Organizational Culture, Justice, Equality and Change in Youth Organizations

The success story of the non-governmental organization ‘System and G’

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Master’s Programme
Gender Studies – Intersectionality and Change

Master’s thesis 30 ECTS credits

ISNR: LIU-Tema G / GSIC2-A-18/009-SE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my fellow student and good friend, Maria Kousoula, who introduced me to youth work in organizations and non-formal education and made me see education from a different perspective.

Along with her, I would like to thank the founders, trainers, volunteers and members of the non-governmental organization System and G, who agreed to take part in this study, changed my life for good and helped me build a new future.

Secondly, I would like to thank my Thesis supervisor, Wera Grahn, who, with her long experience, wisdom and patience, was leading me step by step during my effort to put my thoughts on paper and produce an interesting, innovative and well-structured text.

Along with her, I would like to thank all my teachers and fellow students of the Master in Gender Studies, Intersectionality and Change at Linköping University, thanks to whom I gained valuable knowledge and experience.

Thirdly, I would like to thank my supervisor at work, who gave me all the time I needed off from work to finalize my Thesis and offered me his unconditional help and support during my whole Master studies.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my fiancé and my family for their patience and constant encouragement through my studies.

Finally, I would like to give my special thanks to my fiancé, for being so supportive and willing to start a new life with me in another country.
ABSTRACT

The current study analyzes the official policies and everyday practices of the youth non-governmental organization System and G, located in Komotini, Greece. Through a combination of Critical Policy Analysis, Interviews and Participatory Observation, this Thesis provides a broad image of the organization’s internal culture, with great emphasis on the relations among its members. The results showed that the organization’s philosophy, causes and corresponding policies have emerged from its founders’ personal life experiences, which motivated them for social offer to people with fewer opportunities, developed through cooperation with other youth workers, equally motivated to help people in need, and changed with the contribution of volunteers – also people with fewer opportunities – with innovative ideas and ambition to bring social change. As a result, an intersectional culture has grown in the organization, which is characterized by diversity, emotional proximity, mutual support and solidarity.

The study also analyzes the organization’s social stratification and power relations, which are characterized by equality among all its members, making trainers and volunteers feel that their voice is heard and appreciated. Therefore, the organization succeeds in the achievement of all forms of organizational justice (procedural, distributive, interactional). What is more, important decision-making within the organization requires the equal participation of trainers and volunteers alike, while when it comes to decisions with an impact on local society, the organization gives its members the opportunity to express their opinion and design social policies through cooperation with local entrepreneurs, politicians and other decision-makers. In this way, organizational and social change are achieved and promoted. The future of the organization includes its members’ ambition to spread the methods and results of non-formal education to other regions and countries, and I consider myself lucky and honored to be part of this effort.

Key-words: youth work, organizational culture, organizational justice, equality, organizational change, social change, non-formal education
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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been twelve years since my first involvement in contemporary Academia, and all these years the main focus of the studies I have read, carried out or participated in was a “problem”, a “problematic situation”, an “issue” that needed to be “solved”, at least at a theoretical level, taking for granted that no matter what the research topic is about, there always has to be something “wrong” about it. My experience from my Master in Gender Studies, Intersectionality and Change was no exception, with the only difference being the formation of the approach, which was always something like “What is the problem represented to be?”.

So there I was, nine months ago, entering the second year of my Master and looking for an internship that would help me turn theory into practice. My fellow student and good friend, Maria Kousoula, already in the field of non-formal education and youth organizations, introduced me to the founders of a non-governmental organization (NGO) named System and G, located in my hometown, Komotini, Greece. In a training session with the founders/trainers, I was introduced to the concepts of non-formal and informal education, to the aims of youth work, as well as to the content of the Erasmus+ program, the European Voluntary Service (EVS – see p.30) and the main activities carried out in the frame of the European Union’s plan for active youth (“Youth in action”). Apart from that, I found out everything I needed to know about the organization, its activities, purposes and objectives, as well as the central idea behind the name “System and G”, which is social offer (G = give) and gender equality (G = gender) for a new generation of active citizens (G = generation).

Even from the very beginning of my internship, I realized that there was something different and special about this organization. My first contact with the members – trainers and volunteers – of the organization was at a Youth Exchange (see p.31) they were participating in and my first impression was that all of them are vibrant and active individuals, highly motivated for social offer and eager to take initiatives and organize interesting activities. While watching them from a distance – just observing, not participating – I saw a spark in their eyes, a vivid interest in each other’s opinion and a smile of content after the successful completion of each activity. That diverse group of people from all over Europe made me believe in the organization’s activity and soon enough I realized that I wanted to be part of it.
The first weeks of my internship reinforced my initial impression, as I realized that System and G is an organization which has succeeded in the achievement of gender equality, respect for diversity and social inclusion; an organization where labeling, stereotyping and oppression is not tolerated; an organization which gives opportunities to people who need them. So, for the first time in twelve years it crossed my mind that maybe it would be interesting to investigate the success story of such an organization, that maybe for a change I could do some research on how an organization is doing something “right”, instead of taking for granted that there has to be something “wrong” or “problematic” about it.

Soon enough I shared my idea with the founders, who were more than willing to help. I was already keeping notes for every activity I observed, participated in or designed, so I started keeping a more detailed record and asked for the founders’ permission to carry out interviews with the organization’s members, including them. They agreed and they also gave me access to the organization’s official documents which are not accessible to the public, such as its Statute. In order for me to carry out the investigation that would lead to this Master Thesis, my internship was prolonged from two to nine months, while the main outcome was an offer to be the founder of the upcoming System and G branch in Cyprus.

Therefore, the purpose of this Master Thesis is to study what makes System and G a successful youth organization. In particular, I examine the main principles and corresponding policies of the organization, which compose its internal organizational culture and include intersectionality, equality and justice among its members, diversity, social inclusion and organizational change. Combining Critical Policy Analysis with Interviews and Participatory Observation, I aim at giving the reader a broad image of the organization’s internal culture, function and everyday life, explaining how the organization has achieved equality and organizational justice among its members, as well as sharing my own experience in it, which was life-changing and motivated me to take over the creation of a branch of the organization in another country. Following one of my personal mottos, “I always see ‘invest’ in ‘investigation’”, I attempt to show the readers how I have invested in my existing knowledge from my academic studies and my acquired experiences from the frame of the organization in order to contribute to organizational and social change.
I am totally aware of how challenging my venture is and how difficult it is to convince readers that an organization’s “problems” can be balanced and outnumbered by its strengths. I totally understand how suspicious readers might be and how “ideal” my conclusions can seem to people who have never been involved in such an organization. I admit that I had the same attitude nine months ago, but that was before I was given the opportunity to meet all those people who have achieved progress, inclusion and change at a personal, local and international level and before I went through a process of personal development and growth. One of the founders told me that, as a newcomer to the field of youth work and non-formal education, I was there to “unlearn” before I “learn”, which is what I aim at sharing with the readers of this study. Thus, the study’s main contribution is to show how organizational and social change can be achieved in youth NGOs and how involvement in youth work and alternative forms of education can change a person’s life – in this case, mine.
2. PURPOSE

The inspiration for this Master Thesis came during the first weeks of my internship in the NGO System and G, soon after I met its trainers (including the two founders) and volunteers. Despite the fact that all of them come from different backgrounds and have had different life experiences, they are all highly ambitious individuals, with an intrinsic motivation for social offer and personal development. Furthermore, they were all very efficient in working on common projects, and everyone’s different contribution to the team was equally valued. Realizing the importance of teamwork and equal contribution to the achievement of common goals triggered my interest in finding out the mechanisms behind this achievement. I wanted to know more about the organization’s philosophy, main principles and aims, as well as the specific ways of accomplishing them. In other words, I was interested in analyzing the organization’s official policies, starting from its official documents and moving to the everyday experiences of its members. Apart from the above, during my internship I was given the chance to participate in workshops of Structured Dialogue and Training Courses (see p.31), as well as design a Training Course of my own. Such activities provided me with valuable material to use for the purposes of my research and made it a life-changing experience.

During my everyday interaction with the organization’s members, I detected many elements of the organization’s everyday culture, which I was familiar with from previous research I had carried out in other educational and organizational settings. Apart from that, reading the organization’s official documents and discussing with the founders, I detected many aspects of organizational justice in the purposes of the organization, which I was familiar with from my Gender Studies. What is more, my overall experience revealed the inclusive and intersectional character of the organization and made me see how equality and social change are achieved in practice. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to analyze the main principles and corresponding policies, strategies and good practices of the organization which shape the image of its specific internal culture and explain how equal participation, organizational justice, inclusion, social offer and organizational change are achieved, in parallel with the actual everyday experiences of the people involved, myself included.
My overall purpose is to share my experience from the organization with a broad range of readers and spark their interest to find out more about youth work and non-formal education. During the whole research process, however, I keep in mind the work of Gronold, Hipfl, and Pedersen’s (2009), which has shown that when we produce knowledge should be cautious about how much we can expect other people to understand. Especially in the field of Gender Studies, which consists of people from many different backgrounds and disciplines, we should first recognize and in turn value each other’s understanding of themselves and the world and understand the possible “blind spots” of each other’s perception. Thus, I am aware of the fact that I cannot provide a complete image of each and every activity carried out in the frame of the organization, or generalize my conclusions to all youth NGOs, so my work is open to further discussion, constructive criticism and further research by people within or outside the frame of Gender Studies. Nonetheless, I attempt to motivate readers to follow the Useful Links I include at the end of this Thesis in order to do some research on their own, find out more about the Erasmus+ program and maybe participate in a Youth Exchange, Training Course or EVS project themselves, in order to live the experience and shape an opinion of their own.
3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The analysis of the research material is built upon some key concepts related to the internal function of the organization, its intersectional character and the different aspects of its everyday life, which make it popular and successful. My interest in analyzing those specific concepts stems from the fact that I was already familiar with them through my studies, combined with the fact that they were evident during my participatory observation and active involvement in System and G.

3.1. Organizational culture

The term “culture” in general implies a set of common characteristics among people who live in the same place and share certain norms, history, religion, values, traditions and customs, which make them different from other groups of people. When it comes to a specific place, such as an organization, foundation or company, the concept of culture is described by Gjuraj (2013) as the psychological environment and climate shared by a group of people, which in turn affects their interpersonal relations, feeling of justice, personal satisfaction and commitment to the organization.

According to Tharp (2009), in an organizational or institutional context, the term “culture” is used to describe and analyze mutual influence and interaction among employees and between employees and stakeholders, which is one of the present study’s main purposes. More specifically, organizational culture describes a specific organizational or institutional setting’s values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by its members. Those factors affect everyday life and interactions in the organization and define its overall function and effectiveness (Schein, 1990). For this reason, organizational culture is a key concept of the present study, which aims at analyzing System and G’s working climate and everyday interactions among its members, in order to explain how interpersonal relations, attitudes and behaviors are shaped and affect the organization’s overall function.
3.2. Organizational justice

Along with organizational culture, the term “organizational justice” has been developed in order to describe fairness in everyday social interaction, and distribution of resources within an organizational setting (Bies, 1987). Justice in organizations has always been a complicated and multidimensional concept, with the most prominent dimensions being “distributive” and “procedural” justice (see below), which in turn define “interactional” justice (see below) and its outcomes (Bies, 2015). Organizational justice is a key concept in the present study, as it encompasses System and G’s main policies and provides a better understanding of its members’ feelings, everyday relations and contribution to the purposes of the organization.

