become a successful and contributing member of a society. The composition of these characteristics is linked to outcomes of youth work that have focused on positive youth development. The concepts of positive youth development are the 5 Cs resulting to a 6th C. These are: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character and Caring. The 6th C stands for Contribution. The meaning of the different concepts is presented in table 2. These Five Cs of positive youth development are associated to mutually beneficial individual \leftrightarrow context relations. The growing of the Five Cs in an individual young person can in addition impact on lowered probabilities of risk or problem behaviors. (Lerner & Silbereisen 2007, 8-9.)

TABLE 2. The meaning of the 5Cs and the 6th C (Lerner et al. 2006, 57)

Competence	Positive view of one's actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational. Social competence pertains to interpersonal skills (e.g., conflict resolution). Cognitive competence pertains to cognitive abilities (e.g., decision making). School grades, attendance, and test scores are part of academic competence. Vocational competence involves work habits and career choice explorations.
Confidence	An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; one's global self-regard, as opposed to domain specific beliefs.
Connection	Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship.
Character	Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.
Caring and Compassion	A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.
Contribution as the 6 th C	A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

3.2 Young people and social exclusion and inclusion

Research indicates that faith-based social action tries to fight poverty by increasing social inclusion, participation and well-being. (Addy, Dinham & Kähkönen 2011, 12.) One of the aims of diaconia and social action is promoting equality and justice. This means

according to Addy (2013, 20-22) focusing on meeting needs, promoting participation and advocacy for policy change in promoting inclusion.

There are different definitions on social inclusion and exclusion. Some of them stress employment and education, some of them stress rights to basic needs, some of them stress participation, some of them stress relationships and power relations, and some of them stress the existence or lack of opportunities (World Bank 2013, 255-258). Research carried out by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) suggests that social exclusion and inclusion are both processes and outcomes. As a process social exclusion pushed certain individuals to the margins of society and prevents their full participation in relevant social, economic, cultural and political processes. As an outcome exclusion describes the status of the individual. The social exclusion status may have various dimensions – poverty, lack of basic competencies, limited employment and educational opportunities as well as limited access to social and political networks. (Ivanov, Peleah & Milcher 2012, 10; UNDP 2011, 8.)

The relevant development of the term social exclusion for this discourse started in the 1970s in France. The question of exclusion was connected to the perceived breakdown in social cohesion that led to unemployment and limitations in the rights to social citizenship and the formation of a list of excluded groups in the society. The idea of social exclusion was then rapidly accepted as a concept for policy making in the EU. The term was used widely to describe the prevailing political and cultural context where the discussion on indicators, reasons and responsibilities of poverty was replaced with the term social exclusion. The social exclusion concept has been popular because of its political appeal and it can be linked to the rise of neo-liberal ideology and individualism. (Mathieson, Popay, Enoch, Escorel, Hernandez, Johnston & Rispel 2013, 2-9; Ivanov et al. 2012, 5.)

The World Bank defines social inclusion as the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society. The improvement stresses the support of ability, opportunity and dignity of people, especially of those disadvantaged because of their identity. (World Bank. Understanding Poverty. Topics. Social Inclusion.) The identity and group-based framework's definition links social exclusion with the identity of an individual or a group. Identity is socially constructed and often forms the basis for inclusion or exclusion (World Bank 2013, 67). The framework defines that exclusion is

connected to groups that are vulnerable in societies and underlines that belonging to a marginalized group is a sign of or at least increases probability to be socially excluded (Ivanov et al. 2012, 9). The theorizing of group- and identity-based social exclusion is based on the idea that certain group attributes can lead to lower social standing which can lead to deprivation in terms of income, social capital, access to employment and services, participation and agency in both national and local decision making. It is also noteworthy that individuals have many simultaneous identities. Therefore, intersecting identities can produce an overlay or multiplication of disadvantage. (World Bank 2013, 67-76.)

The European Commission's definition of social exclusion includes not only the traditional dimension of poverty, but also the multi-dimensional aspects of material and non-material deprivation, their interrelationships, and the dynamics of social, economic, and political marginalization as a result (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) 2013). It defines social inclusion as enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job. This means adequate income support together with help to get a job, inclusive labor markets and access to quality services helping people participate actively in society, including getting back to work. (European Commission. Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion.)

Sen's approach underlines that inclusion is the realization of the individual's abilities and the opportunities. Social exclusion occurs when a person does not have the freedom and possibility to live and undertake the activities that a person would have reason to choose. The opportunities may be unattainable because of a policy or practice in society. (Sen 2000.)

Inclusion and exclusion can also be looked from a Human Rights Based approach (HRBA). (UNDP 2011, 11.) The HRBA in development and social work uses the conceptual and analytical tools of human rights to analyze and address the issues of structural disadvantages, forms of inequalities and exclusion in political, economic and social terms (Ife 2008, 167). The HRBA shifts development and social work practice from a charity-based argumentation into a rights-based argumentation in striving for inclusion. A rights-based approach changes the focus from regarding people as passive beneficiaries of state policies to active participants in their lives as rights-holders. The rights-based approach analyzes which practices and policies produce exclusion and what needs to be changed.

It focuses on analyzing the inequalities, discriminatory practices, and unjust power relations that are the root causes that prevent human rights to be fulfilled and enforced as well as identifying the actions that needs to be taken in regard to respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights. (UNDP 2011, 11.)

Social exclusion can also be analyzed from a human development framework constructed by the UNDP. The human development framework is closely connected to the framework of an individual's probabilities of Sen. The integrated framework of social exclusion and human development constructs the definition based on a chain of social exclusion and based on the idea of an individual's social rights. The framework is constructed out of research done in Central and Eastern European and Central Asian countries. The social exclusion chain describes the elements of social inclusion to be individual risks, local conditions and drivers of exclusion. This framework assumes that each individual has a number of individual characteristics that can cause the risk of social exclusion. The risks can for example be related to gender, age, ethnicity, language, religion, disability. Risks can also be related to the status of the individual like income, health, employment, education, resources, opportunities and assets. Although an individual would have characteristics that could be a risk for social exclusion, it does not predict that social exclusion will occur. Whether social exclusion occurs depends on the interaction of the risks with the local conditions as well as with drivers of social exclusion. (Ivanov et al. 2012; UNDP 2011, 8, 12-13.) The local conditions play a role in the process of exclusion or inclusion. The individual risks are influenced by the local conditions including the characteristics of the local economy (such as diverse or limited employment opportunities), history of local conflict, environmental legacy, the state of repair of basic infrastructure, distance to the capital and/or regional centers. (Ivanov et al. 2012, 9.)

The integrated framework of social exclusion and human development observes that the process of social exclusion happens through the interactions of the individual risks, the drivers of exclusion and the local context. The drivers for exclusion create an environment that can be either inclusive or exclusive, but the drivers per se do not result automatically in social exclusion, they interact with the personal characteristics. The personal characteristics can put a person in higher or lower risk of exclusion, but again the characteristics do not result in exclusion in themselves. They interact with the drivers of exclusion in the local context. The local conditions create a context for interaction of drivers of exclusion

and personal characteristic. These local conditions then amplify or reduce inequalities. This process can either result in a status of social exclusion or social inclusion. The status characterizes an individual's ability to participate in society, including participation in economic life, access to public services, and participation in civic and political life. (Ivanov et al. 2012, 10.)

The interaction of the individual risks, the drivers of exclusion and the local context resembles the logic of the ecological systems theory on human development described already earlier in the chapter. Poverty, marginalization and inequalities in the family, community and the society influence young people through out the different ecological systems of human development. (Backwith 2015, 93.)

The exclusion from economic life can mean inequalities in assets, incomes and employment opportunities. It can also mean deprivation in housing issues and the access to credit and loans. Limited access to material resources results from exclusion in the economic dimension. Once exclusion occurs, it is likely to contribute to further exclusion, not only in economic life, but also in the other two dimensions, social services and social networks and civil participation. From the perspective of human development, economic exclusion hinders the development of people's capabilities, which help them to satisfy their needs and exercise their rights. (Ivanov et al. 2012; UNDP 2011, 16; World Bank 2013, 92-96.) Economic exclusion relates to young people in unemployment and underemployment. Being young can be a risk factor for exclusion depending on the interrelations of the exclusion drivers and the local context. Youth unemployment in the EU and in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Central Asia are high. The economic crisis in 2008 affected youth and young adults and now the COVID-19 pandemic affects youth and young adults again in accessing and staying in the labor market. All in all there is a global trend of decline in labor market engagement of young people (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2020.) Young people are also often forced to accept low-skilled employments or migrate to other countries to find jobs.

The exclusion from social services, both public and private, can be a result from unequal access to education, health care, housing, social protection and information technology. Exclusion from services can also mean that individuals can access some services but they are of low quality. These limited opportunities can be the consequence of material

deprivation, but they can also result from inadequate institutional rules governing the supply of such services. When related to young people the number of children and young people in education has risen globally. Exclusion from housing and inadequate institutional care and foster services are drivers for exclusion. (UNDP 2011, 11.)

Exclusion from civil society participation and networks is caused by inequalities in political, cultural and civic activities and power. Unequal access to justice, liberty and institutions also results in exclusion. Social exclusion can lead to reduced participation in social and political life. Participation is thus crucial for social inclusion. In the case of exclusion from civil society participation in formal and informal institutions and structures are limited. (UNDP 2011, 30-32.)

To be socially excluded or to be in the margins of the society is not a natural state or even a definite state. It is possible to be included in one's own life and to the social life. The experience of inclusion is affected by how a person perceives the social environment with relationships, power relations, income, public services, infrastructure and respect of human dignity. This in turn affects how well the individual can use the human and social capital and assets he or she possesses. On top of this, the social environment affects either by supporting or depriving social inclusion. Thus social inclusion is not only about the individual's assets or capabilities or about the characteristics and attributes of the society and community. It is above all finding out how the public and social services can support the individual and what are the assets of the individual and what kind of barriers does the individual have to social inclusion. (Kainulainen, Paananen, Surakka & Saari 2016, 77.)

The measures for inclusion must be determined in relation to the drivers of exclusion and the different dimensions of society: economic, social services and civic society participation. An important route to social inclusion is through the enhancement of human capital, which can be achieved through better and more dignified access to services (World Bank 2013, 219). The integrated human development and social exclusion framework by UNDP (2011, 80) suggests addressing individual vulnerabilities and risk factors as preventive measures before they translate into actual social exclusion.

The integrated human development and social exclusion framework suggests that the governments and societal actors in especially in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

should provide a range of social services that improve an individual's capacity to respond to exclusion risks. The services supporting individuals' capacities are for example accessibility to education, transition from school to work, health, public transportation, water, sanitation and housing, community-based housing and services for people with disabilities or children in foster care. Moreover, efforts should be made in improving the employability of the labor force by active labor market policies, securing that education is available to all also the marginalized groups and that people obtain skills relevant for the labor market. Strengthening the social security system and social protection network would increase the capacities of individuals and families. Thus, they also require cooperation and partnerships among a wide variety of actors, including state agencies, local authorities, NGOs and the private sector. (UNDP 2011, 80-86.)

3.3 Empowerment

Empowerment is a central concept in diaconia and social work. Through the process of becoming empowered, people gain control of their lives and find ways to take more active roles in society (Törrönen, Borodkina, Samolylova & Heino 2013, 1). Empowerment as a concept requires youth diaconia to work with the youth and not for the youth. Empowerment is often defined as the power to make decision in one's life and as the possibility to relevant participation in society (Kaukko 2013, 200). Empowerment is produced by meaningful participation in a community. The structures of power which an individual encounters in the community affects his or her agency. Participation can be empowering both on the macro level and on the micro level of the society. (Kaukko 2013, 201; Parpart 2002, 165-166.)

Empowerment can be achieved in diaconia with marginalized youth with the help of an asset-based approach working model. The asset-based approach suggests that transformation and changes start with the recognition and utilization of assets of individuals and communities. This approach does not only see the needs and the deficits of individuals but emphasizes the positive factors in a person's life. (Addy 2013, 16.) In an asset-based approach in social work or community development, the process of positive change is based on the assets an individual or the community has. (Green & Haines 2016.)