A. Distributive justice

Distributive justice was defined by Jost and Kay (2010) as the degree of distribution of duties, responsibilities, tasks and activities in an organization, regardless of the stakeholders’ origin, religion, physical/mental abilities, gender or sexual orientation, while at the same time taking into consideration individual potential and special skills and interests. This philosophy of activity distribution is evident in System and G’s main principles, which I examine one-by-one in the research part. In a few words, the term describes the fairness of outcomes distributed or allocated in an organization (Bies, 2015).

Distributive justice is a key factor in organizational culture types which value individuality and reward the personal skills, effort and evolution of its members, as it happens in the case of System and G. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), this type of justice reinforces an individual’s commitment to the purposes of the organization, while at the same time allows them to be inventive, find new ways to achieve the organization’s goals and expand their potential, which is one of System and G’s main principles.
B. Procedural justice

Apart from the distribution of an organization’s outcomes, researchers have also been interested in revealing the processes followed to allocate or distribute an organization’s outcomes among people. Therefore, the term “procedural justice” was suggested to describe an organization’s decision-making processes which influence its members’ judgments of fairness and equality (Bies, 1993). Since my participatory observation led me to believe that fairness and equality are key aspects of System and G’s success story, I find it useful to include procedural justice in my analysis, with a main focus in the organization’s process of building partnerships.

C. Interactional-interpersonal justice

The combination of the outcomes of distributive and procedural justice in an organization is defined as “interactional” or “interpersonal” justice, which means that all members of the organization are treated with dignity, respect and honesty, both by their superiors and by their peers (Jost & Kay, 2010). This was evident to me since my very first contact with the organization, which makes me willing to share my experience with the readers. According to Bies (2015), equal treatment, respect for difference, networking opportunities, close and effective relations and solidarity within an organization are the most key elements of interactional justice and should be achieved at any cost. Therefore, in my analysis I use detailed examples of how interpersonal justice is achieved in the framework of System and G.

3.3. Organizational change

In order for an organization to be functioning successfully and effectively, diversity, equality and justice should be ensured and life experiences and situations of all members should be represented and taken into consideration. For this reason, an organization’s stakeholders should follow a process of constant revision of current practices, including both formal procedures and policies and informal social interactions within the organization. Such an evaluation process is considered very
important by the members of System and G, as one of its main purposes is to bring achieve personal and social change.

Ely and Meyerson (2000) suggest a model of organizational change which includes three key elements: a. Critique of privileged positions and power relations in the organization, b. Narratives of all members and corresponding treatment, always with respect and dignity, and c. Experimentation on new activities and allocation of duties, aiming at a more justice-oriented approach. In my analysis I examine how this model works in practice, through a detailed example of System and G’s everyday life.

It should be noted that organizational change is multi-leveled and should be evident at a: a. Micro-level, including psychological aspects and consequences of change, b. Meso-level, including the context of the organization and the effect of change on its policies and mission, and c. Macro-level, including the impact of change on the broader social context, political system and actors around the organization (Jacobs, Van Witteloostuijn, & Christie-Zeyse, 2013). In many parts of my analysis I show with examples how System and G brings change at a personal, regional, national and international level.

3.4. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a very broad term which is used to describe the ways in which an individual’s multiple features – such as age, gender, ethnicity, race, color, religion, language, sexual orientation, (dis)ability and so on – are combined to form a specific identity, which is unique for each individual (Knapp, 2005). As Braidotti (1997) explains, “identity” is a constant negotiation among – many times contradictory – variables which intersect and overlap; an outcome of paradoxes and contradictions of “difference”. Shields (2008) takes a step further and states that there is no specific “category” or “identity” which encompasses how an individual responds to the social environment and at the same time how that individual is responded by other people in the same – or in different – social environment. Therefore, intersectionality emerged from different studies on how multiple layers of oppression and inequalities are produced and reproduced, as a tool for analyzing qualitative differences among different intersectional positions.
In other words, intersectional analysis is an outcome of conflicts within and in-between social movements struggling for social justice, difference, cultural transformation, as well as diversity-sensitive, socially, ecologically and culturally sustainable democracy (Lykke 2011). To put it in a simpler way, an intersectional approach examines the outcomes of a person’s multiple identities, and not just the sum of those identities’ addition, e.g. gender, nationality and religion. In this study, intersectionality is used as a fluid and flexible concept in order to describe and explain how the participants’ multiple identities interact and overlap, as well as how they affect interpersonal relations in the frame of the organization.

It is very important to note that, according to Jacobs et al. (2013), intersectionality encompasses and promotes all three types of organizational justice, distributive, procedural and interactional, leading to organizational change at a personal, as well as collective level. In turn, organizational change promotes social change by forming a basis for mutual understanding, respect and solidarity.

In the research part of the study I examine the type and function of the internal organizational culture of System and G and make conclusions on how organizational justice and change are achieved, following an intersectional approach. Despite the fact that each Research Question focuses on one of the above concepts, all of them overlap in every section of the research part of the Thesis, revealing how organizational culture, organizational justice and organizational change intersect and make System and G a successful youth organization. Thus, intersectionality is perceived as a dimension of organizational culture and organizational justice and forms the basis of organizational change and social progress.
4. STATE OF THE ART AND GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE

Before analyzing the main dimensions of the overall function and success of System and G, it is crucial to present some results of previous research in the field of NGOs, regarding organizational culture, organizational justice and equality, and organizational change.

Organizational culture has been a key study field in business administration, organizational studies, labor market studies, marketing and psychology for decades (Lundberg & Werner, 2012). However, the main focus of past studies has been in profit-based organizations and universities, while the study of organizational culture and change in non-profit organizations, such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) has been a trend of the past few years (Acker, 2012). Unlike profit-based organizations, NGOs are characterized by strategies and policies of social inclusion in order to provide equal opportunities and protect human rights in general and women’s and children’s rights in particular. As a result, new feminist approaches to organizational change are gaining more and more ground, in a general effort to make organizations more inclusive, equal and just.

In order to form a basis for my study, I made an extended search for previous studies, looking at databases available on the online library of Linköping University. The main keywords I used in my search were “organizational culture in NGOs”, “(gender) equality in NGOs”, “organizational justice in NGOs” and “organizational change in NGOs”.

According to my research on organizational culture, many different types have been revealed and studied in the past few decades, depending on the type and aims of the organization and the decision-making process. One type of organizational culture which is usually developed in non-profit organizations and foundations is the “openness to change/ innovation” culture (Xenikou & Furnham, 1996). In particular, unlike bureaucratic and competitive culture types, his type of culture is human-oriented and promotes emotional proximity among the organization’s members, group aims and achievements, self-development, constant support from the supervisors and application of innovative ideas in everyday tasks. A similar culture type is described by Daft (2015) as “personal involvement” culture. Contrary to entrepreneurial culture types, this culture inspires an organization’s members to be committed and devoted to
the purposes of the organization, while it expands their feelings of responsibility and personal ethics. Another type of organizational culture which is often developed in NGOs is the “clan/family” culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2006), which reflects a friendly and pleasant workplace, where all members are considered as parts of an extended family and stakeholders are perceived as mentors.

Apart from different types of organizational culture, researchers have also distinguished different dimensions of different types of organizational culture. A very characteristic example is the work of Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, and Neale (1998), who have named two main dimensions of organizational culture: Individualism and Collectivism. Individualistic organizational cultures focus on the reward of employees’ personal accomplishments, individual characteristics and abilities, and are more common in profit-based organizations. Collectivistic organizational cultures, on the other hand, are characterized by a general agreement of acceptable actions and behaviors, which assure shared objectives, interchangeable interests and commonalities among members. According to Wagner (1995), the main priority of collectivistic cultures is inclusion and cooperation, so simply being a member of the organization may be enough to qualify an individual as an in-group member and offer them a sense of belonging. Furthermore, according to Axelrod (1984), since collectivistic organizational cultures focus on common targets and aspirations, members may perceive their internal disagreements as constructive, rather than threatening for the organization’s success, and utilize them as motives for creation, progress and organizational change.

It is evident that the literature regarding organizational culture types and dimensions is quite rich and provides a good theoretical framework for research. When it comes to NGOs related to youth work and non-formal education, however, previous research is rather limited, since such concepts are less familiar in the frame of contemporary Academia, and therefore most studies are funded and published by the Erasmus+ program itself, which means that they are not usually available on academic databases. Therefore, I believe that my study is one of the first that will attempt to cover this gap in research and corresponding knowledge, aiming at revealing which culture type or combination of types is most likely to occur during the activities and overall function of a youth NGO, as well as which culture
dimension(s) characterize the everyday interpersonal relations among the organization’s members.

Regarding my search on organizational justice and (gender) equality it led to more than 20 studies carried out in NGOs related to human rights and women’s rights. The main dimensions of organizational culture and corresponding change in those NGOs were gender equality/ gender mainstreaming, difference and sameness strategies, transformation and diversity mainstreaming. For instance, Phillips (2015) studied women’s perceptions of gender equality and to what extent they identified with feminist strategies for social change. DeJaeghere and Wiger (2013) came up with key strategies for gender equality, such as “Gender And Development”, which examines human rights from a post-structuralist perspective and “Women In Development”, which is the utilization of human capital for the inclusion of women in economically productive activities. Contu and Girei (2014) studied the power dynamics and the political processes forwarding the constitution of unequal gender relations. A study by Blumberg (2001) focused on NGOs’ addressing gender stratification, which is reflected in the lack of financial sources for women of religious minorities.

Despite the fact that previous research on organizational justice and equality in NGOs is quite extensive, I couldn’t but notice the fact that almost all studies have been carried out in NGOs related almost exclusively to women or to women and children. Youth NGOs, however, do not aim only at social inclusion of women and children; instead, they are usually based on the philosophy of offering opportunities to as many different people and social groups as possible, regardless of their sex, gender, age, socio-economic and cultural background, educational level, sexual orientation etc. Therefore, one of their main aims is not to achieve gender equality per se, but to function in a way which is equal and just for all members, valuing each and everyone’s personal traits and identity. Thus, I believe that studying the strategies for equality and justice in an NGO which is not gender-oriented, but open and broad to a wide range of people, would cover this gap and bring new outcomes to be considered in the future.

As for my research on organizational change, it was evident that since contemporary organizations – especially NGOs – are perceived as diverse and
heterogeneous social groups, their function should be under continuous evaluation and promotion. According to Tayeb (1996), the need for organizational change is based on the fact that distinctions between values and expectations of members with different cultural backgrounds are very common in organizations which carry out international programs. Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall (1992) have come to the conclusion that problems that are likely to come up during international activities and organizations are wrongly attributed to professional incompetence, while they most probably occur due to the members’ inability to perceive other people’s ideas and attitudes and adapt to foreign strategies. Therefore, a fundamental challenge for organizations is to make their members re-categorize demographically dissimilar people as in-group members, in order to increase interaction and mutual trust and benefit from diversity (Grunfeld, Mannix, Williams, & Neale, 1996).

However, each of those studies highlights one aspect of inequality or injustice addressed by the NGOs and focuses on one strategy or intervention to bring organizational change. Apart from that, what I realized was that almost all studies are missing an intersectional approach to the ways in which equality and justice are examined and promoted within NGOs. To cover this gap, I believe that it would be very interesting and useful to carry out a study following a more intersectional approach, which includes different aspects of equality and justice in NGOs and studies organizational change at a personal, social, regional, national and international level.

An overall comment regarding previous research in the field is that all studies that I had the chance to read – as well as the former studies that they were based on – were built upon one or maximum two different methods, usually questionnaires and – more rarely – interviews. With no intention to underestimate any methodological approach, I believe that my attempt to use three different methods at the same time (policy analysis, interviews and observatory participation) will cover this methodological gap and provide a much broader image of System and G’s main policies and strategies for organizational justice, equality and organizational change.
5. AIM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The motivation for carrying out the present study is a result of my active involvement in the youth NGO System and my will to share my experience with a broad range of readers. I consider my attempt quite challenging and ambitious, as my starting point is not a “problem” to be solved, but a positive, rewarding and life-changing experience in a frame which I perceive as inclusive, equal, just and successful; a place that for nine months has been my second home. In my work, I try to avoid falling in what Bacci and Eveline (2010) call the “project trap”, meaning that I not only make a targeted analysis on programs and projects carried out by the organization, but I broaden my analysis to the whole organizational context and everyday experiences of its members, including mine. Instead of a hypothesis-driven, I follow a data-driven multi-methodological approach (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007), aiming at letting the readers follow the words of my study’s participants in their own personalized way and draw to their own conclusions.

Therefore, my overall aim is to make the readers aware of which types and dimensions of organizational culture may occur in the frame of a youth NGO related to non-formal education, which policies and good practices are most appropriate to achieve organizational justice and equality among its members, as well as how such an organization succeeds in bringing organizational and social change. The Research Questions that I attempt to answer in order to achieve the above aim are inspired by the work of Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, and Lee (2014) on Critical Policy Analysis, which of course has been adapted to the needs and objectives of this specific study. The reason I chose this specific model of policy analysis was that it covers a broad range of policies and everyday situations and events which can be detected when analyzing a specific organizational context, while the questions it includes follow a rational order and flow in a well-structured way. Apart from that, I have used the model in my previous research in the frame of other educational and organizational settings and therefore I believe that it is quite effective in the analysis of organizational culture, organizational justice and organizational change. In the present study, I have formed my Research Questions as follows:
1. Who shaped the organization’s main principles and how did those principles evolve over time? My first question was inspired by Diem et al.’s (2014) question “How did the organization’s existing policies emerge, develop and change?” Instead of “how” I use “who”, in order to emphasize the role of the organization’s founders and the contribution of the volunteers to the success of the organization. Also, instead of “develop” and “change” I use “evolve”, to stress that evolution and progress is one of the organization’s main principles.

2. Which type(s) of organizational culture occur in the organization’s everyday life and function? My second question stemmed from Diem et al.’s (2014) question “How are power, resources and knowledge distributed?”. Since I perceive power relations, resource distribution and knowledge dissemination as dimensions of organizational culture and justice, I tried to make my question more inclusive using “organizational culture” as an umbrella term which includes all the above.

3. How are organizational justice and equality in the organization achieved? The third question was inspired by Diem et al.’s (2014) question “What is the social stratification within the organization? What are the relations between inequality and privilege? Does policy analysis reproduce them?”. Since I perceive social stratification and (in)equalities as key dimensions of organizational justice, I used the latter term to encompass the two former terms.

4. How is organizational and social change achieved through the activity of the organization? The fourth question was inspired by Diem et al.’s (2014) question “Who is sitting around the decision-making table and who is not?”, which however I think is very general, and therefore I reshaped the question to emphasize the fact that decision-making in the organization requires the equal participation of all its members, achieving organizational change. Apart from that, the organization carries out numerous activities which require the participation of the broader public, including policy-makers, contributing to social change at a regional, local, national and international level.

5. How do I see the future of the organization and how am I involved in it? The fifth question was inspired by Diem et al.’s (2014) question “What policy says and what it doesn’t?”, which I think is quite general as well, so I reformed it in order to
stress the importance of my personal reflections and future plans in parallel with the organization’s future.

It should be noted that, as it happens with every research, my work is characterized by certain limitations. First of all, there are no previous studies in similar organizational settings or with a similar methodological approach, which means that there is no common ground for comparing and contrasting the research results. Apart from that, the study does not only aiming at producing different knowledge, but producing knowledge differently (Richardson, 2000), meaning that I am not trying to make my material and conclusions “fit” in existing theories of feminist studies or gender studies, but to let my material – especially the participants’ quotes – speak for itself, state my interpretations and let the readers shape their own theories and conclusions. Secondly, despite the fact that the organization’s policies are common for all branches in all cities in Greece (Komotini, Athens and Crete) and abroad (Latvia, Finland, Sweden, Belgium and Spain), the results cannot be generalized to other NGOs which do not belong to the family of System and G. Finally, although the results are based on my nine-month internship in the organization, the process of writing this Thesis was rather exhausting and under serious time restrictions, since it had to be balanced with two full-time jobs (one of them at a psychiatric clinic) and at the same time preparing to move to another country (Cyprus). Therefore, I am sure that the readers will find many flaws and “problems to be solved” in my work. Nonetheless, I hope that the Thesis will help me spread my experience and acquired knowledge from my involvement in youth work and non-formal education and work as a stimulus for further research.
6. METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS

The current study is carried out in the frame of my Master in Gender studies, a very broad field, which includes – or at least should include – practically everything. Given that each and every individual involved in Gender Studies has a different background, point of view and life attitude, I embrace Haraway’s notion (1988), that as a researcher I can never produce an “objective” depiction of the world, which can be generalized; instead, I attempt to create a story of which I am already part of. As a Gender Studies researcher, I aim at giving an innovative insight of the specific part of reality that I can see from my own position in space, time, body and historical power relations. To use Haraway’s words (1988, in Lykke, 2010, p.6), I act as a guide, revealing my siting and sighting to guide the readers to see the worlds as I see it. I do so, however, bearing in mind that the readers are actually the travelers, whose own position and interests affect which parts of the story they pay attention to.

According to Lykke (2014), there is not a specific way of choosing and using the “right” research methods in the field of gender studies and intersectionality. Instead, as researchers, we should question the universal criteria of “good” science and adopt a self-reflexive, experimental approach. Therefore, my study is personalized, focused on my small and localized story, since I am part of the research subjects myself. In my study I combine Interviews as a method of feminist empiricism – which Letherby (2003, p.91) calls “talking” – with Critical Policy Analysis – which Letherby (2003, p.93) would call “counting and ordering” – and Participatory Observation – which Letherby (2003, p.94) calls “looking and living”. In that way, I aim at giving a broad image of organizational culture, equality, justice and change in System and G, which includes both other people’s stories and narratives and my own experience.

One of my methods is a Critical Policy Analysis of the organization’s Statute, which contains its main principles and corresponding strategies and good practices to achieve its aims and objectives. A policy analysis in general aims at providing a better understanding of an organization’s policy-making process, in order to supply decision-makers with valid and reliable policy-relevant knowledge about pressing social or economic problems (Fischer, Miller, & Sidney, 2007). My research questions are inspired by a model of Critical Policy Analysis developed by Diem et al.
I chose this specific model because it is an outcome of the researchers’ 30-year old experience in the field of local, national and international educational policies and provides a critical review of existing theories and methods applied in contemporary education. The main advantage of the model, which makes it suitable to apply in my case, is that it examines policies of different forms and levels of education, including non-formal education, which is the main activity of System and G.

Following Lykkes’s advice (2010), that a contemporary Gender Studies researcher should use not just mixed, but very mixed methods, in parallel with Critical Policy Analysis I am using interview quotes and field notes of my nine-month participatory observation. In this way, I aim at making use of Tlostanova and Mignolo’s (2009) view that a successful researcher should not “study” people but study “with” people.

Therefore, the second one of my methods is semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview is based on a set of questions which are formed by the researcher, but at the same time offers the interviewee the opportunity to add comments and statements which are relevant or even irrelevant with the questions, giving a broader range of data to be analyzed (Cohen et al., 2007). Taking into consideration that the sample of my interviews is very diverse and heterogeneous, I believe that the semi-structured type of interview is the best way to make all voices heard. More specifically, two interviews were carried out with the founders of the organization, who work as trainers, two interviews were carried out with trainers/mentors, who are also responsible for the coordination of the EVS projects, while thirteen interviews were carried out with volunteers.

I met two of the volunteers at the end of their voluntary work in the organization, before I started my intervention there. However, we kept in touch after their departure and they were willing to participate in the study. Another two of the volunteers were in the middle of their voluntary work in their organization when I met them. Our common course in the organization lasted for four months and they agreed to take part in the interviews, which took place online, two months after they had finished their voluntary work. I sent the questions online to all the volunteers and a few days later we had online interviews that lasted about 30 minutes each.
The rest nine volunteers started their voluntary work during my intervention in the organization. Part of their agreement with the organization was their permission for my participatory observation as an intern and their participation in the interviews at some point of their voluntary work. Our common course in the organization lasted for six months. I interviewed two of them after they had finished their voluntary work in the organization, two of them in the fourth month of their voluntary work, two of them in the sixth month and two of them in the first month. I sent the questions online to all the volunteers in advance and after two days the interviews were carried out live, with an average duration of 30 minutes. I should note that in my study there was no actual selection of participants, as all of the volunteers, trainers and mentors I met during the nine months of my internship agreed to participate in the interviews.

It should be noted here that all interviews were carried out in English, which is not the mother language for any of the participants. For this reason, some of their quotes may include grammatical or syntactical mistakes. However, I haven't made any corrections and I quote the participants’ words and phrases exactly as they were recorded during the interviews, providing what Cohen et al. (2007) call “first hand” material.

Regarding my third method, my field-notes from participatory observation make my analysis more holistic, deep, detailed, and contextualized. The main reason for deciding to use it that in this way my conclusions are not based on “second hand” data (Cohen et al., 2007), while the analysis offers me the opportunity to develop theories through a rich experience and a self-awareness process.

Regarding the collection of data from official sources, like System and G’s Statute, such documents are given to me by the organization with a permission to use them for the purposes of my study and copy parts of them if necessary, as long as I reference the source. As for the interviews, they were escorted by oral and written instructions to the participants, making clear the purpose of the research and ensuring that the data is anonymous and will be used for research purposes only (Cohen et al., 2007). In formulating the questions, special attention was given, so that they were easily understandable and did not include ambiguous or contradictory concepts. In this way, valuable conclusions can be provided (Zafeiropoulos, 2005), which is the ultimate goal of my study.
Moreover, it should be noted that the questions were formulated in such a way that the respondents did not worry that their answers would be negatively judged, did not tend to adjust their responses to social norms and did not feel threatened by a personal commitment. In general, questions that could lead to superficial answers, personal and committing answers, or questions difficult to answer were avoided during the interviews. Also, I avoided including questions that would raise sensitive issues, lead answers to a certain direction, contain "emotionally charged" words, refer to celebrities or be too extensive or unclear (Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou, 2005). In this way, I did not receive any negative comments or complaints regarding the interview process.

As for my participatory observation, I always made sure that all participants felt comfortable with me keeping field notes during the organization’s activities. The notes inevitably include my position, role, experience and feelings, so I try to be as descriptive as possible, offering a reflexive view of the organization’s everyday life. It should be noted here that in the nine months of my internship I observed or participated in numerous activities, which unfortunately cannot all be included in my research. Apart from that, I read about or saw photos and videos from previous activities, which were carried out before my internship. Therefore, I choose to give a further description mainly of the activities which I designed and carried out, as well as training courses I participated in. I believe that in this way I provide the readers with a better understanding of the purpose, aims and outcomes of such activities and trigger their interest in participating in similar activities themselves.