Empowerment is tightly connected to social inclusion. Building and supporting social inclusion is not only related to terms of economic welfare but also to the voice and empowerment of all groups. (World Bank 2013, 40.) Empowerment is connected to social and human capital which build inclusion. Empowerment, especially for women, means a possibility to make choices which improve some aspect of one's life, but it also implies to future claims for material, human and social resources; a better future (Kabeer 1999, 435).

Empowerment can be seen both as a means and an outcome. Empowerment is a process of developing individual capacities through gaining skills which are needed to improve circumstances in one's life. As an outcome, empowerment is the change that has occurred as a result of the process. (Kaukko 2013, 251.) Empowered people have freedom of choice and action. This in turn makes it possible for people to better influence the course of their lives and the decisions which affect them. Empowerment has a number of qualities: having decision-making power, having access to information and resources, having a range of options for making choices, being confident and being hopeful. It also relates to having influence on things, learning to think critically, learning to redefine who you are and speaking in your own voice. In addition empowerment is comprised of feeling part of a group or having sense of community, understanding that people have rights, effecting change in one's life and one's community, learning skills, changing others' perceptions of one's competency and capacity to act, growth and change that is never ending and self-initiated, and increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma. (Addy 2011, 48.)

4 METHODOLOGY

The research in this master's thesis is performed using qualitative research methodology. There are different purposes to conduct social research and therefore also different ways of conducting qualitative research. Qualitative research is chosen when the interest of the research is to understand individuals, groups or a phenomenon better. (Leavy 2017, 5; Kananen 2017, 32-35.) Leavy presents different ways on how qualitative research can be conducted. Qualitative research can be explorative, descriptive, explanative, aiming for community action, evaluative or provocative (Leavy 2017, 5). In this thesis, the research is performed both to explore and to describe the young people's experiences and to create suggestions for development. In qualitative research the research is carried out by looking at a specific context compared to quantitative research where the research is carried out by researching a wider range of contexts. (Kananen 2017, 36.) The process of a qualitative research is most often inductive by building knowledge that aims at generating meaning and exploring people's subjective experiences and their meaning-making processes. (Leavy 2017, 9.)

The next sections describe the research objectives and the research questions that are of interest in this master's thesis. Also, data collection methods and analysis methods to interpret the data are introduced.

4.1 Research objectives and questions

The aim of this master's thesis is to explore the young people's experiences of youth diaconia and social actions in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia and to listen to the young people's ideas and visions on how the youth diaconia and social activities could be developed. The purpose is to understand how the young people have perceived and experienced youth diaconia, what they may have learned or gained through the services and what kind of impact the services have had on their lives. Moreover, the purpose is to understand how youth diaconia could be developed from the perspective of marginalized young people and to understand what the issues or topics under discussion are. The

purpose is to understand what needs the young people have and how diaconia services could give to these needs.

The research questions of this thesis are:

1. What are the young people's experiences of youth diaconia that they have been part of?
2. What kind of ideas and visions do the young people have to develop and improve the youth diaconia for marginalized young people?

This thesis aims at increasing youth participation in developing youth diaconia. It is vital that children's and young people's voices are being heard in research if their needs and rights are to be met and recognized (Aldridge 2015, 62). Children's and young people's active participation in research is part of a rights-based approach in research according to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989; Morrow 2008, 52). The Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) underlines that children have the right to express their opinion in matters concerning their lives, they have the right to express themselves in a way they want, they have the right to expect highest quality services that include also highest quality research. On top of these children must be protected from all kinds of exploitation also within research. (Morrow 2008, 53.)

The purpose of the thesis is to listen to the voices of the young people through participatory research. Participating in the interviews may be an empowering experience for the young people. Participatory research in general tries to give a 'voice' to people in disadvantageous and vulnerable situations. The intention is to address inequality and powerlessness of people both in the process and in the results of the research. (Aldridge 2015, 16.) Out of a rights-based perspective it is vital that the young people in this thesis have been part of the research sharing their experiences of youth diaconia and that they have been given the opportunity to give suggestions and ideas for developing youth diaconia. The research could also have been conducted by interviewing only the staff members about youth diaconia, but doing this the participation of young people would not have been actualized. Children's and young people's participation in public and political life

has become an agenda for research and policy making that aim at addressing children's and young people's marginalization and exclusion from society (Aldridge 2015, 31).

4.2 Data collection

As mentioned in chapter two, the thesis is part of a wider research. The data collection was conducted by the local researchers who are employees of the local member organizations of interdiac. The members of the research group were Marek Ilenin and Ihor Kornii (Slovakia, Presov), Avo Uprus and Kadri Kesküla (Estonia, Tallinn), Nicole Boriuk (Ukraine, Odessa), Teona Gotsiridze (Georgia, Tbilisi), Irina Trofimova (Kyrgyz Republic) and Knarik Martirosyan (Armenia, Jerevan). The interviews were conducted in fall 2019 and spring 2020 and transcribed and translated into English by the staff members. The questions and instructions for the individual and the focus groups interviews can be found in the appendix 1 and appendix 2.

The data consists of 22 individual interviews and six focus groups interviews. Altogether 55 persons were interviewed. In Slovakia two of the participants were attending both the focus group and individual interviews. The majority of the young people interviewed were in the age group of 14-28. In Estonia the participants in the focus group interview were 28-48-years old which means that they were significantly older than any other of the interviewees. A more specific description of the participants is listed in table 3. All of the interviewees have been or are presently part of the activities or services of the organizations.

TABLE 3. Number of participants and the gender and age of the interviewees in the countries

	Armenia	Estonia	Georgia	Kyrgyzstan	Slovakia	Ukraine
Individual interview	four interviews, one male, three females, ages 16-25.	four interviews, two males, two female, ages 15-21.	four interviews, two males, two females, ages 17-24.	three interviews, one male, two females, ages 15-20.	four interviews, two males, two females, ages 17-24.	four interviews, two males, two females, ages 17-21.

Focus group	seven participants, three males, four females, ages not available.	five participants, five males, ages 28-48.	five participants, three males, three females, ages 14-25.	six participants, two males, four females, ages 16-26.	six participants, three males, three females, ages 18-27.	six participants, three males, three females, ages 16-21.
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Triangulating data collection methods is a way to ensure the validity of the data and to reduce inappropriate certainty related to the data. By using multiple data collection methods, the answers may differ from each other, which reduces the risk of drawing hasty assumptions and making generalizations. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 39.) Thus, the data for this research was collected with individual and focus group interviews.

In individual interviews the informants are the subjects of the interview. Throughout the interview process the researcher shares what the informant thinks and how the person views and comprehends the world. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 41; Silverman & Patterson 2014, 62.) As a research method, interviewing allows the researcher to deepen and clarify the received answers, thus giving more space and opportunities for the informant to explain further. The researcher may also ask for clarifications to understand the answers more comprehensively and the researcher may also alter the data gathering methods by asking questions in a different order or emphasizing a specific question. Although interviewing is a time-consuming method, it provides information that is both holistic and specific, and can be examined on different levels. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 24-26.)

The individual interviews conducted for this research were done in a semi-structured way. Semi-structured interviews do not have a specific definition but the typical features for semi-structured interviews are that they have a theme or a viewpoint that guides the interview, there are similar questions for all informants but they can be asked in different order and that the questions are open ended. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 47.) Although the structure is flexible and the context of the interview might be more spontaneous compared to a structured interview, the aim of the semi-structured interview is to find significant and relevant answers related to the research questions of the research. Therefore, the themes or topics that compose the structure of the interview are chosen based on the

theoretical framework and based on what is already known about the phenomena. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 88.)

Focus group interviews are an effective way of collecting data by interviewing several people at the same time. The purpose of a focus group interview is to collect various perspectives of the research topic, the goal is not consensus building. The purpose of a focus group interview is to bring a small group of people together to discuss about the research topic. The group in a focus group interview must be small enough so that every participant has a possibility to participate in the discussion, but the group needs to be big enough so that there are a variety of perspectives to the research topic. (Silverman & Patterson 2014, 76, 78.)

The focus group interview is a good data collection method since the individuals in the group may encourage, remind and correct each other while talking about the topics of the interview. The negative aspect of a focus group interview is that group dynamics can also restrict individuals to freely speak about the topics. (Hirsjärvi, Remes, Sajavaara & Sinivuori 2009, 210-211.) The process of a focus group interview is led by a moderator and there are often a secretary and an observer to help in recording the discussion, observing the atmosphere and taking notes on the moderating of the discussion (Silverman & Patterson 2014, 77).

4.3 Content analysis as the data analysis method

The data analysis method used in this master's thesis is content analysis. Content analysis is an inductive analysis method meaning that the theory and themes of interest emerge from the data. Content analysis focuses on analyzing written data and allows researchers to explore and describe the meanings embedded in the written text such as transcripts from interviews (Leavy 2017, 146). Prior to performing the content analysis, units of analysis must be determined. The units of analysis can be described as chunks of data. The units can be either chosen by the length of the written text such as one word or a sentence, or thematically meaning that every time a theme is mentioned, it is considered as a unit of analysis. (Leavy 2017, 147; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 122-123). The content analysis process consists of three different phases: 1) data reduction and simplifying by

coding the data, 2) building groups, clusters and subcategories of the coded data, and 3) forming top categories out of the subcategories (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 122-123). The figure 3 shows the general process of a content analysis. Appendix 3 shows an example on the formation of the main categories and of two top categories in this thesis.

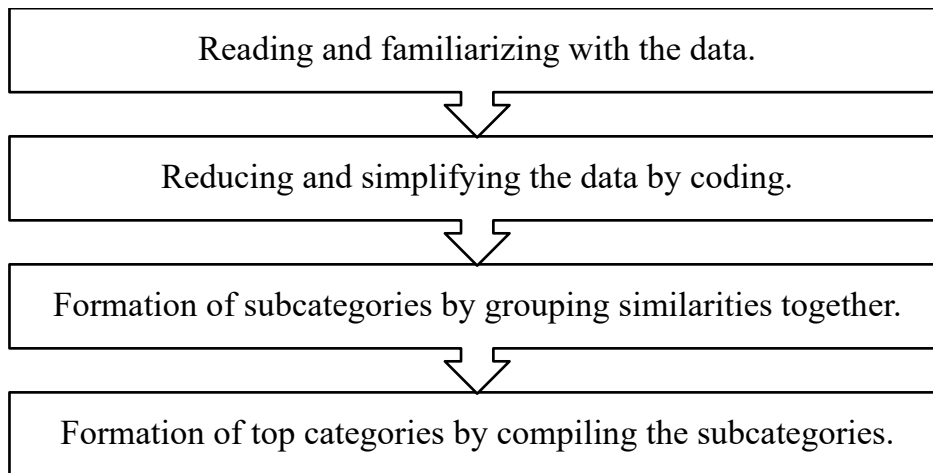


FIGURE 2. Process of the content analysis

In this thesis the units of analysis represent data that are thematically categorized. The original expressions within the data are reduced to simpler expressions and coded (phase 1). In the reduction process most important things are sought out from the data and the irrelevant parts are left out. The coding can be done by using the exact expressions of the informants in the data, or by creating descriptive codes for the reduced expressions, or by coding the expressions by numbers (Leavy 2017, 151). Through the coding and the categorizing, answers to the research questions start to formulate. (Kananen 2017, 114, 133.) A practical way to proceed is to make a list of the reduced expressions, separate the expressions from the original data and start the formation of the subcategories (phase 2) (Leavy 2017, 151; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 123-124.) Subcategories are formed by linking similar or seemingly related reduced expressions with each other. The name of the subcategory represents the contents of the reduced expressions. The data is compressed through building subcategories and a structure for the research starts to form. When the researcher has created the subcategories, general concepts and top categories are formed (phase 3). The concepts and top categories are theoretical counterparts to the original expressions in the data. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 124-126.)