At some points, my field notes include different incidents that occurred during my internship in the organization and needed to be addressed by me or the rest of the members. However, the content of the mentor talks and individual sessions is confidential and I am not allowed to reveal personal information about the trainers or the volunteers. Therefore, I have chosen to include only the parts which are relevant and useful for my analysis, always with the permission of the people involved. In general, the research part of the Thesis was distributed to all seventeen people that are included in the study, so that they had the chance to read it and comment on it before it reached my supervisor or the rest of the readers. The comments I received were almost exclusively positive, while none of the study participants expressed discomfort or asked me to exclude parts of the analysis.
According to Pink (2009) the point of research is not to produce “objective” or “truthful” realities, but many different versions of it. I am totally aware of the fact that my material will most likely lead different readers to different conclusions, and therefore I proceed to the analysis being aware of the fact that as a feminist researcher I do not aim at revealing a “pure”, “universal” and “uncontaminated” truth, but at offering a new way of seeing the world, or, I should say “my” world. Thus, my findings and conclusions are open to criticism and self-questioning (Letherby, 2003). I am aware of the fact that some of the readers may not even get the point of my work, but I think this is inevitable in the field of gender studies; thus, I will give my work a chance to be read, bearing in mind the words of Richardson (2000), that there is no “getting it right”, just “getting it”.
7. PRESENTATION OF THE ORGANIZATION

7.1. History and purposes

System and G is a non-governmental, non-profit organization which was founded in 2010 in Athens, Greece, by former participants of the European Voluntary Service with the aim of offering mobility and non-formal education opportunities to “underprivileged” young European citizens, such as individuals of lower socio-economic status, special needs and LGBTIQ (Lesbian/ Gay/ Bisexual/ Transsexual/ Intersexual/ Queer). The term “youth organization” means that the organization is organized around – but not limited to – the needs, rights and activities of young people. The organization has no financial capital of itself; instead, the organization’s youth workers (see p.28) – which are at least 18 years old – design and facilitate projects funded by the European Commission in the frame of the ongoing program Erasmus+ (see p.29). Such projects offer young people – from 13 to 30 years old – the opportunity to participate in interesting activities and gain experience and knowledge in a non-formal way (see p.29). As stated by the founders, “created by young people with fewer opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities, System and G is a ‘learning to learn’ project itself” (for more information follow the link: http://systemandg.weebly.com/about-us.html [Accessed 18 May 2018]).

The organization is now present in Athens, Komotini and Crete. Its activities include Youth Exchanges, EVS projects, Structured Dialogue, as well as seminars, Training Courses and workshops. With local, national and international projects of informal and non-formal education (see p.29), the organization offers opportunities both to its members and partners and to the public to acquire knowledge, skills and experience in the fields of gender mainstreaming, minorities, refugee crisis, environment protection, healthy lifestyle et al. The organization’s philosophy is based on the notion that each person is unique, and its ultimate goal is to promote personal development and, in the founders’ words, “...expand the horizons of equally treated individuals.”.
7.2. Members and main activities

7.2.1. Youth workers

The organization comprises of two main categories of people, youth workers and participants of the European Voluntary Service (EVS – see p.30). A youth worker is an adult whose role is to educate young people between 13 and 30 years old on a wide range of topics (social, cultural, educational, sports-related and political) carried out with, by and for young people through non-formal and informal learning, which means outside the frame of official schooling. The difference between a youth worker and a teacher is that a youth worker and a young person are considered partners in the learning process and both of them acquire knowledge via their participation in learning activities. This mutual learning may happen in various forms, such as peer learning activities, conferences and seminars, high-level forums or expert groups, as well as through studies, analyses, and web-based networks with the involvement of relevant stakeholders (usually NGOs). According to the European Union Work Plan for Youth, 2016-2018 (European Union, 2015), the aim of youth working is to help young people reach their full potential by encouraging personal development, autonomy, initiative and active participation in contemporary society (for more information: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/work_en [Accessed 18 May 2018]).

In System and G, youth workers have three main roles: training, mentorship/coaching and project coordination. Every time a project, Training Course or Youth Exchange is organized (see p.31), the trainer is the person who takes over the educational part and aims at sharing their knowledge and experience with the participants, as well as gaining new knowledge through the mutual learning process described above. The project coordinator is the person responsible for the practical part of the project, i.e. location, duration, facilitation, budget etc. The mentor/coach provides constant counseling, support and encouragement to the project’s participants, according to each individual’s needs and ambitions (European Commission, 2014).

Mentoring/coaching – which was my main role in System and G – is a useful way of developing people’s skills and abilities, and of boosting performance. It can also help an individual deal with issues and challenges before they become major problems. A coaching session typically takes place as a conversation between the
coach and the coachee (person being coached), and it focuses on helping the coachee discover answers for themselves (European Commission, 2014).

It is very important to make clear that, since System and G is a non-profit organization, there is no such thing as “hiring” youth workers and offering a stable “salary”. Both the organization’s founders (trainers) and the youth workers who take part in each project get paid after the successful implementation of the project, which is evaluated both by the participants and the people who benefit from it and by the youth workers themselves. For this reason, it is the founders’ main priority to build partnerships with people who demonstrate an intrinsic motivation for social offer, rather than for profit.

7.2.2. Non-formal and informal education

Non-formal learning is a loosely defined term covering various structured learning activities, which are not part of an official educational system, but may occasionally be designed, organized or facilitated by youth workers and school teachers or university professors alike. The motives and objectives of the mutual learners involved in the process (trainer and trainee) may vary from increasing their skills and knowledge to experiencing the emotional reward associated with increased love for a subject or increased passion for learning. It includes seminars, Training Courses, Youth Exchanges, study visits, job observation etc. (European Commission, 2014).

Informal learning differs from non-formal in a sense that it “just happens” everywhere and in any way, through everyday interaction with other people and cultures. The outcomes of informal learning may vary and include social skills, (intercultural) communication skills, time management skills, leading skills etc. (European Commission, 2014).

7.2.3. Erasmus+ program

Erasmus+ is the European Union’s program to support training, education, youth and sport in Europe (European Commission, 2017). Since the program started in 2014, more than two million young European citizens have participated and benefited from
its activities. Set to last until 2020, Erasmus+ is the outcome of merging seven prior European Union programs, in order to offer training and volunteering opportunities to a wide variety of individuals and organizations (including universities). The program aims to contribute to the European Union’s strategies for growth, social equity and inclusion, as well as equal opportunities for education and training (European Commission, 2014).

In order to achieve those aims, Erasmus+ includes four main activities/projects: A. European Voluntary Service (EVS), B. Youth Exchanges, C. Training Courses and D. Structured Dialogue.


A. European Voluntary Service (EVS)

The European Voluntary Service (EVS) is designed to offer young people between 18 and 30 years old the opportunity to spend a time period between 2 weeks and 12 months in another European or Partner country and participate in voluntary projects carried out by NGOs. Voluntary projects include various kinds of activities in areas such as youth work, intercultural awareness, social care, art and culture or environmental protection, while the volunteers attend language courses in order to be able to communicate with local people and authorities. Voluntary work is on an unpaid and full-time basis, while the volunteers’ travel and living costs are covered by Erasmus+ budget, including insurance and pocket money (European Union, 2015). The volunteers’ achievements, learning outcomes and acquired knowledge are certified Europe-wide via a certificate called “Youthpass” in order to make their curriculum vitae more competitive in the European labor market (for more information follow the useful link: https://europa.eu/youth/volunteering_en [Accessed 18 May 2018]).
B. Youth exchanges

Youth Exchanges allow people between 13 and 30 years old to visit another country for a time period between 5 and 21 days in order to meet, live together and work with other people on shared projects designed and managed by youth NGOs. Such projects may include workshops, exercises, debates, role-plays and outdoor activities (European Commission, 2015). All costs are covered by the Erasmus+ budget. The participants’ learning experiences are recognized and certified via a “Youthpass” (for more information follow the useful link: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/individuals/young-people/youth-exchanges_en [Accessed 18 May 2018]).

C. Training Courses

Erasmus+ supports the professional development of youth workers (aged at least 18 years old) who are already involved in youth NGOs through training or networking periods abroad. Such periods may last from 2 days to 2 months and all costs are covered by the Erasmus+ budget. The topics of the Training Courses vary and are in line with European Union’s annual aims for active citizenship, democratic living, sustainable development and so on. To name but a few, such topics may include gender equality, (un)employment in Europe, sport and healthy lifestyle, migration and refugee crisis, inter-religious dialogue, mass media, inclusion/ fighting social exclusion, art and culture, technology and digital tools in youth work, peaceful conflict resolution, human rights, as well as combating anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism and homophobia (European Union, 2015). The participants’ acquired knowledge is certified via a “Youthpass” (for more information follow the useful link: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/staff-training_en [Accessed 18 May 2018]).

D. Structured Dialogue

Structured Dialogue is an instrument of the European Union which brings together young individuals (at least 13 years old), members of NGOs related to youth (at least
18 years old) and decision-makers (such as politicians) to jointly discuss youth policy-making at a regional, national and European level. Its activities include Youth Conferences organized by each EU Presidency country in work cycles of 18 months, with each cycle having a thematic priority (Youth for Exchange and Understanding, 2013).

Most times, each country’s National Working Group organizes workshops at a regional level, during which the participants work in groups in the form of “round tables”, each of them creating a Position Paper of suggestions for accomplishing each thematic’s aims. Each group consists of high school and university students, young people involved in NGOs (usually volunteers), as well as representatives of local authorities. After an open discussion among all the participants, the Position Papers of each “round table” are merged in one final Position Paper, which is sent for consideration to the Parliament. After critical discussion on each region’s Position Papers, the Parliament creates an extended Position Paper, which includes the main points of all Position Papers and which is in turn presented and discussed at the upcoming Youth Conference (Youth for Exchange and Understanding, 2013). In this way, all regions of all European countries have the opportunity to take part in crucial decisions and design the European Union’s future (for more information follow the useful link: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/dialogue_en [Accessed 18 May 2018]).

7.3. Overall aim and objectives of the organization

It is evident from the above that System and G is an organization with a very broad range of activities which aim at providing educational opportunities not only to its members but also to the broader public, which in this case is the citizens of Komotini. Komotini is a small – yet intercultural – town, where the “majority” of Greek Orthodox Christians co-exist in harmony with the Muslim/ Turkish-speaking minority, the Russian-speaking minority of people from the Former Soviet Union and other minorities from Asian and African countries. The town is a crossroads of many cultures and its inhabitants belong to different socio-economic statuses, making it an ideal place for strategic interventions and changes. Therefore, the aim of the organization is to utilize the existing knowledge and experience of its members,
which are youth workers and volunteers from all over Europe, in order to motivate
citizens to take part in the organization’s educational, social and environmental
activities and make the town a better place.

7.4. My internship in the organization

When we first met, the founders of the organization appreciated the fact that I come
from Komotini, and therefore I am aware of the town’s population, culture, mentality,
habits and customs. Apart from that, they appreciated my background in Psychology
and my ongoing Master in Gender Studies, and they thought that I would have a lot to
offer to System and G as an intern. In particular, I took over the role of the mentor
(see p.28), under the supervision of one of the founders.

My first job was to design a short welcome session for volunteers who were
about to start their EVS, which included valuable information about the multicultural
character of Komotini and the intersections between origin, gender, religion, socio-
economic status and cultural background, which give its inhabitants a diverse identity.
The session included official data and statistics regarding the distribution of the
town’s population, as well as short stories and pictures I had collected from my
everyday interaction with friends and colleagues. The second task that was assigned
to me was to carry out weekly group and individual sessions of mentorship/ coaching
and psychological support, in order to help new volunteers adjust to the inclusive
philosophy of System and G and make them feel as members of a big team, following
the organization’s motto, which is “System and G is a learning to learn experience”.
The third and most important task was to design and implement weekly team-building
activities, aiming at cohesion within the organization and effective teamwork. Thus, I
can say that I was given the opportunity to design, carry out and participate in many
different activities, which made my experience valuable and motivated me for further
involvement in youth work.
8. RESEARCH ANALYSIS

System and G serves multiple purposes and organizes a number of activities for young European citizens. My aim is to analyze – and problematize when necessary – the formation, evolution and success of those purposes and corresponding policies through a step-by-step analysis of the organization’s objectives, everyday life and overall function. My research questions are inspired by Diem et al.’s (2014) model of Critical Policy Analysis. I have adapted and revised the model’s questions to my research questions to analyze the organization’s Statute and main principles, including my experience during my internship in the organization, in order to provide a critical and broad image of its philosophy and purpose.

More specifically, I attempt to answer each question in multiple ways, by quoting some key statements made by the organization’s founders and trainers during the interviews, as well as quoting the parts of the organization’s Statute which I find relevant with each question. In many cases, I expand on the quotes by sharing my own observations and experiences as an intern and analyzing the results of my intervention. Combining official data with my personal experience, this Thesis offers a critical view of System and G’s purposes and educational policies. Its aim is not limited to producing different knowledge, but to produce knowledge differently (Richardson, 2000), that is with the combination of different methods and material. The ultimate goal is to make the organization’s activity known to the broader public and spark the readers’ interest for further research.

8.1. Shaping and evolution of the organization’s main principles

My starting point for the analysis of the organization’s success story is the inception of its creation and its leading principles. I believe that in order to make readers understand the organization’s philosophy and overall function it is very important to describe the facts and context which led to the organization’s creation.

The idea for the organization’s creation and the formation of the corresponding policies emerged from the founders’ experience of the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which according to their statements during the interviews was “...life-changing...” and taught them “...the importance of social offer to people
in need...”. As mentioned in the introduction, both of the founders are people with fewer opportunities themselves and, like one of them said, “The fact that a person knows what it is like to be in need of help, eventually makes them want to help other people in need.”

In particular, “fewer opportunities” in the case of Argyris Choulias translates as perinatal cerebral hemiplegia, a disease which has an impact on his physical mobility and motor skills. However, his personal motto, “You do not need wings to fly!”, gives him strength and motivates him to achieve his personal goals. As he explained during the interview:

“Growing up in Greece, a country with one of the worst health systems in the world, in the 1980’s, when the term “special needs” was unknown even among experts, meant that I had to struggle for my rights every day. However, I always had allies in my effort to be a functional and equal member of society and when I became an adult I decided that it was my turn to offer my help to others. During my EVS I contributed to an NGO which assisted children with disabilities similar to mine and after I finished I decided it was time for me to create an organization of my own.”

Therefore, I would say that Argyris’ special needs combined with the fact that he faced many social barriers in life shaped his special identity, which made him appreciated the value of social offer and motivated him for creating an organization “…by people with fewer opportunities for people with fewer opportunities.” as its main leading principle (System and G Statute, 2017, p.1). More specifically, being aware of what it feels like to have a physical impairment and of how difficult it is to be socially included in a country with an ongoing financial crisis, is what makes this person successful in supporting other people with limited opportunities for equal participation in contemporary society.

As for the other founder of the organization, Diana Batraka, she comes from a small Post-Soviet country with a very low socio-economic level, which means that her family was not able to offer her a chance for education and she had to work from a very young age to support herself and her family financially. However, her personal motto “‘Impossible’ is just an opinion! Not mine!” led her to get involved in non-formal and informal education as a participant in different projects offered by an NGO in her country. Later, her EVS project included helping other people design and
implement projects of non-formal education for children from lower socio-economic levels. Cooperating as volunteers in the same NGO, Argyris and Diana found out that they shared the same interests for social inclusion and gradually they developed a common plan for the creation of an organization of their own.

From an intersectional perspective, I would say that the founders’ intersectional identities were formulated through the multiple forms of oppression they have been through. As Grahn (2011) explains, in order to understand how a person’s intersectional identity was shaped and evolved, it is very important to consider that identities are not developed in the frame of one social category, but emerge from the interaction of many different and intersecting power structures. In the case of Argyris, the unique identity he developed is an outcome of the intersections among the mobility limitations he has faced due to his physical impairment, the financial limitations he has experienced due to the Greek economy’s restricted sources for people with special needs, and the social limitations he is still facing due to the stigma of disability. In the case of Diana, she grew up in a family which was struggling to survive after the collapse of the Soviet Union, while at the same time the existing social norms were pushing her to take up her role as a woman and marry as young as possible in order to “...find a good husband with money...”. Therefore, financial limitations in combination with gender oppression shaped her intersectional identity, which in her country is considered weak and inferior. However, both of the founders managed to overcome the obstacles and succeed in their lives, setting a very good example for other people with fewer opportunities, confirming that, apart from oppressions, intersections may also create opportunities (Shields, 2008). I think that Argyris’ statement speaks for itself:

“Instead of complaining about our oppressions and blaming our oppressors, we have managed to use our oppression experiences for good; to help other people face their oppressions and oppressors, to prevent other people from being oppressed and to teach them how not to oppress others.”

Thus, in an attempt to expand on the concept of intersectionality, I would agree with Crenshaw (1989), who supported that the intersectional experience is greater than the simple summing of sexism, racism and social stigma. On the contrary, an individual’s experiences are unique and, as in the cases of Argyris and Diana, may
include multiple forms of oppression and marginalization. However, Argyris and Diana have proven that an intersectional oppression does not necessarily lead to oppression, but may instead become a motive for social offer, an asset for social change or, to put it in Puar’s words (2012), a re-investment in the human subject.

Therefore, to answer the first part of my first Research Question, “Who shaped the organization’s main principles?”, I would say that the organization’s main principles and policies emerged from the founders’ ambition of sharing the knowledge and experience they had gained from their participation in youth work voluntary activities and bringing a positive social change at a local, national and international level. As Diana explained during the interview, “Before we became facilitators we were participants.” In practice, this means that they can evaluate the various needs of people with fewer opportunities and offer them opportunities for education in an informal and non-formal way, based on their own experience.

This philosophy of social inclusion and education of people with fewer opportunities led to the formation of one of the organization’s main principles, principle number 4, **Promotion of youth participation in non-formal and informal learning** (System and G Statute, 2017, p.2):

“*The organization’s main policy to promote non-formal and informal education is to inform, sensitize and activate youth with fewer opportunities in the field of alternative ways of learning, such as voluntarism, youth exchanges, training courses, seminars and workshops. Such educational methods aim at promoting mutual respect among people from different backgrounds, inter-cultural dialogue and cooperation. At the same time, they promote the creation of partnerships for research, training and education in order to approach and analyze the social, economic, political issues and extend the results to the domestic and foreign-related organizations, institutions and trainers.*”

The above quote reveals the founders’ ambition for creating non-conventional educational settings and conditions, accessible to people with fewer opportunities, such as workshops carried out in the facilities of the organization, which are designed to host people with any kind of disability or impairment and their escorts. Those activities give the opportunity to different people to cooperate in effective ways and work on common targets, always with the guidance of the organization’s trainers. One
of the trainers’ comments during the interviews was that “Combining outdoor with digital tools, traditional and contemporary methods, we believe that learner chooses the method and not the other way round.”. In this way, each individual can utilize their own interests, skills and capacities and contribute to educational projects related to human rights, gender equality, democracy, active citizenship etc. Examples of those projects will be presented in the following chapters.

Apart from the founders, the organization’s existing policies were developed with the contribution of the youth workers (trainers, mentors, project coordinators) who gradually joined the organization. As explained earlier in the Thesis, youth workers can work in NGOs as trainers, mentors and project coordinators, depending on their personal interests or on the needs of each organization’s current projects(s). In this Thesis, however, I will be referring to them as “trainers”, in order to differentiate between them and the volunteers. The term ‘trainers” is more relevant than other terms which are usually used for people involved in organizations; for example, the term “stakeholders” is often used for people involved in profit organizations. The term “volunteers” is more relevant than the term “trainees”, because in this particular organization, apart from learning from the trainers, the volunteers are given the opportunity to design their own personal projects and training tools, as part of the Erasmus+ EVS program. This way of functioning is what makes the difference between teachers and trainers, as well as between students and volunteers. Trainers and volunteers are equally involved in a process of mutual learning, which belongs to the field of non-formal education and differs from official schooling. When asked about their motivation to join the organization, two trainers said the following:

“The organization’s profile matches my interest in designing and participating in activities related to democracy and active citizenship, and at the same time it helps me implement the knowledge and skills that I acquired during my studies.”

“I found the thematic of the organization’s different projects very qualitative and designed for a broad range of people. For example, the trainers do not focus on “cold” and “limited” subjects like, for instance, entrepreneurship. In my point of view, the humanistic character of the organization and the fact that it was built by people with fewer opportunities made me want to get involved as an active European citizen.”
Those comments reveal that the trainers appreciate the organization’s diverse and inclusive working environment, as well as the fact that each person’s interests and personal goals are taken into consideration in the planning of each activity, and this is what motivates them to expand and develop the organization’s policies. This human-oriented philosophy is typical in “openness to change/innovation” types of organizational culture (Xenikou & Furnham, 1996), where the application of each individual’s ideas promotes personal development and growth. A characteristic example is the fact that the revised version of the Statute (2017) includes a principle that did not exist in previous versions, principle number 7, Cooperation for innovation and growth (System and G Statute, 2017, p.4):

“The organization’s policies for innovation and growth are based on mutual understanding, freedom for initiative, cooperative spirit, mutual trust, flexibility in the schedule and promotion of self-development, so that each member grows as a better person and System and G grows as a better organization.”

Another important dimension that was mentioned by one of the trainers was that “The organization is an environment where I [the trainer] can move the rainbow flag with pride, design my own activities, include everyone and everything!” This reveals that the organization has been developed as a safe space, where each person involved—either as a trainer or as a volunteer—has the freedom to express themselves in a non-judgmental way and expand their potential with everyone’s constant support and encouragement. Considering the organization as a safe space is a feature of “clan/family” types of organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2006), which reflects a friendly and pleasant place, as in the case of System and G.

Thus, attempting to respond to the second part of my first Research Question “How did the organization’s main policies evolve over time?”, I would say that the founders of the organization created various learning methods to fit each participant’s special needs and capabilities and assist them in their effort to be educated outside the frame of official schooling. Such methods include workshops, mutual learning, experiential seminars, open to the public debates, training courses, youth exchanges and voluntarism. With the valuable contribution of the volunteers, those methods were enhanced, expanded and combined with new methods developed by the volunteers. To name but a few, such methods include field trips, team-building
activities, poetry clubs and human libraries. More detailed examples are given in the chapters that follow.

Taking a step further and attempting to analyze how the organization’s policies changed over time, I have realized that change is a constant process within the organization and a never ending project. In particular, through constant oral and written feedback and evaluation, the founders of the organization adapt their learning tools to the interests, skills and abilities of the members of the organization, while the volunteers contribute to the development of new tools and educational methods.