The process of a content analysis building on empirical data describes the phenomena researched only from the perspective of that specific data. Different concepts and expressions can be found from other data because in an inductive research process, the sub and top categories and the theoretical concepts cannot be determined in beforehand. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 127.) Thus, in this master's thesis the experiences related to the youth diaconia are only described from the perspective of the young people that are involved in the research. If the young people were some other young people, the data as well as the sub and top categories would probably be different.

4.4 Trustworthiness and credibility of the research

Evaluating the research process and the results of the research are part of academic writing. The reflection on the trustworthiness and credibility, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), indicates the quality of the research process (Leavy 2017, 156). Reflecting on the trustworthiness of the research means that the process and the results of the research are assessed. The quality assessment is part of the planning of the research as well as the final conclusions of the research. (Kananen 2017, 175.)

The quality of the research can be evaluated by reflecting on the explicitness and the thoroughness of the research. In qualitative research the relation between the data collection and the analysis of the data reflects on the comprehensiveness of the methodology and the research process. (Leavy 2017, 154). The quality of the research is ensured with interviewing relevant persons to the research topic. (Kananen 2014, 97.) The focus of the thesis was on the young people's experiences and development ideas and therefore it was essential that the young people have had a connection to the organizations. The young people were chosen by the staff members of the organizations which ensured the relevance of them to the research. The fact that the interviewees were chosen by the staff members, lead to the possibility that unconscious selection on the favorable viewpoints could have happened.

The collected data consisted of focus group interviews as well as of individual interviews conducted in six different countries. The different forms of data produced a broad set of material to analyze and the individual and focus group interviews complemented each

other. Through triangulation the credibility and trustworthiness were enhanced (Saldaña 2011, 76). There were some disturbances in the data collection. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted some parts of the data collection and because of the restrictions of meeting in person, the focus group interview in Kyrgyzstan was conducted as online interviews with each individual respondent. Nevertheless, the data and the analysis can be considered to target the research phenomena well.

The interviews were conducted, transcribed and translated into English by interdiac's and the organizations' staff members. The content analysis was conducted separately from the data collection process. This multifaceted chain of people between the young people's answers and the analysis may affect the interpretation. Moreover, the different cultural and societal backgrounds of the context of the research topic and the researcher may affect the interpretations. As a professional youth worker I can also see that my work experience may affect the interpretations in the research process. I have tried to minimize any false interpretations by being obedient to the data and to the inductive methodology in conducting the analysis.

The above-mentioned issues may affect the credibility of the research as there could be some misinterpretations. A way to ensure credibility is to let the interviewees to correct possible misinterpretations, but unfortunately due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and restrictions, this was not possible. Therefore, interdiac arranged an online seminar on the 19th of September 2020 for the staff members of interdiac and the organizations. The findings of the analysis were presented to the persons who had conducted the interviews to minimize false interpretations and hence increase the trustworthiness of the research. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 165.)

The content analysis was conducted according to the methodological guidelines in Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) and Leavy (2017). The consistency of the content analysis is exemplified in the table which can be found in appendix 3. The table demonstrates the analysis process of two of the top categories formed in the content analysis. The table increases the trustworthiness of the research. According to Leavy (2011) and Lincoln & Guba (1985) the vividness of the research helps to build the trustworthiness of the research by showing the reader how the data and the analysis are in relation to each other (Leavy 2017, 156). Plenty of quotations from the data are used to provide detailed and rich

descriptions of the relation between the data and the analysis. The quotations in the analysis and the main findings makes it also possible to transfer the research findings to a broader context. The preliminary findings of the thesis were presented and discussed in the online seminar with interdiac and the feedback was that the findings of the research can be transferred and generalized into the development of youth diaconia in the organizations.

The trustworthiness of the research has also been improved by discussions between the research coordinator, research theme coordinator and the author of the thesis. Through discussing and comparing the interpretations and results of the analysis among the members of the research group the credibility and the internal coherence can be improved (Kananen 2017, 179; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 186). During the research process the credibility of the responses in the interviews were discussed. The data consisted predominantly of positive experiences of youth diaconia and there were few mentions about negative experiences expressing disappointment or discontent with the organizations and youth diaconia. Both positive and negative experiences would be beneficial in understanding the impact of youth diaconia and in developing youth diaconia from the perspectives of marginalized youth. The reason for the absence of negative experiences may result from the fact that the young people are to some extent dependent on the organizations as beneficiaries or participants. It may be that informants in research try to give answers or discuss topics that are considered socially acceptable or believed to be the correct answers in the research (Jyrinki 1974, 129-130). Therefore, there might be some parts of the research topic that the interviews did not cover because it might be difficult to express critical or negative experiences. The power relations between the interviewees and the researcher is discussed more in the following chapter reflecting on the research ethics.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical thinking is part of the qualitative research process. The ethical thinking is an external constraint on the methods and strategies in which researchers engage (Traianou 2014, 73). The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity Teknisk TENK has determined the requirements for ethical research of humans (Tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan julkaisu 3 2019). Research should be conducted so that the human dignity and self-

determination are respected and that no harm is done to the people involved in the research (Tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan julkaisu 3 2019, 7). In qualitative research ethics, most discussions focus on how researchers should treat the people whom they are studying or who are the informants of the data collection. General principles within qualitative research ethics aims at minimizing harm reflected on the informants, respecting the privacy of the informants and respecting the autonomy of the informants (Traianou 2014, 62-65).

As the research in this thesis concerns young people there are a few aspects to look at. Young people are generally assumed as a vulnerable group in research (Aldridge 2015, 35) and in the case of this master's thesis, as most of the young people participating in the research live in the margins of the society, makes them even more vulnerable. The vulnerability of children and young people participating in research need to be taken into consideration while conducting qualitative research. There are propositions within research ethics, that while conducting research related to children and youth, the challenge is to create research strategies that are fair and respectful to the subjects of the research (Aldridge 2015, 36). The above-mentioned key principles of minimizing harm, respecting the privacy as well as the autonomy of the individual applies also with young people in research.

There are three aspects concerning children and youth to add to the general principles (minimizing harm reflected on the informants, respecting the privacy of the informants and respecting the autonomy of the informants) in research. These additions are related to the difference between children and adults in research. The first is that children and young people have different competencies, perceptions and frameworks of reference depending on different social differences such as age, gender, ethnic background or personal characteristics (Morrow 2008, 52). The young people interviewed for the thesis have a range of social differences, but they also have things in common. The participants are from different countries with different cultures. However, they are all from post-soviet countries so there are some similarities in the societies that they have grown up in. Their age varies from 14 to 40. This means that not all of the participants go under the definition of adolescents. The majority of the participants are from 14 up to 29 years old. The age difference of the young people is not an issue for the research because the interviewers were able to explain the interview questions when needed. The young people represent

different ethnicities and Christian traditions which influence the perception and worldview of the young people. The differences are faded out because the research topic focuses on the experiences of the young people, so they can talk from their own perspective.

The second addition is that children and young people are potentially vulnerable to exploitation in interaction with adults and therefore adults have responsibilities towards children (Morrow 2008, 52). The young people participating in the thesis live in disadvantageous situations and are beneficiaries, service users and participants in different activities and services in the organizations taking part in the research. The young people are therefore in a vulnerable position in relation to the organizations, interdiac and in relation to the researcher, because some of their everyday life and future is dependent of the connection to the organizations. Therefore, it is vital that research should not compromise the relation that the young people have to the organizations. The research should not either compromise the young people's status or reputation within the broader society. Some of the young people have a few quite critical comments on the culture and religious traditions in their country, that could potentially cause negative reactions or reactions of undermining the research findings.

Understanding the subsidiary position of the young people in relation to the organizations and the research team requires the research to ensure the anonymity of the informants. In the research and in the content analysis the young people's anonymity have therefore been secured with pseudonyms and codes like F1 standing for a female informant. The young people's names, ages, hometown or place of residence are not mentioned in the research. The data consists also of quite a lot of personal details, but these are not extensively quoted to protect the privacy of the young people and their families. The countries where the young people live are mentioned so that interdiac and its partner organizations have a possibility to compare the young people's experiences and development ideas in developing youth diaconia in the future.

The third addition to the principles of research ethics is that there is often an adult who mediates the access to children and youth. This may affect the informed consent of the participants. (Morrow 2008, 52.) In this thesis interdiac and the different organizations that conducted the interviews have been responsible to make sure of the informed

consents. The informed consent is acquired for interdiac's research project which includes this master's thesis. The informed consent is acquired with the purpose to use the young people's experiences and development ideas in developing youth diaconia and professional education. Therefore, it should be clear for the young people that their stories, experiences and ideas will be read and utilized in different countries and by people who do not know them. The inform consent also requires the research process to be trustworthy for the young people. They need to be sure that they can trust that their stories and experiences are only used to the purpose that they have agreed on. (Aldridge 2015, 38.)

5 THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH DIACONIA

This chapter presents the findings based on the content analysis related to the first research questions that tries to answer how the young people have perceived and experienced youth diaconia, what they may have learned or gained through the services and what kind of impact the services have had on their lives. In the focus group interviews as well as in the individual interviews the young people were asked to tell about their own lives and describe and reflect about the youth diaconia that they had been part of.

Through the phases of the content analysis and with the help of the research questions of the master's thesis, three top categories were found linking together the experiences of the young people in the different countries. The top categories are 1) acceptance, 2) social inclusion and 3) being empowered. Top categories were formed based on subcategories that are presented in table 4. The next chapter will present how the abovementioned top categories and the subcategories underneath them have been determined via extensive analysis of the interview transcriptions and through subcategorization work performed during the content analysis phase.

TABLE 4. Top and subcategories of the young people's experiences

Top category	Acceptance		Social inclusion		Being empowered		
Sub-category	Recognition of human dignity.	A welcoming atmosphere.	Impact on the living conditions.	Impact on education and employment.	Identity building.	Participation.	Belonging to a community.

5.1 Acceptance

The first established top category describing the experiences of the young people participating in youth diaconia is acceptance. Throughout the interviews, a common theme was the experience on how the young people had been accepted by the staff members to the organizations and recognized as valuable young people. Acceptance is further divided

into two subcategories: 1) recognition of human dignity and 2) the atmosphere of the organizations. Both of these subcategories will be discussed in more detail below and the categories are presented with quotations and descriptions of the young people's thoughts.

The first subcategory is recognition of human dignity. Based on the content analysis, topics such as the attitude towards youth participating in diaconia, how youth participating in diaconia are treated and perceived and how young people feel that they are of interest to other people can all be tied to the recognition of human dignity.

Remarkable for the young people was the attitude of the staff members towards them in the organizations. The young people described how in other parts of the society not related to youth diaconia they had had negative experiences of how people treat and perceive them as young people who participate in youth diaconia. On the contrary, the experiences on how the staff members and volunteers in the diaconia organizations had treated and perceived them had been mostly positive. The staff members and volunteers had had an impact on the atmosphere in the organizations, they had become role models for the young people and people that the young people could trust in. Some young people described the attitude of the staff as warm and open (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4). These attitudes were experienced when the young people had joined the services for the first time, but the attitude was also experienced in situations where the young person had been away and come back. One young person describes it followingly:

Sometimes I did not visit the center for months, but when I came back every time the workers and volunteers showed me that they are very happy to see me. There was no condemnation. Nobody was telling me that I am bad, nobody laughed at me every time when I came back. After one more time walking away and doing bad things I returned with a deep understanding that this is the only place where people really wait for me and that I want to change something in my life. (Ukraine M2.)

The young people mention how they were surprised over the attitude and the way people perceived them. They even thought that the staff were not like everyone else. (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4.) There can be seen different ways how these young people have felt that people treat them and how people perceive them. The young people in Kyrgyzstan also mentioned that they had not have many people in their lives that were trustworthy (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4).

When I came to the shelter, I was very surprised by the people who worked there, they were very kind, open, I wanted to trust them, because until that moment in my life, unfortunately, there were no such people, everything was quite the opposite, and I forgot how to trust people. (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4.)