To be more specific, weekly and monthly meetings and mentor talks between trainers and volunteers, as well as questionnaires and evaluation papers filled-in by participants during and after each project, help the organization’s trainers be constantly aware of its members’ needs and wishes. Apart from that, volunteers are encouraged to make their own suggestions and try out the methods of their choice during educational projects, which in turn can be adopted by the organization and used in the transformation of its existing policies and the development of new ones. Those characteristics reflect both a “personal involvement” (Daft, 2015) and an “openness to change/ innovation” (Xenikou & Furnham, 1996) type of organizational culture, since in both types constant evaluation and improvement is a main priority and a prerequisite for organizational change and progress.

During the intervention, I had welcome sessions with all nine volunteers soon after their arrival and I realized that all of them had experienced some form of inequality and injustice in their lives, in terms of gender, age and nationality. This fact made them stronger and willing to offer their help to people that really needed it. During their stay in Greece, four of the volunteers offered their services to the guest house for unaccompanied under-aged refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, which is called “Arsis” (in Greek it means to rise, especially after a fall). One of the volunteers worked at the elderly house, one of the volunteers worked at the music school, while the rest of the volunteers taught English, Turkish and Russian lessons to local people and university students.

Apart from the above, each volunteer had the liberty to design a personal project and organize activities open to the public in order to promote it. Such projects included weekly discussions (“Europe Talk”) about contemporary issues that affect
the European Union, like Catalonia’s independence, Brexit etc., weekly poetry evenings in different languages ("Transpoesis"), weekly networking meetings between members of the organization and local people ("Networking: first steps"), weekly photo club, weekly game nights etc.

During the interviews, some of the volunteers mentioned the following:

"I choose System & G because it gave participants the liberty to take a lead in their projects."

"I chose System & G for my EVS because it has the greater variety of projects about many topics with different kind of people. Also because I have the opportunity to create my own project and that encourages us to be active and dynamic, and that is what I’m looking for."

Those comments make it evident that, despite the initial difficulties the volunteers faced due to the fact that they didn’t speak the Greek language, they were very passionate and devoted to their work and appreciated the fact that they had the opportunity to choose and design the activities they would take part in. This finding is in line with the organization’s philosophy and ambition to let each participant develop their potential and, in Argyris Choulias’ words, "...expand their horizons...".

Furthermore, it is evident that the organization’s trainers make good use of Young’s (1990) definition of justice as a process of “listening” to difference, not just “looking” at it. In the frame of the organization, this “listening” process is achieved through constructive dialogue among all members, constant evaluation and feedback, team-building activities and taking into consideration all suggestions made by the members. In fact, the trainers try to make good use of every member’s individual features by integrating them in every activity and by allocating the activities according to each person’s capacities. In this way, justice is perceived as a politics of recognition and respect for difference, rather than a repression of difference. The overall aim is to design and carry out activities in which every member’s identity is equally represented and contributes equally to the achievement of a common goal, or, as a volunteer put it during the interview:
“Our experience here is like a rainbow. Each color represents a country, a culture, a person. They are all bright and beautiful on their own, but they look much better when they are put together.”

Apart from that, the volunteers stated that they appreciated the fact that they were involved in teamwork, with common goals and achievements, which is very effectively stated in the following comment:

“We worked in groups and everybody needed to work with everybody at one point. Also, the fact that we did more than one activities in one week made it more interesting and you can learn a lot more from that.”

At this point, I should mention that a few weeks after my internship started, a new trainer was hired in the organization, in charge of the EVS participants’ supervision and project coordination. Asking him about his personal motivation, he shared with me his personal motto, which is “Everyone is the key word for everything!” By that he meant that the organization is open literally to everyone, regardless of their age, gender, nationality and cultural background, educational level, religion, sexual orientation, previous work experience, language, social skills, external appearance and personal style, talents, abilities, interests and ambitions. He also stressed the importance of the trainers’ genuine interest for others, the ability to embrace and handle difference, as well as their skills in leading, guiding and rewarding people in their effort to achieve their goals. During our interview he mentioned the following:

“For me, System and G was an opportunity to try my wings on my own and do what I love and not to be “tied” in someone else’s rules and bureaucracy. Freedom and creativity matter a lot to me, more than money.”

Thus, I can safely say that the organization’s trainers are characterized by an innate tendency for social offer and that their motivation is mainly humanistic, which, in my opinion, makes them suitable to hold key posts in a non-governmental, non-profit organization.
Concluding points

To summarize all the above, regarding the first Research Question, “Who shaped the organization’s main principles and how did those principles evolve over time?”, I would say that the existing educational policies stemmed from the founder’s experience of youth work and their aspiration for social offer and change. The success of those policies is reflected in the fact that the organization started as an informal group and in a few months became a fully developed NGO, offering opportunities to young citizens from all over Europe. Part of the trainers’ philosophy is that the existing policies are under continuous evaluation, promotion and improvement, reflecting the life-long learning character of the organization.

8.2. Organizational culture in the organization’s everyday life and function

As previously mentioned, one of the organization’s main purposes is to provide opportunities for equal participation and social inclusion, while trainers and participants (volunteers and people from the broader public) are considered as peers in a process of mutual learning. Therefore, trainers and participants are encouraged to participate equally in all activities and decision-making processes, regardless of their individual characteristics.

I start by analyzing the process of partnership-building with trainers and volunteers, which is vital for the overall function of the organization, as it affects cooperation, team effort, working process and learning outcomes. It is very important to clarify that both trainers and volunteers are already part of the Erasmus+ online network before they contact the organization. In order to become accredited trainers, all youth workers should have worked on at least three international projects carried out in the frame of the Erasmus+ project and get positive evaluation (demonstrated on official online Erasmus+ forms) by other trainers and participants of those projects. As for the volunteers, they should have offered voluntary services to at least one youth organization in their countries. Thus, they contact System and G (the receiving organization) with the help of the organization in which they are already members (the sending organization).
As it was mentioned above, since the organization is non-profit and each project is funded by the European Union (including the trainers’ payment), there is no such thing as “hiring” or “salary”. Instead, trainers work with the organization’s founders on current projects and get paid by the Erasmus+ program at the end of each project. Therefore, the organization’s founders are always willing to work with accredited trainers who have been positively evaluated. As summarized by one of the founders, “The main criteria for partnership-building are reliability, trust and common values we share, which makes the perfect match between us and the partners.”. This finding implies that the organization’s philosophy includes some elements of the “personal involvement” type of organizational culture, which is described by Daft (2015) as inspiring members for personal commitment to common values and devotion to the organization’s purposes. During my interviews, I got valuable comments regarding the choice of trainers, including intrinsic motivation for social offer and genuine interest for other people. For instance, one of the founders said: “As we are targeted to give the chance to young people with fewer opportunities, this is one of the key factors when we are building partnerships.”, meaning that all trainers should show empathy to other people’s difficulties and innate altruism, either they are people with fewer opportunities themselves or not. Such behavior is also a feature of “personal involvement” organizational cultures, which according to Daft (2015) value personal ethic and motivation for offer.

Apart from that, successful allocation of activities and personal aspiration are also valued during the partnership-building process (“We adapt our tasks to who is more relevant and motivated to do what.”). For this reason, there is no such thing as “choice” among candidate trainers. All trainers who are interested in working in the organization are given the opportunity to participate in one of the existing or upcoming projects, according to their interests and skills. Even if there is no project available at the time of the interview, the organization keeps each trainer posted on upcoming projects, so that eventually they are given the opportunity to get involved in the organization. This policy is very crucial for the achievement of inclusion, because there is no such thing as “rejection” of candidates; instead, all trainers are given an opportunity to work on a project which reflects their own capacities and promotes their career in youth working, even if that opportunity comes a few weeks or months after they express their interest to get involved in the organization. It should be noted
here that the trainers are already aware of this possibility, since it is part of their training to learn how the Erasmus+ program and partner organizations work. Provided that a trainer receives positive evaluation (as required by the Erasmus+ program), they keep participating in projects carried out by the organization or design and implement their own.

What is more, the demonstration of team spirit (as evaluated by other trainers and project participants) is considered crucial for the success of the organization’s activities ("Together we always succeed because over everything is teamwork and finding the solutions is always possible."). To be more specific, each trainer should be effective in cooperating with other people, without being competitive and without trying to overshadow or underestimate the contribution of other trainers in each project. Instead, they should be eager to assist other trainers whenever they need help, as well as to compromise in order to find solutions to difficulties and problems. In this way, the trainers develop a feeling of responsibility towards the organization’s objectives, which according to Daft (2015) is another feature of “personal involvement” organizational culture.

Bearing in mind that both of the organization’s founders are people with fewer opportunities (see previous chapter), I was interested in finding out whether the rest of the partner trainers were also individuals with fewer opportunities and in which way(s).

Interviewing a former trainer, who joined the organization before my intervention, I found out that due to his homosexuality he has been considered as a member of a social “minority”, which is still stigmatized in my country, especially in small towns and rural areas. During our interview, he shared the following:

“The organization has been a safe space for me right from the start. I learned to be proud of what I am and leave no space for rejection because of my sexual orientation. Now, everyone who meets me knows who and what I am and I never let that affect the quality of my work. Whoever cannot put up with it gives me no reason to work with them!”

This finding confirms the founder’s aspiration for providing opportunities to people who have been deprived of them and allowing each member’s personal skills and capacities to develop within the organization’s activities.
Regarding the trainer who joined the organization during my intervention, I found out that he comes from a very democratic and prosperous country of liberal mentality and that he has a background in working with children and youth. Asking him if he perceives himself as an individual with fewer opportunities, he responded:

"I do not consider myself on the genre of fewer opportunities, in terms of economic, physical or social restrictions. However, I have made some bad handlings regarding my health and my finances, and at some point I found myself drunk and broke. But I did recover and for sure the involvement in the organization gave me a second chance to change and stand on my feet again."

Those inspiring words made me understand that the concept of “fewer opportunities” is even broader and more intersectional than the founders of the organization initially believed. As it was described above, “fewer opportunities” translated to the founders as any form of physical disability or social oppression. Many times, however, the restrictions that an individual experiences are not as obvious as, for example, a physical impairment, but nonetheless have a serious impact on the person’s capacities, quality of life, overall functioning and motivation. As Lykke (2010) explains, an intersectional experience describes how an individual negotiates the power-laden social conditions and relations in which they are embedded. In this sense, I can identify with the term “fewer opportunities” myself, despite the fact that it was something that appeared late in my life. More specifically, I was lucky enough to grow up in a white, Christian, middle-class family where all my basic needs were covered and I didn’t have to work to support my studies at university. My parents helped me open my privat office and kept supporting me financially for some time after that. However, hit by the general financial crisis and due to my father’s health issues which led to his early pension-less retirement, my family and I found ourselves in a very difficult position, struggling for the basics and being obliged to work endless hours per day to cover our debts and needs. Soon after I opened my office I had to find a second, and after that a third job, just to be able to pay my house’s and office’s bills and utilities. For this reason, the Master in Gender Studies and the internship in the organization helped me set new goals in my life and find the motivation I was looking for in order to design a new career path, which will allow me to cover my needs and make plans for the future. Thus, I identify with one of the founders’ motto, “’Impossible’ is just an opinion! Not ours!”.
Therefore, so far it can be supported that partnership-building with trainers is based on their life experiences and the impact of those experiences on their character and personality. In particular, all trainers are individuals who have faced different kinds of difficulties and obstacles in their lives and who, in the frame of the organization, have found a safe space to express and develop their singularity and uniqueness in a non-judgmental and equal way. In this way, I believe that the organization has succeeded in the achievement of procedural justice (Bies, 1993), which encompasses its members’ feeling of fairness, equality, respect to individuality and absence of judgment. For this reason, I can say that power is equally distributed among trainers, as I will show in more detail in the upcoming chapters.

Moving to the process of building partnerships with volunteers, I would say that it is equally important with building partnerships with trainers, as it defines the outcomes of the cooperation among volunteers and between volunteers and trainers. All potential volunteers have already offered their voluntary services in the frame of their sending organization, which provides the receiving organization with information about each volunteer’s motivation and skills. For the founders of the organization, this means that both sides are characterized by similar motivation and interests and have common goals and objectives. In order for that to be ensured, it is the founders’ responsibility to treat potential volunteers with seriousness, respect and dignity and share with them their vision.

As it happens in the case of the partnership-building with trainers, there is no such thing as actual “choice” among candidates. All potential volunteers are given the opportunity to participate either in the existing EVS project or in the upcoming project. Even in the case a candidate’s profile does not match the purposes or the content of the existing project, they keep receiving notifications for future projects and they can reschedule a new interview with the founders. Apart from that, the founders also suggest projects carried out by other organizations, for which the volunteers can possibly apply. In this way, no volunteer is actually “rejected”; instead, the founders’ experience over the years and the needs of each project work in favor of the volunteers, so that they are given the opportunity to do some meaningful and rewarding voluntary work and not perceive their voluntary service as a vacation in another country. As in the case of trainers, candidate volunteers become aware of all
the above when they register on the EVS Erasmus+ official platform, long before they contact the organization.

During the interviews with me, the volunteers were directly asked whether they found anything about the partnership-building process problematic (such as vocabulary, labeling, or stereotyping) and whether they felt somehow uncomfortable during their interview with the founders. According to their comments, the partnership-building process for all of them was "...neutral, politically correct and very productive...", implying that they were given the chance for a fruitful dialogue with the organization’s founders. Two volunteers stated that the interview they went through was aiming at finding out their "...personal motivation rather than official CV..." [Curriculum Vitae], showing that their individual skills and interests were valued by the founders. As it happens with the trainers, many volunteers stressed the importance of teamwork and interpersonal relations, showing that a key element of their partnership-building process was interactional justice, which is defined by Jost and Kay (2010) as treating other people with dignity, respect and honesty. One of them put it this way: "From the beginning I always felt welcome and part of the team.". Such comments made me understand the importance of building good interpersonal relations among an organization’s members for its overall function and success.

During my internship, I was allowed to be present and observe the process of partnership-building with new volunteers, in order not only to learn how it is done but also to make comments and give feedback to the founders based on my perspective as a psychologist and a gender studies student. From my point of view, one of the positive elements of the partnership-building process was that the candidates felt, as some of them put it, "...comfortable..." and "...non-formal..." and experienced "...a cozy atmosphere...", which made them talkative and enthusiastic, as I observed. To be more specific, in most cases the candidates were sitting in front of their computer with a cup of coffee or tea, dressed casually or even in their pajamas (not formally, as in the case of a typical job interview), using slang language, while both founders and candidates were making jokes and laughing.

The above findings reflect a type of organizational culture which has been described by Cameron and Quinn (2006) as "family/clan". Such a culture is
developed in organizations where members are encouraged to feel like they are at home, behave in a casual way, use informal language when talking to each other and bring their personal habits and behavior to the organization. As for power relations between employees and stakeholders, in “family/clan” cultures they are characterized by equality and peer learning (mentoring), as it happens between volunteers and trainers in System and G. In this way, trainers are not perceived as power holders and volunteers are not treated as inferiors, avoiding the reproduction of unequal power relations.

Thus, I would say that in general the organization is characterized by equality among all members, which share similar interests and motivation. Trainers and volunteers are equally treated in the partnership-building process, which values their personal talents and skills, rather than their academic achievements. In this way, the types of organizational culture which occur are the “personal involvement” (Daft 2015) and the “family/clan” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). The partnership-building process forms the basis for effective and successful cooperation and achievement of the organization’s purposes and objectives. This cooperation is based on personal commitment to the organization’s purposes, which according to Markus and Kitayama (1991) is crucial for the achievement of distributive organizational justice.

Apart from the above, the organization’s function and success are based on its human resources or, in Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992) words, its social capital. In particular, trainers and volunteers are welcome to bring to the organization their personal experiences, knowledge, interests, talents and skills and transform them to personal motivation, commitment to the organization’s purposes, teamwork, mutual support and solidarity within the organization, as well as networking and building strategic partnerships with local people, members of other organizations and the broader public, always in the way that better fits their personality and character. This part of the organization’s philosophy reflects a key dimension of its internal culture, collectivism, which is described by Chatman et al. (1998) as shared objectives, interchangeable interests and commonalities among members. In order for the organization’s human resources to be equally distributed and effectively used, the contribution of the trainers’ experience and knowledge is vital, while constant support and leadership are essential. This is another clue which reveals the “family/clan” type of organizational culture, in which all members are considered as parts of an extended
family, while leaders (in this case trainers) act as mentors and figures for inspiration (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). Furthermore, for actual equality to be achieved, the trainers utilize their leading skills and help volunteers design the activities according to their talents and abilities, in a process of mutual understanding and reciprocal learning.

What is more, according to Wagner (1995), an important dimension of “family/ clan” and “collectivistic” organizational cultures is the equal distribution of responsibilities and activities. According to the volunteers’ saying during our mentor talks and interviews, the allocation of activities and duties was “…very good…”, “…definitely based on the volunteers’ interests and talents…” and “…chosen carefully between the trainer and the volunteers…”. Those comments are in line with Bies (2015), according to which personal merit is a key factor that should be taken into consideration in the frame of distributive justice – in terms, for instance, of resources and rewards – and therefore each individual should be treated according to their own different talents, skills and potential or, as another volunteer put it, “…according to what each of us has and wants to offer.”. Furthermore, another statement made by a volunteer shows the importance of giving an organization’s members the liberty to use their potential up to the point they feel comfortable with: “We really are not forced to do activities against our skills, limits and willing…”.

Building upon the words of Bies (2015), I would say that in a diverse and multicultural environment, where international and inter-religious projects are carried out, it is highly important that the people holding key positions (in this case trainers) make each person feel welcome and develop a sense of belonging soon after their involvement in the group. In this way, all individuals feel bonded with the team and committed to its purposes and objectives. At the same time, they are given the opportunity to utilize their personal skills and capacities and expand their potential, making good use of Young’s (1990) definition of distributive justice as a way to move from the allocation of pre-given jobs or tasks to the conception of new ideas, using constant encouragement and feedback, and always taking into consideration the individual’s personality, as well as the circumstances and the context. In my point of view, System and G has succeeded in the above, setting a good example of how interactional and distributive justice are achieved and intersect with the organization’s internal culture.
Another dimension of human resources distribution and achievement of distributive justice which came up during the interviews was the constant support and supervision for each volunteer’s project and activities (“They always helped us if we didn’t know what to do.”), which is part of Jost and Kay’s (2010) description of distributive justice as providing support according to each individual’s potential. In particular, most volunteers said that they were receiving constant feedback and encouragement both from the other volunteers and from the trainer (“They encouraged us and we encouraged each other to do more and take over more responsibilities.”), while there was flexibility regarding the duration and extent of the activities (“We have the freedom to design our own schedule.”), as well as the option to change an activity if it was not working or didn’t have the expected outcomes (“If we really don’t like to do something, it can always be changed.”). This way of handling work contributed to the volunteer’s responsibility and commitment and promoted their self-development and skills; to use one of the volunteers’ words, “I [the volunteer] learned to be responsible for a lot of things and I always tried to find the best solution on my own first before asking for help.”. This comment also shows the development of a “personal involvement” organizational culture (Daft 2015), as well as the achievement of “collectivism”, which according to Wagner (1995), should promote inclusion and cooperation.

Moving to the allocation of responsibilities among the trainers, my personal observation, as well as the interviews, gave me the impression of flexibility and freedom of initiative, team spirit and, in one of the founders’ worlds, “…cover for each other…” logic, which translates as taking over each others’ duties and responsibilities in case they are not able to fulfill them (e.g. sickness, absence, fatigue, other obligations). This is also a characteristic of “family/ clan” organizational culture, which is described by Chatman et al. (1998) as willingness to balance other people’s weaknesses with personal sacrifice. According to the other founder, “The relations among trainers are always supportive, as well as transparent. Otherwise, the organization wouldn’t work.”, reflecting the need for mutual trust, transparency and solidarity. Apart from that, all trainers were sometimes involved in activities that were not initially assigned to them, but they did not seem to be dissatisfied, because they were related to the organization’s overall aims and objectives or, as a trainer put it, “We put the organization’s common good above all.”.
At this point, I can identify with the above, as many times I was offered or kindly asked to do something that was not part of my agreement contract. To name but a few, I occasionally offered to give a ride to the volunteers or the trainer when they needed to be somewhere for the purposes of the organization. I also helped the coming trainer adapt to the town’s lifestyle and showed him around during the first weeks of his arrival. Moreover, I escorted the volunteers to their first meetings with local associations and public services and assisted in the making of an agreement contract between them. Furthermore, I sometimes had to handle part of the organization’s budget and distribute some money to certain activities.

However, I never felt used or disrespected; on the contrary, I felt that the trainers trusted me and helped me feel like a member of System and G’s family. I also learned a lot from these experiences, had some interaction with the volunteers and the trainers outside the organization’s activities and made some connections with local authorities and public services. Very soon the organization’s founders showed their appreciation for my services and broadened the range of my activities in the organization by sending me to represent System and G in conferences and meetings of organizations in other cities, as well as by encouraging me to apply for a membership in the National Working Group for Structured Dialogue in Youth. Thus, I must say that the organization’s philosophy matches my personal life attitude and personality, as well as my motto “Give and you will be given.”.

Another important dimension of the organization’s internal culture is mutual learning in the frame of non-formal and informal education. This is in line with the organization’s principle number 6, Promotion of critical thinking and dissemination of the knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal education (System and G Statute, 2017, p.4):

“The organization’s main policy to promote critical thinking and dissemination of the knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal education is the participation of its members in the development and implementation of activities which combine their academic knowledge with the skills they acquire through alternative forms of learning. System and G develops and implements many training activities, research studies and pilot projects aiming at economic, social, rural and regional development. It also has a library which includes training material offered by the European Commission, as well as its own publications which are funded by the European Union. Individuals
involved in System and G are encouraged to disseminate the knowledge they acquire by contributing to research projects carried out either by the organization or by universities and other academic institutions. Networking and creation of partnerships for research, training and education are considered crucial in order to approach and analyze current social, economic and political issues and share the results with domestic and foreign organizations, institutions and trainers.”

The above policies and aims of the organization became evident during my participatory observation, as well as the interviews with the trainers and the volunteers. For instance, some of the volunteers were interested in sharing and expanding some knowledge they had acquired at school (“I already had some limited knowledge about childcare, but working with under-aged refugees was a valuable experience.”), while others gained some knowledge through their participation in the organization, which motivated them to search for opportunities for future studies (“I aim to study social work, so for me it was important to work with people and make a lot of local contacts through the organization.”).