The young people express how they have encountered people who are interested in them, willing to get to know them and willing to support and take care of them and reminding the young people of their dignity. A few of the young people brought up that being part of the life in the institution or organization had changed the view on themselves and understanding of self-worth:

Exactly in church I felt someone needs in me and wait for me. (Kyrgyzstan F6.)

I was really impressed that I did not have to earn respect, but I am respected anyway. I felt valued and met people who tried to understand me open-hearted. (Ukraine M1.)

You remind me that I am a person with dignity and deserve respect as I am. (Kyrgyzstan F5.)

The importance of the recognition of human dignity can be understood also in relation to how to the ways the young people described other encounters in society. The young people expressed how they had had complex and negative experiences of how people have related to, perceived and treated the them because they participate in youth diaconia. Some of the young people in Ukraine expressed how they had been bullied or excluded in school by other students or how the teachers had treated them differently or unequally because they were orphans and part of the organizations.

I was very excluded, because I attended the day care center. That was very difficult for me. (Ukraine M2.)

I had always problems with the other kids, because the teacher called me an orphan and then the other kids behaved differently.(Ukraine F6.)

Also in Slovakia, youth in diaconia have experienced similar experienced as in the other countries. One girl said that in her experience people have a negative impression of young people related to youth diaconia (Slovakia F6). Some of the other young people could

relate to this and shared their experiences. One person had told at a workplace that he was from the diaconia organization and then he felt that the people at the workplace perceived him as a homeless man, in bad light, with mental health problems and not equal with other people. (Ukraine M1.) The rest of the young people in the focus group could relate to this and added that people's attitude and perception change when people hear about the personal history and connections to youth diaconia. Some had also experienced that strangers have tried to define and explain the young people's background. Some of the young people had stopped to tell people about their background and relations to the organization to avoid these situations and experiences. (Slovakia M4, M1, F6, M3.)

It is negative if I tell other people in a community who were and where we are from (e.g. from half-way house). It does not even matter what education you have. There is straight away a negative impression for the people. (Slovakia F6.)

People do not take me as equal anymore, if I tell them that I live in the half-way house. (Slovakia M1.)

The second subcategory is the experience of a welcoming atmosphere. The content analysis brought up topics highlighting the atmosphere of the organizations as vital and this having an effect on how people are treated and given care and attention. The analysis also shows that the atmosphere can also have a negative impact on the quality of the youth diaconia services provided.

Through a welcoming atmosphere the young people have found places to grow as young people, to find people to trust and a place where they can be themselves. The atmosphere of a place is formed by the way people treat each other and therefore the subcategory is strongly linked to the way how the staff members and volunteers have treated the young people.

I love this place. Here are so many good people and atmosphere. (Slovakia P4.)

F1 I really like the atmosphere in the day care centers. It differs from the atmosphere at home or in school. I feel like you are part of a huge friendly family. (Kyrgyzstan F1.)

Cozy. Like a real home. You can be yourself. You don't have to pretend that you are someone else. (Kyrgyzstan F2.)

It's like a family. I feel to be part of a community. (Kyrgyzstan M2.)

The experience of a warm and friendly atmosphere was created by different situations where the staff members had given the young people attention and time. The young people mentioned that the staff and the volunteers had been as an inspiration for them, they had given advice and consultations to the young people, they had solved issues together with the young people and given help and support. (Ukraine M2, F3, F5; Kyrgyzstan F6; Slovakia F2, F7.)

They paid attention on me, gave me love that won my heart. (Kyrgyzstan F6.)

I do not feel alone now, I have someone to talk to, to solve the issues with – it is very positive. (Slovakia F8.)

I have a desire to be like the teachers in our center who have endless patience. (Armenia F2.)

A social worker ... in “Hniezdo” has a little time for me, but when she has time – we communicate. (Slovakia F6.)

The young people expressed their gratefulness and affection towards the staff members by telling about how long they had known the staff (Slovakia F7) and of what they were thankful for (Ukraine F6). One of the young people described how she has kept contact with the staff also after then time spent in the organizations.

I continue to keep in touch with the shelter staff, as they became the ones who helped me gain hope and faith in the future. (Kyrgyzstan F4.)

In the focus group interview in Georgia the young people brought up how they felt that the organizations and the way the staff members were working, had been better before. In the interviews the young people discussed how things had changed, many children and young people had left the center and that the attitude of the teachers had changed. They reflected on how in their opinion the teachers had previously been more attentive towards the children and that the teachers had used better methods which in their opinion were better. They felt that one reason why many children and young people had left the organization was because of the staff members attitude and way of working. They also discussed how there had also grown mistrust towards some of the staff which had led the

young people to feel that the services and activities were not so good anymore. They thought that teachers and staff in general should be warm, patient and have time for children. (Georgia P1, P2.)

...despite that fact the children number were huge, teachers were more attentive than they are now. (Georgia P1.)

Time spent together with the young people and time that the staff is possible to give to the young people is highly valued and anticipated. One young person suggested that the decline in the service and the change in the attitudes of teachers was caused by the lack of time the staff had for the children and youth and by the increase of paper work the staff had to do (Georgia P1).

I sure, that this problem causes from the teacher. They do so many administrative paper work that they don't have time for children. (Georgia P1.)

5.2 Social inclusion

The second established top category describing the experiences of the young people participating in youth diaconia is social inclusion. The interviews highlight the support that the young people have received that have increased their social inclusion. The top category is divided into two subcategories: 1) impact on the living conditions and 2) impact on education and employment. There will be discussed in depth below.

The first subcategory is the impact of the youth diaconia services on the young people's living conditions. The main topics determined through the content analysis were that youth diaconia activities affect young people's experience of life and in their family, it is of help in disadvantageous life situations, the organizations might become young people's second home and help them get hold of life again as well as give them support in different legal or official matters.

One point of view of the youth diaconia services discussed by the young people was what kind of impact the services had had on their life course and the situation in their families. Diaconia and social activity is supporting the people in disadvantageous life situations.

The impact and influence of the services differ between individuals because all of the young people have their own individual, unique life, personal history and context, though there are also similarities in the events and circumstances in their lives. Although the services vary from each other in the different countries and in the different organizations, there can be seen similarities in the young people's experiences and the perceptions on how being part of the organizations had influenced their lives.

Many of the organizations work with street-connected children and young people. Many of the young people describe how the organization has become their new home.

...the organization became the family for me, I am very grateful that at that difficult time, when I was completely left alone on the street. (Kyrgyzstan F3.)

There are similar experiences also in other countries on how being connected to the institution or organization have changed the life course – the young people have in their own words started to live a normal life, changed their lifestyle, stopped being attracted of the things connected to street life, become part of a community and their life has changed for better. (Georgia P6, Ukraine F3, Ukraine M5.)

Street-connected life can have different consequences on a young person's life. Street-connected life places young people in vulnerable situations. The young people involved in the interviews described street-connected life followingly:

When I managed to escape from that house, I became street and start begging for food since I was starving, was very cold and scared. (Kyrgyzstan F4.)

... it was very bad at street. I didn't like to be a part of the street life... It was long time ago... and I was there a lot... (Georgia P5.)

Before I was in the street, I had some protest in my family, I wanted to be outside all the time, I have been all the centers in Tbilisi ... after that I was jail for 6 month ... The main reason why I was not at home was conflict with everyone.... So than I decided to left house. I wanted to be free and I could do whatever I wanted.... I was 7-8 years old... I don't like boundaries.... Then I gained many friends. This period was so mess... (Georgia P6.)

The young people in Kyrgyzstan also explained how a person must be registered to be entitled various legal, official and basic services in the society. The registration has to be done together with an adult, but because street-connected children and young people might not have any adults or legal guardians to support them, the minors are left on their own. The young people interviewed in the focus group expressed themselves about how the need of having registered documents and the registration process is difficult for young people and especially for young people that don't have reliable adults around them. (Kyrgyzstan M2). The organization has helped the young people to get their registration done and through that the young people have been able to benefit of the services in the society.

Not all of the young people interviewed have lived a street-connected life, but many of them described issues, problems and difficult circumstances that their families had gone through. Families struggled with substance abuse, violence towards family members and towards the young people, insufficient living conditions and homelessness, mistreatment in foster care, malnutrition, unemployment and underemployment of the parents or grandparents, adults in the family juggling with too many jobs because of poor economic situation. Some of the young people grew up in single parent families or in a family where the grandparents took care of them, some of the young people had lived in various family settings such as foster care and orphanages, relatives and at friends. In relation to difficulties and struggles that the families had had the young people told different ways how the organizations have helped the families.

Living Hope started to cover all the medical expenses for my mother. (Ukraine F3.)

I was beaten in case if I did not iron the cloth. I have never had any support in that family. From both sides, at school and at home I was humiliated. The "woman" ("Profi family") did not even do my laundry, and did not allow me to do it myself. School peers helped me with my laundry (take it at home). She did not play the role of a mother, it was some kind of terror for me. I had a full list of tasks in the house: to do ironing, cleaning, go to the garden and do some work over there until the evening etc. (Slovakia F8.)

I started to attend the day care center I met many good people, ready to help me and my family. (Ukraine F2.)

Some of the young people had lived in a shelter for young people but then later they had moved back to their families and the organization had provided the families with supervision and support with the new start of having their young person living back at home.

I lived in the shelter for a year then I was placed back to my own family since it became a safer place to live then it used to be but the staff of the organization provided supervision of my family during the next few years. (Kyrgyzstan F1, F2, M2.)

In some cases, the situation in the family had become worse for the young person and the young person had shifted from daytime services to fulltime services and moved to the institution.

First I was day care child and then when I had crucial problems in my family I was staying at night also. (Georgia P1.)

The second subcategory is the impact on education and employment youth diaconia have had. The interview data shows that participating in the youth diaconia have given them support in school and education related matters, they have received help in funding their education, they have received help with unemployment issues and have succeeded to connect to work life.

Many of the young people had needed support in building a stable and independent life. School and education in general have been areas that the young people had received support for from the organizations they have been involved in. Some of them had needed support to enroll to a school, some had needed and received support in doing their homework, some had needed motivation and encouragement to keep studying.

I've got a lot of help during the secondary school. (particularly, from the workers of Relevant) (Slovakia F7.)

Social workers from Relevant motivated me to move forward ... motivated me to start the studies in the university. (Slovakia F7.)

Some of the young people had needed funding for different courses and other education and the organizations had helped in covering these costs. In other cases, the institution had helped with the legal documents so that the young person could study for free. In

Slovakia the young people mentioned how the different trainings on how to work had been important, supportive and necessary for them.

The organization restored to me registration documents that were lost. I had privileges at school so that I could start studying again for free. (Kyrgyzstan F3.)

Relevant helped me to get other funds from one project. I used to go to language courses – Relevant covered that one for me as well. (Slovakia F7.)

The people around me were supportive in making the progress in my life. Also the trainings were supportive too. (Slovakia M1.)

Closely related to educational support is employment issues. Many of the young people have gained job experiences despite their young age. The young people had though also seen a lot of unemployment and under-employment within their families. The personal and family history that the interviewees shared gave a picture of families and young people in poor economic situations.

When I didn't have enough for my personal expenses I always found some job to earn that money, for example collecting walnuts and selling them. (Ukraine M1.)

I worked during that time (during schooltime), so I managed to cover the bus tickets, lunches at school and so on. (Slovakia F7.)

Mother brings me and my younger brother up alone, I would say we are poor. (Ukraine M2.)

I often was left alone even during kindergarten time, because my mother was always working trying to earn enough money for us to survive. (Ukraine M4.)

In the biological family the economic situation was bad; the father worked, but he did not earn the necessary amount of money to take care of all of us. (Slovakia F7.)

The different organizations offer support in connecting adolescents with working life. In Slovakia the aim of the youth diaconia services is to teach and train the young people to manage on their own in working life and become integrated to the society. The young people in Slovakia describe how the opportunity to work has given them the possibility

to become economically independent and stable, being able to pay debts, being part of a work community and getting the feeling of being needed and appreciated.

I was doing for SED, (Center of Lutheran diaconia who runs half way house) with a purpose to learn how to work, and other things, which I needed. (Slovakia M5.)

I have finished school and now I work in a company called “U Denku” (social enterprise run by SED). This work helped me to get rid of a debt. (Slovakia M3)

I got a working position in health sector after finishing a nursing school. Now I work as a nurse-practitioner. (Slovakia F6.)

In Ukraine one young person had learned cooking at the organization as he had prepared meals for other children in the activities the organization had organized. Obtaining the cooking skills have led to the young person to hope that cooking could be his future profession.

I really like to prepare meals and in the day care center I have developed this skill. I have voluntarily helped to prepare food for the kids almost every day over the last two years. And now I want to become a professional cook. The NGO helped me to define my future profession I would say. (Ukraine M3.)

5.3 Being empowered

The third top category related to the experiences of youth in diaconia is being empowered. The interviews emphasize on how young people discussed how the youth diaconia services had influenced them growing as a young person, what kind of skills they had learned, to what kind of communities they had belonged to, what kind of impacts communities had on their lives and what kind of participatory roles they have had. The top category of being empowered is divided into three subcategories: 1) identity building, 2) participation and 3) belonging to a community. All three are discussed in more detail below.

The first subcategory is identity building. Based on the content analysis the young people highlighted how youth diaconia had given them the possibility to grow as a person and to

deepen their faith. They emphasized their experience on mentoring, support and motivation.

Being part of the youth diaconia services have had an impact on the young people's identity building. The services have given the young people different skills, competences and experiences that they might have been deprived from if they had not been part of the services.

The young people describe frequently how being part of the different youth diaconia have influenced their identity building, growing as a person and growing in their faith.

Before I have attraction beyond the streets but after being here I changed my life, I became more "talkative" connected with people, change some sought about the life and change my lifestyle. (Georgia P3.)

Other young people described that they had learned to be more tolerant and more forgiving towards their friends and family members (Armenia F3). Some of the young people in Slovakia told that the kindness and love they had experienced in the organization, despite the actions and behavior that they regret, had changed them to be more kind and better (Slovakia F3, F4).

Pastoral care, sessions with psychologists and therapists and discussions with the staff members have been meaningful and important for the young people. Through the discussions young people have received help to deal with the circumstances in their lives, they have grown as persons and in their spiritual life (Ukraine M4), they have received mentoring in a new phase of their life (Estonia M1), support in the process of changing the life, motivation and encouragements in spiritual guidance (Slovakia M1), and encouragement in building trust towards other people and trying to open up themselves to other people (Slovakia F6).

Everything stopped in one day. To make this changed the day care center helped me. I analyzed the life of youngsters older than me attending the center - not smoking, drinking, loving and caring for us the younger ones and I wanted to be like them. (Ukraine M1.)

Being included in youth diaconia and as a part of a community has also changed the values and worldviews of the young people. Encountering volunteers and staff members of the organizations have made the young people to reevaluate their values and how they perceive the world.

I also was very much impressed by the help of two men from Germany. They are both handicapped, but still help a lot and care for others. I have met them during a youth exchange with Living Hope. They don't look at their weaknesses but use what they have to make the lives of others a little better.

For me it is important to be part of Living Hope community. It has changed my world view. Before I was more an egoist now it brings me joy to help others. (Ukraine M5.)

I have learned from the teachers of the center that everyone is important in our society. (Armenia F2.)

All the organizations are faith based and many of the young people explained how youth diaconia had supported and strengthened their faith which is part of the young people's identity. The young people explained the spiritual growth in various ways. As being surrounded by other believers, Christian belief and values had become more personal for a few young persons (Ukraine F3, M4; Georgia P6). Taking part in home groups, worship services and Bible study groups, faith had grown and it had become more deep and the role of faith had become bigger in their lives (Ukraine M1, F3; Kyrgyzstan F3, F4, F1, M1; Estonia F1). One young person from Armenia noted that if the St. Mariane Social Center would not be faith based, he and the other young people would probably not be Christians and know God (Armenia M3).

The young people explained how the faith and the spiritual life in the organizations had influenced their lives. This is represented in the interviews with e.g. the following expressions: hearing about God made them more stronger and rooted and laid a foundation for life (Ukraine F2; Kyrgyzstan F2), hearing and learning about Christian faith in the organizations had supported the young people (Ukraine M3, F5; Kyrgyzstan, F5), church and faith had changed themselves and their lives (Kyrgyzstan, F6), faith and going to church calms them down (Armenia M1, F4, M2), faith gives trust in the future and in future plans (Ukraine M4; Kyrgyzstan F4), through the institution and God dreams had come true (Ukraine F3), through faith they had found answers to their questions (Ukraine F6),

choices and decisions are based on faith (Estonia M7) and having other Christians around them had had an influence on them (Ukraine M1).

Faith had been part of difficult times in life. One young person said that his faith had been the only anchor in the difficult situations in life and that life is much easier with faith and with the organization being faith based (Ukraine M2). Many others had experienced that by relying on their faith they had overcome difficult times in life. One person in Kyrgyzstan expressed that through her faith and prayers she can survive the ‘unfriendly’ world and another said she can get through difficult times with faith (Kyrgyzstan F1, F5). The men interviewed in the Estonian focus group expressed how faith and church had saved them from the difficulties of their history with addictions (Estonia M1, M2, M3, M4, M5).

Faith and growing as a Christian had also influenced the relationships with family members and friends. A young person noted that she had started to pray for her parents and she said that a lot had changed and her relationship to her parents had become better (Ukraine F2). One of the young people had also seen that it was because by God’s influence that she had become part of youth diaconia and received caretaking (Kyrgyzstan F3). One person said that she was happy to hear that the organization she was attending was Christian faith based, because it made her feel more safe and calm knowing that the people in the organization were believers (Slovakia F6).

For many young people religion and faith had a big impact and was an important part of their identity and life. But for some, religion and faith were not important or they didn’t believe in God (Georgia P2). There were some young people who felt that religion and faith had no influence on their current life (Estonia M6, F2). One person had had a rich history of churchgoing, but at times he felt that he was not deeply dedicated to religion (Kyrgyzstan M3). Also one person was pondering on how her faith had become more ambiguous and that she was now more careful with trusting in what people say about religion, faith and God (Kyrgyzstan F2). One person said that he is not a believer, but he has no problem with the organization to be faith based (Slovakia M4).

Growing as a young person includes learning and youth work and youth diaconal services in general can be a space for informal learning. Many of the organizations offer activities

for the young people where they can learn new skills and try out new activities. Skills that the young people have learned include playing guitar, dancing, language skills, cooking skills.

We learn something new at the center every day. (Armenia M1.)

Youth work and diaconal services can also be a form of producing experiences that young people might be deprived of because of the hard circumstances they deal with. Youth work and youth diaconal services can even out inequalities in the society. The young persons in Armenia told about different trips, excursions and pilgrimages with the organizations. They told how the destinations were unknown to them, how they learned new things of the history and the culture of their home country, and that they would probably not have seen those places without the organizations. They also mentioned that they had had a good time together and received good and positive energy from spending time together in groups (Armenia F4, F1, F3, M1). A young person in Ukraine also told about her opportunities to travel to different countries and take part in a youth exchange through the organizations and that it gave her many opportunities (Ukraine F3).

The second subcategory is participation. Based on the content analysis the young people emphasize the active role of the volunteers in diaconia and the importance of belonging to a community.

Some of the young people mentioned how they have had an active role in volunteering or working for the organization that they are involved in. For example, in Georgia one young person told frequently told how he is a peer educator in a mobile group that monitors the streets and the risk zones of the streets with the intention to find street-connected children and help them to survive (Georgia P6). The peer educators have a background in being street-connected children themselves. The young person describes how he had some trouble with his family, how he ended up on the streets and in jail. After he was released from jail, he became part of the youth center. As a peer educator he helps other children and youth to get back to normal life and away from a street-connected life. He feels that he can help because he has similar experiences as other street-connected children, he can explain what he has gone through, what he has learned and how he has passed the difficulties. He feels that other children can trust him because they can relate to him.

I am peer educator and I like it. I don't call it profession but still it is god job, because I help children and youth, help them to back to normal life and leave the street. If I change my life they can change too (he was a street kid in the past) and I try to explain all the mistakes and challenges what is important what I have already passed. And they trust because they know me. (Georgia P6.)

Participating and volunteering in the activities and programs organized by the organizations are mentioned by young people from other countries too. Two of the young people in Ukraine mentioned that they participate in helping in the activities and one of them mentioned that he finds value in belonging to a community and participating in the activities. In Estonia one of the informants said that he has been part of organizing an event for six years already. In Slovakia, a big part of the aim of the programs and activities conducted by the organization builds on the idea of participation in social enterprises where the service users can train for different jobs and be integrated to the society.

I can volunteer in the day care center, helping other kids. (Ukraine M2.)

We (the young people) can develop a program for the kids in our centers connected to sustainability and eco- friendliness. (Ukraine M1.)

The third subcategory is belonging to a community. The content analysis picked up experiences of the young people that suggest both positive and negative experiences in relation to the belonging to a community but in general highlight the strong feeling of belonging to a community.

Belonging to a community and its impacts were discussed in the interviews. In the content analysis community refers to the organizations being part of the research. . For some of the young people it was a positive experience to be part of a community, for some it had have some negative implications and some of the young people felt indifferent or reluctant about belonging to a community. A young person in Ukraine explained that it is important for her to belong to the organization and she has tried to attend church regularly and to serve on summer camps. Belonging and being active has shaped her faith (Ukraine F5). In Slovakia one of the young people described how she feels that the young people in the organization form a community because they live together, communicate with each other and sometimes they spend time together and go to different places together

(Slovakia F7). A girl in Estonia described how she likes to be part of the organization when there is a lot of singing and storytelling (Estonia F1).

Belonging and being part of a community can also be complicated and have negative implications. Young people feel that it is important to belong to the community and being part of the activities but at the same time it is difficult to be part of the community since they have problems in trusting people.

For me belonging is not so important, because I was often disappointed by people. But I like to serve God and people, for instance in summer camps, in the day care center etc. Participation is important, because we are part of a community. (Ukraine F6.)

Two of the young people in Kyrgyzstan reflected on their belonging to the organization and being Christians. For them it was important to be part of the community because it was part of their identity, but at the same time they felt that it separated them from other young people in their city.

My identity is rooted in my family, in the organizations and my church. I am actively involved in church life, involving in various youth ministries and I enjoy it... This separates me from the general youth in our city, but at the same time, I am a member of the Christian community and part of my church. (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4.)

The young people in Kyrgyzstan also reflected over these dimensions of being a Christian and being part of the organization and church and being somewhat excluded from other young people's lives and cultures. The young people felt difficulties to build relationships with non-believers because they have a different value base, they had struggled to find a "common language" and they felt that they were interested in different things in life and had different opinions on e.g. use of substances and sexual relationships.

I often can't find a "common language" with unbelievers. This separates me from the general youth in our city. (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4.)

The young people in Ukraine had had experiences of discrimination and exclusion because of being Christian. One person explained how her friends had made jokes about her Christian faith, which she didn't like, but she felt that the jokes would not stop her to

believe and do good things (Ukraine F1). Many other young people in Ukraine could relate to the experience and had experienced something similar. Another young person told in more detail about his experiences. He told that he felt excluded from other students because of his relations to the organization and because of his faith. The other students in school had tried to pressure him to do things that he didn't want to do. (Ukraine M2.) Similarly the young people in Slovakia discussed how Christian faith can be a taboo and how talking about faith can change how people perceive you.

I also had many others making fun of me, because of my values. (Ukraine F1.)

It was the hardest year in school for me in relation to my classmates. I was very excluded, because I attended the day care center. (Ukraine M2.)

The taboo is connected to a faith. If you speak about the faith - your opinion may not be accepted by others. You tell your opinion on the Christianity – and you will be a different person for others. (Slovakia M1.)

Some of the young people felt that they didn't belong to a community. One young person reflected on how she thinks that she didn't belong to the community in the organization. She explained how she is reserved towards the other girls in the center because she felt that the other girls could not help her and that the young people in the center all takes care of their own things. The young person felt that she can relay and talk with the staff members in the organization. (Slovakia F8.)

6 YOUNG PEOPLE'S DEVELOPMENT IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS ON YOUTH DIACONIA

This chapter presents the findings based on the content analysis related to the second research questions that tries to answer what development ideas the young people had related to youth diaconia. The young people shared their thoughts on specific improvement and development areas in the individual and in the focus group interviews. In the focus group interviews the young people were asked to describe the life of themselves, of young people in general and problems young people meet in life. The young people were also asked to compose ideas on how the organizations could develop their services to meet the needs of the young people and to find solutions for the problems, difficulties or disadvantageous situations young people might be in. The problems and difficulties young people are facing include economic and educational issues, problems concerning health and well-being, housing issues, problems with rights and entitled services, independency and growing up, and tensions and pressure from different parts of the society.

Similar as in chapter five, the performed content analysis suggests three top categories that capture the improvement and development ideas of the young people: 1) supporting orphans and street-connected young people, 2) building understanding between young people and adults and the churches and 3) supporting young people in social inclusion. The top categories were formed based on subcategories that are presented in table 5. The next chapters will present how the abovementioned top categories have been determined via extensive analysis of the interview transcriptions and through subcategorization work performed during the content analysis phase.

TABLE 5. Top and subcategories of young people's development ideas and suggestions

Top category	Supporting orphans and street-connected young people		Building understanding between young people and adults and the churches		Supporting young people in social inclusion.		
Sub-category	Difficult circumstances in life.	Ideas for support.	Tension between different groups.	Hope to have space to be young and to be understood.	Independent life.	Free time activities.	Help with education and

							em- ploy- ment.
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6.1 Supporting orphans and street-connected young people

The first established top category describing how young people would enhance the youth diaconia is supporting orphans and street-connected young people. This top category is further divided into two subcategories: 1) difficult circumstances in life and 2) need for support.

The first subcategory consists of the difficult circumstances the both orphans and street-connected young face in life. As mentioned already before, many of the young people that have taken part in this research are street-connected young people. As a result of trouble in families or in foster care, some of the young people had actively chosen to or because of the circumstances ended up living on the streets. Street-connected youth was one group of young people that the interviewees identified as a group who would in their opinion need support and help. The hardships related to living on the streets according to the young people's own experiences include issues like not being registered and therefore not being entitled all the services there would be for children and young people (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4) and humiliating and unstable living conditions with begging, substance use, violence and uncertainty (Georgia P4, P5).

The second subcategory consist of the suggestions to meet the needs of orphans and street-connected youth. On top of being concerned of the living conditions and well-being of orphans and street-connected youth, the young people were concerned of the rights of disadvantaged children and young people. The young people in Kyrgyzstan discussed about the problems with the requirements for registration and valid documents which young people have difficult to obtain without the help of adults (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4). The young people in Ukraine discussed about the treatment of orphans and unequal and discriminatory practices there are e.g. in schools (Ukraine M1, F5, F6). Similarly, the young people in Slovakia had had personal experiences of discrimination and mistreatment because of their background (Slovakia M4, M1, F6, M3). As a solution to the discrimination and unequal treatment the young people suggested advocacy work for the rights of street-

connected young people and orphans as well as advocacy work for rights of children (Ukraine M1).

Supporting rights of orphans. The orphans do not get what they should materially and financially by the law. So in the protection of children's rights there is a lot of work ahead. And it would be important to do more in this field in our organization. (Ukraine M1.)

The young people also suggested supporting orphans with material donations and food. They also suggested that there could also be different activities with sports, arts and mentoring with the aim of building friendships between the children in the orphanages in the organization and other children and young people in the city. (Ukraine F2, M2, M1.)

I think regular visits to orphanages with material help and some common activities would be great. (Ukraine M2.)

We could go and visit an orphanage regularly. Maybe some kind of friendship/mentorship will develop. (Ukraine F2.)

The young people discussed how there are different services for street-connected young people, but there are not enough of organization that offer youth diaconia. They suggested that social workers could work on the streets and look for street-connected youth and approach them on the streets. The participants in the Estonian focus group suggested that street-connected young people need support like loving and caring families, respect and recognition, social programs with music, training and creative activities and support in making choices in their lives. As a whole, the young people thought that there should be more services for orphans and street-connected young people. One type of services would be the "Half-way" house in Slovakia. (Slovakia F2; Kyrgyzstan F1, F4; Estonia M1, M3, M4.)

Abandoned young people, probably even teenagers, maybe they have parents or guardians, but they have remained out of the system and are trying to figure out their own lives. Sometimes they receive help and support from organizations such as the "Children of the Tien Shan", but there are very few such organizations in our country. (Kyrgyzstan F1, F4.)

The young people who graduated from the orphanage. They have the fewer opportunities. (Slovakia F2.)

Secretary/Observer: do I understand correctly, do the children and young people need such half-way houses?

Yes, the half-way houses. (Slovakia F6.)

Some people from the orphanages ended up on the street, as they did not have where to live. Those youngsters were for some time with the relatives; nevertheless, the relatives used the chance to receive the state money for the young people, who leave the orphanage (1000 EUR). I had another thought. When I saw that the relatives are mostly motivated with the money, I did not go to them. Because I have had 2 options, whether to go to the relatives, or to “half-way house”. (Slovakia M1.)

6.2 Building understanding between young people and adults and the churches

The second established top category is describing how young people have identified a gap between generations: young people and adults, and the traditional church, and how they hope youth diaconia youth diaconia could build understanding. The subcategories are: 1) gap between groups and 2) hope to have space to be young and to be understood.

The first subcategory in the gap between youth culture, globalization and a pluralistic society on one side and adults, the older generation in general, traditions and the traditional churches on the other side. The young people in Kyrgyzstan especially discussed how they felt that it is valuable that the organization is faith-based and that Christian values are part of the youth diaconia and the services provided. But they also discussed how they experience a tension between young people and the older generation.

It would probably be easier to live, for us young people if the church and parents knew how to listen and hear us, would be willing to let us make our own choices, and not decide for us what we need in this world. (Kyrgyzstan F1.)

The problem with the gap that has arisen between the old and new generations, and a lack of understanding between them (Kyrgyzstan F2.)

The young people felt that because of the gap between generations and between the traditional church and youth culture, adolescents might be misunderstood and might not receive the support and services they would need. Therefore the second subcategory is hope to have space to be young and to be understood. The young people felt that as many of the issues in young people’s lives are seen from the perspective of churches the

organizations do not give enough time and support for the young people to choose a better direction for their lives. (Kyrgyzstan F1, F4, F2.)

These are Christian organizations, many of them have strong beliefs about sin and are not particularly open to “sinful” youth, are not always ready to accept them with their views and beliefs, are not always ready to give enough time for young people to choose the right way and not destruction for their lives. (Kyrgyzstan F1, F4.)

The young people hoped that the church would become more open to the youth. They suggested that churches should use different methods and approaches in serving the youth. They thought that the churches should take in consideration the pace of development in the society and the churches could e.g. use technology.

It seems to me that the churches in our country should think about using different approaches in serving the youth, not just traditional ones, taking into account how fast the world is developing, technology and what new challenges society poses to modern youth. (Kyrgyzstan F3.)

I think that in churches there are rules and traditions that cannot accept young people as they are in our days, with their voices and sins. (Kyrgyzstan F4.)

According to the interviewees, churches should consider what the issues are in young people’s lives and address those issues. This would make the churches more open towards young people. The young people mentioned issues like the moral and physical pressure of fitting in, meeting the standard of being ‘normal’ and reflecting on one’s sexual orientation. They hoped that there would be space in the churches and in the organizations to talk about questions and issues that confuse adolescents. (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4, M2.)

In our Asian context, it is not customary to talk about sexual orientation, drugs and alcohol consumption, since this is all considered a sin and often instead of helping a teenager make an informed choice in favor of getting freedom, the Christian (or even Muslim) community condemns this behavior and insists on the immediate release and termination of this practice. A special taboo lies with sexual orientation, probably this is also due to the fact that we live in the Muslim community, where even talking on this topic is generally unacceptable, so the teenager is left alone with his problem and he doesn’t even have anyone to talk about it. (Kyrgyzstan F4.)

6.3 Supporting young people in social inclusion

The third top category is supporting young people in social inclusion. The top category is divided into three subcategories: 1) independent life, 2) free time activities and 3) help with education and employment.

Growing up and learning to be independent concerns all young people as a part of adolescence and therefore it is the first subcategory. The focus group in Estonia talked about street-connected young people, but also about young people in general. They thought that youth diaconia for young people could try to work on the assets and interests that a young person have. They thought that by starting with the assets and interests, it would encourage the young person to continue with other issues in life. They discussed also about how any kind of activities and support would prevent them from participating dangerous situations.

Finding out what a human being really likes to do and starting to study it, for example playing guitar, then step by step he starts to open his mind for other things too. People need your time and recognition. (Estonia M3.)

Free trainings, that are open for young people are important. This helps to prevent dangerous situations. (Estonia M4.)

As the second subcategory is free time activities. The young people discussed how free time activities would support young people in being part of the society and prevent from street-connected life and substance abuse. Free-time activities are needed especially in rural areas that might not have enough of services and activities for young people. There could be youth clubs and free-time centers and the organizations could organize seminars and workshops with different topics and together with schools as well as discussion groups and places for sharing experiences.

I really would like us to develop projects rising awareness in the field of youth and ecology. (Ukraine M1.)

Seminars and workshops for kids from our schools to bring all together. This will help to be more inclusive. (Ukraine F3.)

Clubs, should participate in the preventive activities. (Georgia M1.)

In my opinion, it should be such an organization like “CVC” (Centrum voľného času) – “Free Time Centre”. (Slovakia F2.)

The young people also mentioned that young people need support with education and employment issues. This is the third subcategory in supporting social inclusion. The young people in the research talked about their hopes and dreams for their own futures including decent jobs, that they could provide for them and their families. Many hoped to be able to support their future family better than their own childhood family had been able to support them. The young people wished that the youth diaconia would include learning skills to apply for jobs and be in job interviews, there would be possibilities to do practical trainings and learn skills for working life. (Slovakia F6, M1).

The education should be more practical. The second thing is to prepare a student at schooling system for the future life. (Slovakia M1.)

I would add the preparation for the work interviews at school. (Slovakia F6.)

7 FINDINGS

7.1 Model of youth diaconia with youth in the risk of marginalization

Based on the content analysis performed on the data gathered during the individual and focus group interviews with young people, it is clear that young people that participated in youth diaconia have experienced acceptance, social inclusion and empowerment. These are the answers to the first research question in this thesis. The analysis showed that these experiences are attained when the youth diaconia organizations emphasize specific areas in their work. These areas are supporting human development, ensuring social inclusion and participation, cherishing sustainable and caring relations between the youth and adults, securing a welcoming atmosphere and inviting the young people to belong to a community. These areas are depicted figure 3.

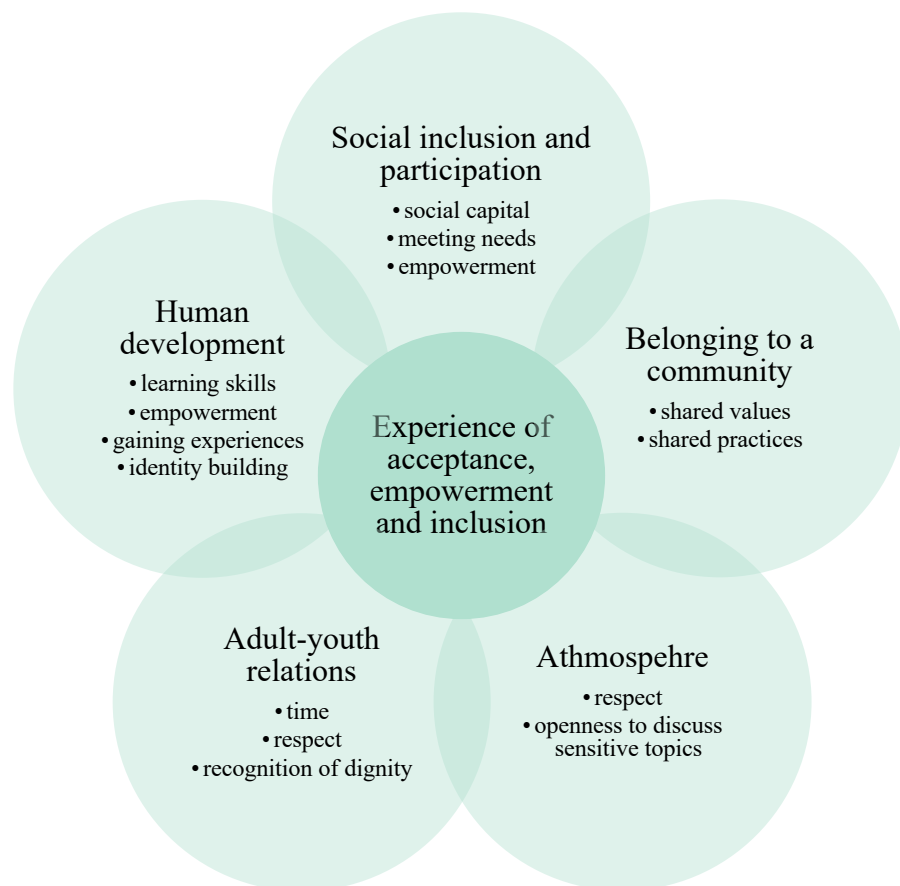


FIGURE 3. Model on youth diaconia creating the experience of acceptance, social inclusion and empowerment

7.2 Development ideas and suggestions on youth diaconia

The second research question concerned how the young people that were interviewed see how youth diaconia should be developed. The analysis shows that the young people felt that it would be important to support orphans and street-connected youth, to build understanding between young people and adults and the churches, and to increase social inclusion. These ideas and visions were structured by looking at the reasons why a specific topic or issue is important according to the young people, how that topic or issue could be addressed and what kind of concrete actions could be done in the organizations.

The suggestion of supporting orphans and street-connected young people was presented because of the interviewee's personal experiences of foster care and street-connected life. Knowing the circumstances and understanding the vulnerable situation of orphans and street-connected youth, was a reason why this groups of youth was considered in need of attention. Youth diaconia organizations should focus on making living conditions better by tackling housing issues, supporting youth in independent life, advocating for the rights and fair treatment of street-connected young people and children in foster care. Concrete actions could be material donations, activities like sports etc. with the aim of building friendships or mentoring programs between young people from different backgrounds.

The suggestion to build understanding between young people and adults and hence decrease the gap between generations rose from the experience of tension between young people and the older generation. The young people pointed out that adolescents were not understood by the older generation and might therefore lack the support and services they would need. The interviewees hoped that the churches would firstly become more interested in and more open to young people, and secondly approach the issues in young people's lives from the perspective of the young people. Issues that the young people mentioned are e.g. the moral and physical pressure of fitting in, meeting the standard of being 'normal', discussing about alcohol and drugs and reflecting on one's sexual orientation. The young people hoped that there would be space in the churches and in the youth diaconia organizations to talk about questions and issues that perplex adolescents. Practical ideas that the young people came up with was using different methods and ways to reach

and serve youth, e.g. social media, having a space to discuss and reflect on issues relating to the perplex adolescents.

The suggestion of supporting social inclusion is related to the fact that growing up and learning to be independent concerns all young people as a part of adolescence. The young people dreamed of a future where they would be better off than where they were in their childhood. Actions for inclusion were presented as building on assets and interests, arranging informal education activities, and supporting with education and employment issues. Youth diaconia should have a preventive role and not only fix risk behavior. Concrete ideas for youth diaconia activities are free-time activities, youth clubs and free-time centers where the organizations could organize seminars and workshops with different topics. Together with schools the organizations could organize discussion groups and places for sharing experiences. Concrete ideas were also to ensure adequate skills to apply for jobs, help to perform in job interviews and to increase possibilities to do practical trainings for working life.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Relations impact the experience of acceptance

Essential for the young people was the experience of being accepted by the staff members and the volunteers in the organizations. The adult-youth relationship is an important condition and prerequisite for a young person to thrive and show positive development. Sustaining and caring adult-youth relations are also a characteristic of youth programs according to Lerner and colleagues that may lead to positive youth development. (Lerner et al. 2012, 232; Lerner et al. 2006, 11.) The relationships between the youth and the adults in the organizations part of the research led into the young people's process of building self-worth and human dignity.

Negative experiences of the organizations can also be connected to the adult-youth relations. There were only a few remarks on negative experiences. Negative experiences and disappointments are connected to the lack of time of the staff member for the young person. Time and appreciation given to a person indicates respect and recognition of one's dignity. According to Noordegraaf (2020) *diaconia* implies affirming people's dignity. Affirming and recognizing human dignity are achieved by seeing and hearing people – giving time to them.

The young people's development ideas also touch the experience of being accepted. The young people discuss and point out a gap between generations. They acknowledged a tension between youth culture and the values and norms of the traditional churches, the realm of adults. The concern to be accepted as a young person in churches and FBOs was also noted in South Africa by the international interdisciplinary research project YOMA. In the South African study, the churches provided a community for street-connected youth that provided social cohesion offering positive activities to replace destructive activities such as drug abuse. The churches attempted to create a fostering community and building an alternative (positive) identity and ethos for the young people, but at the same time churches could be experienced as judgmental, discriminatory or inaccessible by the young people. The YOMA research raises questions about whether churches in some instances attempt to foster social cohesion through social control – enforced through

(intended or unintended) stigma and discrimination. Where certain behaviors are not ‘acceptable’ within the frame of reference of most church members, those who engage in these activities could find it difficult to experience a sense of belonging in the church. Under such circumstances, the capacity of churches towards fostering social cohesion was weakened. (Le Roux, Hankela & McDonald 2018, 6.)

The young people within the Central and Eastern European and Central Asian context discussed how there might not be space for young people within the traditional churches because they might not accept young people as they are. The young people wished for possibilities to discuss about issues and concerns in adolescence with adults without condemnation or being forced to repent and give up behavior connected to youth culture. The hope to have time and space for discussions and questions indicated the need for adult-youth relations.

8.2 Youth diaconia as a tool for social inclusion

Social inclusion as a process and as a result emerged from the analysis as one of the working models of youth diaconia with marginalized youth. Relevant for developing the practice of youth diaconia is to assess if youth diaconia is supporting social inclusion, participation and empowerment, and is not pushing the marginalized youth even more to the margins. The various organizations involved in this research have noticed the importance to work with marginalized young people to increase their inclusion. NGOs, FBOs and different private and third sector service providers can be valuable coworkers and partners with local authorities and governments in building more inclusive societies (UNDP 2011, 84).

The role of FBOs in increasing social inclusion is topical and it has been studied for example in the research project YOMA. The YOMA research concluded in the South African context that FBOs were not successful in targeting social exclusion as a structural problem in young people’s lives. However, the research showed how the churches and FBOs were able to compensate for the lack of state provided social services and offered the only attainable support for the needs of some marginalized youth. (Swart et al. 2019, 11-12.) Similarly, the organizations participating in the research for this thesis can

provide activities and services through which young people can experience social inclusion even though the risks for exclusion are still prevalent. YOMA is an interesting research and gives possibilities for further development of youth diaconia in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia working with marginalized youth.

As drafted in the ecological human development theory and in the research on drivers of social exclusion and inclusion, the different environments and systems in the society affects an individual's life, development and social exclusion or inclusion status (Bronfenbrenner 1979; UNDP 2011). If youth diaconia aims at increasing inclusion, the ecological systems and their influence on exclusion should be reflected on and services and activities should be planned according to the knowledge of the interrelatedness of the different systems and drivers for exclusion (Backwith 2015, 93).

The development suggestions for the youth diaconia organizations as well as the young people's own experiences shows how the organizations have been decreasing individual risks to social exclusion (UNDP 2011, 80). The young people valued the activities in youth diaconia that decreases the individual risks for exclusion. Such activities focus on, for example, improving the skills for studying and for applying for jobs, enhancing school motivation and creating vocational training opportunities. The young people's ideas and visions for development of youth diaconia are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals through supporting the youths' access to labor, making economic growth inclusive, supporting gender equality and by reducing inequalities by focusing on marginalized youth. (Holt 2020, 6; UNDP 2016).

The importance of focusing on education is in line with UNICEF's (2018) and Save the Children's (2011) researches on street-connected children and young people in Georgia. Barriers to education are often related to the burden of the parents or other caretakers to provide children with school supplies, the falling of children's self-confidence if school performances are poor, difficulties to adapt to the rules of school and conditions at home that do not support children's concentration on home-work. Often children and young people feel obligated to assist parents in generating income rather than going to school. (UNICEF 2018, 39; Wargan & Dershem 2011, 55.) This had also been the case for some of the young people interviewed for this thesis. Education and school attendance is

nevertheless one of the most crucial protection elements and a means to decrease the risk for social exclusion (UNDP 2011, 80; Wargan & Dershem 2011, 55.)

The young people's concern of the well-being, inclusion and participation of orphans and street-connected youth underpins the importance of youth diaconia with marginalized youth. The suggestion to focus on work with this group of young people is an example on how youth diaconia can strive for social inclusion. Youth diaconia can focus on meeting needs, promoting participation and advocacy for policy change and can impact on each of them. (Addy 2013, 21.)

8.3 Becoming empowered in youth diaconia activities

The process of individuals becoming empowered is an important purpose of diaconia work (Addy 2013). Through the analysis of this thesis different forms of becoming empowered were found. The young people had felt that they had grown as a person through identity-building, participation and active roles in the organization and gaining some sense of community. Supporting the positive growing of a young person is related to work done with young people. In the young people's experiences of youth diaconia, characteristics like learning new skills, being active and participating in the organization's activities as well as having caring relationships influenced the experience of being empowered. These experiences and reflections resonate quite well also with the characteristics of the positive youth development theory of Lerner et al. (2006).

Participation and an assets-based approach can be possible approaches in youth diaconia and in work with marginalized or disadvantaged people to aim for empowerment (Addy 2013, 16). Some of the young people mentioned how they have had an active role in volunteering or working for the organization that they are involved in. These stories are an example on how assets and strengths of individuals are looked for and cultivated and then put in use for helping others (Green & Haines 2016).

Creating possibilities for participating strengthens the role of agency. Participation can be empowering both on the macro level and on the micro level of the society. (Kaukko 2013, 201; Parpart 2002, 165-166.) The young people had ideas on how they could

participate and generate change and good for other people. A young person showing active and positive engagement with the environment is seen as a result of the components of positive youth development. The Five Cs: character, competence, confidence, connection, and caring may lead to the sixth C - contribution. (Lerner 2018, 270.) Contribution can be actions taken to generate good for family, school, and community settings or to civil society and to the institutions of democracy. Being able to act and make a difference is part of the transformation of being empowered.

Being part of youth diaconia were not only experienced in a positive way and in an empowering way. The young people contemplate on how being part of the youth diaconia have also caused them experiences of stigmatization and exclusion from the local youth culture and from the majority groups in their societies. The contradiction is in how it is a positive experience to belong to a community and find a place where a young person is accepted, and how at the same time being identified as a service user in the organizations excludes and stigmatizes the young person to be different from other young people in school and on the streets. Similar experiences of stigma and exclusion have been noted by the Save the Children's research in Georgia. That research made a remark that families, children and young people that have experienced a street-connected life or poverty, have experienced that it is almost impossible for children to be accepted by their peers at school (Wargan & Dershem 2011, 59).

9 CONCLUSIONS AND EVALUATION

9.1 Conclusions

This thesis has explored the young people's experiences and development ideas on youth diaconia in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The purpose was to understand how the young people have perceived and experienced youth diaconia, what they may have learned or gained and what kind of impact youth diaconia have had on their lives. Moreover, the purpose was to understand how youth diaconia could be developed from the perspective of marginalized young people and to understand what the relevant issues or topics are in a young person's life in risk for marginalization. The purpose was to understand what the needs of young people are and how youth diaconia could meet these needs.

The content analysis and the findings of the thesis will be part of the research report composed by Jouko Porkka for interdiac's research project "Voices of the young people in the 'M'". The findings will be utilized by interdiac in updating of the handbook on working with marginalized young people and organize further learning programs for youth diaconia. The participating organizations are committed to develop and innovate new elaborate working models on working with marginalized young people and they will utilize the findings of interdiac's research.

The data of the thesis consisted of individual and focus group interviews and a content analysis was conducted in order to answer the research questions. The main findings of the thesis consists firstly of the young people's experiences on youth diaconia which are: acceptance, social inclusion and being empowered. Secondly the findings consist of the young people's developmental ideas on youth diaconia. There were three development ideas: supporting orphans and street-connected youth, building understanding between young people and adults and the churches, and supporting young people in social inclusion. The model on youth diaconia presented in chapter seven shows that the experiences of acceptance, social inclusion and empowerment, may be attained when the youth diaconia organizations emphasize specific areas in their work.

The thesis shows how the youth diaconia can impact young people's positive development according to the characteristics of positive youth development (Lerner et al 2006). The thesis shows the importance of the adult-youth relations, the importance of learning skills and having the possibility to participate and take active leadership roles in a community. The thesis also shows the impact of the interconnectedness of the individual and spheres of the society. Hence youth diaconia can decrease the risks of social exclusion and give support to young people in experiencing social inclusion and empowerment (Swart et al. 2019; UNDP 2011).

9.2 Evaluation and recommendations

One concern for the trustworthiness of the thesis is how well the findings represent the actual experiences and the voices of the young people. Another concern of the thesis is the fact that the data consisted predominantly of positive experiences of youth diaconia while both positive and negative experiences would be beneficial. Trustworthiness and credibility were enhanced by the critical discussions with interdiac's researchers and the staff members of the organizations, reading the data thoroughly and reorganizing it according to the methodological guidelines for performing a content analysis and by conducting the analysis in a strictly data based manner.

Young people's development ideas should be used in the development of youth diaconia in the organizations as well as in the development processes in interdiac. The development ideas indicate on which groups and what activities and services youth diaconia should focus on. The development ideas are preliminary ideas and they should be further developed in each country with the local expertise on young diaconia activities, the context and the available resources. Young people's participation should be enabled in the further development. The development process could contain elements of both service design and peer research where young people are part of the research team. Peer research would be a way of hearing and listening to young people's voices even further. Involving youth in research may also decrease the power imbalances that inflect research relationships between adult researchers and youth interviewees. (Higgins, Karin & Sligo 2007, 104-105.)

Researching young people's experiences and gathering development ideas and suggestions from young people challenges both the research process as well as the process of developing professional practices. If young people are involved in the research team as peer researchers it is essential to provide roles to young people where real participation can take place (Higgins, Karin & Sligo 2007, 105). Essential is to build a trust between the research team and the interviewees so that it is meaningful and comfortable to participate in the research.

In the further research and development of youth diaconia in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia youth participation may challenge the research and development processes. The key issue is to find a balance between respecting and utilizing the potential of young people and respecting and utilizing the skills of professional employees in developing youth diaconia. On one hand, young people may possess capacities and cultural capital relevant for the research purpose that adults may not possess, whereas on the other hand, adult researchers and practitioners may have a broader view on the research and development issues, possible risks and limitation, as well as a view on the resources. However young people's participation in research and development projects are intriguing and advantageous.

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APPENDIX 1. Instructions for individual interviews

YOUNG PEOPLE IN “M”: FIRST PART OF THE DATA COLLECTION – THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

FIRST PART

The individual interview starts by drawing own lifeline from your birth until now. We should ask the informants to think about the history of their childhood and youth placing a special emphasis on:

- changes in subsistence
- childhood family if having one
- socio-economic status and way of living (social classes, status of men and women)
- ideas, worldviews and religion (values, norms, customs, ethics and morality)
 - evaluate the connections between this history and present situation of your family.
 - Can you distinguish causes and effects?

The interview starts only after drawing the lifeline. Lifeline is to tool we use in the first part of the data collection.

SECOND PART: CHILDHOOD

How was your childhood in the environment you lived? How did it affect you? What did you think or feel about future then? How did you cope with the situation? What did you find challenging, if anything?

THIRD PART: EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC SITUATION

How has been your schooling time? Tell me about your primary school and your time there. What about secondary school? How did you finance the studies? What is the economic situation in your family and neighborhood from your point of view?

FOURTH PART: SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Tell me about your family relationships? Who do you think has been the closest person to you? Why? How were the other students in the regular school/special school?

FIFTH PART: THE ROLE OF FAITH AND RELIGION

Think about your biography and concentrate on the role of religion in it:

- How the spiritual topics have or have not been present over the course of your life.
- Recall which incidents and people have been the most important to your spiritual development
- (obs. the influence might have been either positive or negative).
- Try also to describe how your thinking and image of God has changed in the course of the time.
- What is the importance and meaning of faith for you now and how has it influenced to your current life?

SIXT PART: DRAWING THE FUTURE LIFELINE

Drawing the second lifeline where the starting point is your life now and in the other end “My own future life”.

SEVENT PART: DISCUSSION ON THE FUTURE LIFELINE:

How do you see your future? Where would you like to be after 10 years? What are your dreams? What kind of expectations you have? Do you think you can achieve them? If yes, how? If no, why? What would you like to be differently, if anything? How do you see the good life?

How are you now? What does well-being mean to you? How do you understand participation and belonging? Do you feel that you participate in or belong to something? Describe a good life according to your own standards: Can you call your life as a good life now? What else you would like to say?

APPENDIX 2. Instructions for focus group interviews

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSSIONS, TASKS FOR MODERATORS, OBSERVERS AND PARTICIPANTS

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CHART

The group discussions will be divided into four sections; your identity, the institution you are currently involved in, the support you have and perhaps would need and coping with the challenges.

IDENTITY

1. Who you are? Identity building: from local to societal level. How do you define yourself in the societal level? Is your identity in touch with your family or perhaps with whom you spent time – or the organisation you are involved in.
2. How are you doing? Do you enjoy your life? Do you see hope? Depression? Mental health challenges and traumas?
3. Construction of social relationship – family, friends, neighbours, relatives; What kinds of relationships do respondents have?

INSTITUTION YOU ARE INVOLVED IN

What factors affect access to the institution you are involved in? How? What are your experiences in this organisation? The role of the Church/fait in your life and in the organisation you're involved. What is your opinion on religion and faith? Does it support you or disturb you while you're in touch with the organisation?

SUPPORT

1. Support – implementation; How were the services distributed? Getting support? Possible barriers in getting support according to their experiences?
2. Community level: Cultural elements
3. Is support available for all who needs them around you?
4. Are there taboos, habits, beliefs of surrounding community which are difficult to talk about? For example, discussion on sexual orientation, mental problems, drugs, alcohol or ethnic background, immigration, religion?
5. Societal level – infrastructure, legislation, registered services; How do the society structures affect your everyday life? What kind of young people/groups of young people there are who are out of support? Who we should try to find and help? How to find them?

COPING WITH CHALLENGES

How did the respondents cope with the challenges they confronted in societal, communal or social dimension? What could still be done?

Tasks of the moderator

- Create a relaxed, supportive and non-judgemental atmosphere
- Remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers
- Take care that all participants have possibility to talk and express their viewpoints
- Take care of the time!

Tasks of the observer/ secretary

- Make notes of the main topics discussed
- Your role is to be mainly a silent observer but you can ask clarifying questions and act as a co-moderator
- Concentrate on group dynamic:
 - Do all participants have possibility to talk and express their viewpoints?
 - Is the discussion focusing on the topics given?
 - Are participants discussing with each other?

Tasks of the participant

- Discuss and focus on the given topics
- You can tell your own viewpoint and experiences
- Share ideas and experiences with other group participants
- Remember that there are no right or wrong answers!

APPENDIX 3. Example of the formation two top categories in the content analysis

Original expressions	Simplifications	Subcategory	Top category
Sometimes I did not visit the center for months, but when I came back every time the workers and volunteers showed me that they are very happy to see me. There was no condemnation. Nobody was telling me that I am bad, no-body laughed at me every time when I came back. After one more time walking away and doing bad things I returned with a deep understanding that this is the only place where people really wait for me and that I want to change something in my life. (Ukraine M2.)	-show the importance of the young person.	Recognition of human dignity	Acceptance
You remind me that I am a person with dignity and deserve respect as I am. (Kyr-gyzstan F5.)	-young person is a person with dignity and should be respected		
I was really impressed that I did not have to earn respect, but I am respected anyway. I felt valued and met people who tried to understand me openhearted. (Ukraine M1.)			
I had always problems with the other kids, because the teacher called me an orphan and then the other kids behaved differently.(Ukraine F6.)	-disrespect form other people		
It is negative if tell other people in a community who were and where we are from (e.g. from half-way house). It does not even matter what education you have. There is straight away a negative impression for the people. (Slovakia F6.)			
People do not take me as equal anymore, if I tell them			

that I live in the half-way house. (Slovakia M1.)			
When I came to the shelter, I was very surprised by the people who worked there, they were very kind, open, I wanted to trust them, because until that moment in my life, unfortunately, there were no such people, everything was quite the opposite, and I forgot how to trust people. (Kyrgyzstan F3, F4.)			
I have a desire to be like the teachers in our center who have endless patience. (Armenia F2.)	-how the staff member has time to spend together with the young people	A welcoming atmosphere	
They paid attention on me, gave me love that won my heart. (Kyrgyzstan F6.)			
I really like the atmosphere in the day care centers. It differs from the atmosphere at home or in school. (Ukraine F1.)	-the atmosphere is different compared to home or school		
Cozy. Like a real home. You can be yourself. You don't have to pretend that you are someone else. (Kyrgyzstan F2.)	-you can be yourself		
Before here was friendly, there were more children, then everything changed... So, it was better situation before then now, ...despite that fact the children number were huge, teachers were more attentive than they are now. (Georgia P2.)	-if the staff member do not have time, the atmosphere is not good		
I sure, that this problem causes from the teacher. They do so many administrative paper work that they don't have time for children. (Georgia P1.)			
The young people who graduated from the orphanage. They have the fewer opportunities. (Slovakia F2.)	-orphans, young people with a history of foster care	Difficult circumstances in life	

Supporting rights of orphans. The orphans do not get what they should materially and financially by the law. So in the protection of children's rights there is a lot of work ahead. And it would be important to do more in this field in our organization. (Ukraine M1.)			
Abandoned young people, probably even teenagers, maybe they have parents or guardians, but they have remained out of the system and are trying to figure out their own lives. (Kyrgyzstan F4.)	-living outside of the local social services		
If this organization was not existing many children will be in the street... and, many children would be begging... the results of working this organization is huge... in the past almost 7 years ago so there were so many places were surrounded with street children and now only one or two child can be found. (Georgia P2.)	-the youth diaconia services have had an impact		Supporting orphans and street-connected young people
I think regular visits to orphanages with material help and some common activities would be great. (Ukraine M2.)	-visiting orphanages		
We could go and visit an orphanage regularly. Maybe some kind of friendship/mentorship will develop. (Ukraine F2.)	-build friendship and understanding between young people in different situations	Ideas for support	
Helping to find supportive families for children is an answer. (Estonia M1.)	-change the situation of street-connected young people		
Field social workers used to come there directly. They should look for such youngsters in the city, in the regions. (Slovakia F2.)	-youth diaconia workers should look for young people to help		

The half-way houses. (Slovakia F6.)	-suggestion of a successful method		
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