The most effective way of knowledge distribution and dissemination in the organization is the sharing of life experiences and skills among the members and between members and the broader public. The activity which contributes the most to this is the “Human Library”. Apart from the traditional library, which is located in the organization’s office, some new volunteers of System and G recently took the initiative to create a “Human Library” in order to spread their experience and motivate local people to get involved in the organization. The Human Library is a social movement which started in 2000 in Denmark with the aim of creating a positive framework for conversations that can challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue (www.humanlibrary.org [Accessed 20 March 2018]). In a human library, people act as books available for loan by readers, through sharing their life stories and experiences. The volunteers’ objective was to “...give a voice to groups in the community that are stigmatized...”, create a safe space, where people listen to and learn from each other in an informal way, embrace diversity and difference and “...bring about platforms that support a greater understanding of diversity and social cohesion...”, meaning that they aimed at making local people more sensitive to other people’s needs.
In a human library, inclusion is a key element and every person living or even passing by Komotini is welcome to join, making use of Bacci and Eveline’s words (2010, p.115), “every truth is as good as any other”. One of the volunteers characteristically said during the interview: “Everyone has a story to tell. Everybody can be a listener.”, showing that every person’s experiences can be appreciated and shared if that person is given the opportunity to express them to people who are eager to listen to them. All volunteers got very actively involved in this activity, spent much of their time promoting it and trying to find participants – either storytellers or listeners – while they were willing to act as books themselves. The first human library activity was quite successful and worked like this: The Books were gathered in one room and the listeners had to choose a Book to borrow according to the schedules. The volunteers who acted as Librarians were pointing out one room where the Book and the listener(s) would go. The Books were being listened to for about 20 to 30 minutes and could be borrowed at the same time by one or more listeners. In case a listener wanted to listen to a Book already borrowed, they had to wait for the session to finish. There was also a booklist for the listeners to choose from and each Book could choose their own title, which they could identify with and support.

In total, twenty people took part in the activity, which brought together five Books and fifteen listeners (apart from the volunteers and the trainers). In particular, a former drug and alcohol addict who overcame his problems and became a trainer, an actress who was previously oppressed and bullied because of her gender and external appearance, a policewoman who travels to Africa twice a year to offer voluntary help to ill and starving children, a man who survived for a month alone in a mountain and later became the founder of the local mountaineering club and a Muslim woman who went from a beggar to a politician acted as Books and shared their experience with local people. Before coming to this activity, those people already belonged to a certain category and had a certain identity that the local community – and contemporary society in general – had attributed to them. I use the word “identity” in the intersectional way that Shields (2008) defines it, as the sum of all socially constructed categories in which an individual claims membership and personal meaning or, I could add, has no choice but to be a member of, like for example skin color. Nevertheless, a person’s identity is an expression of the way they perceive and describe their “self”, uniqueness and singularity though their own eyes, and this is
exactly what those people were asked to express through acting as Books to be read. If an individual feels that they do not belong to any fixed category or identity, they should, as Horsford and Tillman (2012) put it, “define themselves the way they want” (p.1) or, in other words, “invent themselves” (p.2).

Overall, the Human Library was a very interesting experience for all participants and promoted mutual understanding and addressing stereotypes or, in one of the participants’ words, “...learning how not to judge a book by its cover.”. The individuals who were given the chance to make their voices heard shared with the rest of the participants the feeling of relief they experienced after the activity was completed (“I managed to approach the public and to give them signals to approach me.”), stressing how important it was for them to talk about their “difference” instead of listening to other people talking about it.

Thus, I would say that one of System and G’s main policies is to encourage its members, as well as all the people interested in the organization’s activity, to express themselves freely and without hesitation or fear, to talk and act in their own way, and not in the way that would be socially acceptable. For this reason, the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning in the frame of System and G are successfully disseminated and shared with a broad public, setting a good example of social inclusion, difference and solidarity. In this way, System and G contributes to a general effort for inclusion, to what Shiva (2003) calls Earth Democracy Movement, which is based on a continuum of justice, peace and sustainability in order to achieve diversity, creativity and freedom, and I feel lucky to be part of this process.

Those findings are in line with what I have learned on an international Training Course I participated in March, called “Appetizer: An introduction to International Youth Work”, during which I realized that youth work is not about teaching, but about creating opportunities. In order to do this, trainers should challenge themselves, their position and their knowledge and many times un-learn in order to learn and let others learn. Informal and non-formal learning aim at addressing problems of “here” and “now” and give young people the chance to try their competences and skills in a process of self-questioning and self-promotion. In this way, organizational and social justice is achieved in the way that Dolphijn and Van
der Tuin (2012) define it, which is listening and responding to ourselves and to others in a responsible and ethical way.

**Concluding points**

Analyzing the process of partnership-building, as well as everyday life in the organization, a combination of three intersecting types of organizational culture was revealed (“openness to change/ innovation culture”, “personal involvement culture” and “family/ clan culture”). In particular, both existing and potential members of the organization are characterized by an intrinsic motivation for social offer and social change, which is characteristic of an “openness to change/ innovation culture”. What is more, mutual support and solidarity among members promote their commitment to the organization’s principles and makes them adopt a culture of “personal involvement”. Soon enough, all members perceive the organization as their home and their colleagues as their family, which makes them develop a “family/ clan” type of culture, characterized by collectivist thought and acting for the common good. Overall, the existing policies of the organization set a good example of equal participation and distribution of resources and knowledge, interactional and distributive justice in terms of allocation of power and contribution to the activities, equal opportunities for decision-making and constant effort to make more and more different voices heard.

**8.3. Organizational justice and equality in the organization**

In the previous chapters, it has been clear that power relations in the organization are characterized by equity, freedom of choice and equal participation in decision-making. In this chapter, I analyze how different forms of organizational justice and equality are achieved in the organization and how they intersect with the organization’s internal culture. I focus on three main aspects, the organization’s partnership-building and public activities, the organization’s everyday life, and the constant evaluation and improvement.
8.3.1. Partnership-building and public activities

This section focuses on the organization’s main policies to achieve justice and equality in many different social levels (local, regional, national, international). I start by analyzing the organization’s principle number 3, **Promotion of gender equality and inter-religious dialogue and combat of all kinds of discrimination** (System and G Statute, 2017, p.3):

“The organization’s main policy to promote gender equality and inter-religious dialogue and combat of all kinds of discrimination is to welcome each and every one to participate in its activities, either as a trainer or as a participant, regardless of their biological sex, social gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, educational level and sexual orientation.”

In order to carry out activities which promote gender equality and address different kinds of discrimination, the composition of the organization itself reflects all forms of equality and diversity. Regarding gender balance and equality among the members of the organization, it is not limited to the number of male and female participants or to the active participation of LGBTIQ individuals. On the contrary, the organization’s members are constantly trying to build partnerships with and include people of each and every sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, educational level, cultural background, and past or current occupation, as long as they demonstrate and commit to a set of values which are essential for the function of the organization. In particular, trainers and volunteers alike should have the ability for successful and meaningful intercultural communication, be willing to advocate for and defend other people’s rights, be able to work in a heterogeneous and diverse team for a common goal, be open to change and willing to learn and help others learn, as well as value each person’s uniqueness and singularity. The fact that the potential partners of the organization should demonstrate similar values and beliefs promotes the achievement of procedural justice, which according to Bies (1993) includes the utilization of an organization’s human resources through certain procedures or criteria which are common for everyone, regardless of their individual features.

It should be reminded that the volunteers’ involvement (European Voluntary Service – EVS) in the organization lasts from two to twelve months, while the existing trainers have been in the organization for at least six years, except the trainer
in charge of the current volunteers’ supervision and project coordination, who has been in the organization for seven months. However, regardless of the duration of the involvement, all members should demonstrate the above attributes during the interview, which is the most crucial part of the partnership-building process. This finding is very important for understanding why this specific organization differs from other organizations which strive for (gender) equality in more “traditional” ways, like simply having the same number of male and female members. In particular, System and G makes use of Gronold and Pedersen (2009), according to whom gender is only one essential factor in the understanding of gender relations and should not overshadow the rest of an individual’s intersecting characteristics. Therefore, relations among the organization’s members are built upon their unique and intersectional identity, rather than the socially given categories they might belong to (gender, ethnicity etc).

According to the trainers, social stratification in the frame of the organization should be diverse and equal and based on the commitment to the organization’s philosophy. One of the trainers characteristically said during the interview: “The combination of gender, skin color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion etc. is what makes an individual unique and valuable, even if he or she is not aware of it.”. This comment confirms Puar’s (2012) notion that every individual is intersectional, regardless if they recognize themselves as such, and shows the key role of intersectionality in the successful function of the organization.

What is more, another trainer said: “The only thing you need in order to join us is to be human, think human and behave human.”, stressing that the organization is based on equal distribution of power among its members and that social stratification is based on the members’ intrinsic motivation for social offer and protection of human rights, instead of individual features like gender. Apart from that, the trainer’s comment makes use of Wagner’s words (1995), according to which, in collectivist organizational cultures, being a member of an organization is enough to qualify an individual as an in-group member and promote their sense of belonging.

Apart from the partnership-building process, all individuals involved in the organization are encouraged to raise awareness of local people regarding equality, justice, anti-discrimination laws and human rights protection by organizing and
participating in relevant events and workshops. For instance, the trainers visit a different school every month in order to inform students and teachers about current issues such as gender equality and human rights. Depending on the students’ age, the trainers organize drawing or authoring contests, while all students are encouraged to participate in charity concerts and balls which aim at raising public awareness and funds for vulnerable social groups, usually refugees, homeless people and orphans.

What is more, System and G organizes monthly events open to the public which aim at revealing and handling intersections among the local inhabitants' identities, with the most prominent being gender and religion/ gender and family traditions – for example, lectures and experiential seminars for women from minority groups, gender and culture/ gender and external appearance – for example, traditional festivals, during which women from local associations host and exchange experience with women from associations form other cities or countries, gender in the workplace/ gender, religion and the institution of marriage – for example, single mothers, women who became mothers at a very young age or women who quit their jobs to look after their children are encouraged to work part-time at public benefit organizations, gender trafficking/ gender-based violence – for example, the organization works as a link between services of free legal aid and women and children who have witnessed/ experienced any form of violence. What is more, the organization’s members invite local people to participate in protests, theatrical plays and television and radio programs, in order to learn how to claim and protect their rights, as well as how to recognize and respect other people’s rights. It is evident, therefore, that, unlike other organizations which aim only at bringing social awareness of inequalities and injustice, System and G motivates people to be actively involved in addressing and solving everyday problems of the local society. As Tuana (2009) mentions, intersections and interactions are sometimes easy to point out, yet difficult to handle and practice. For this reason, System and G’s contribution to providing ways of handling intersectionality – instead of just describing it – is a vital part of the general attempt of Komotini’s decision-makers to bring social change and progress.

One of the organization’s most prominent activities to promote gender equality was the design and facilitation of the Training Course “Power Games” in Komotini. More specifically, “Power Games” was an international Training Course on equality between women and men, European active citizenship and peaceful
conflict management. It brought together 26 youth workers from 7 European, neighboring and partner countries to take part in public discussions and workshops held simultaneously at different spots of the city – town hall, public library, basketball court, cathedral church, schools, music halls – during which local people were informed about gender issues and rights, took part in surveys regarding their level of awareness of gender equality and received advice on how to handle situations of gender inequality, e.g. seek legal aid. What is more, the participants created a theatrical play which was broadcasted by the local media, simulating situations of everyday gender inequalities and possible solutions, like unequal payment, sexual harassment, domestic violence, oppression of religious minorities, stereotypes related to external appearance etc.

On the second day of the training course, the participants gathered at the central square with carton masks on their faces, which pictured faces of females with bruised eyes, scratches on the cheeks or bleeding lips. They were holding banners with messages regarding domestic violence, such as statistics, quotes from European laws, phone numbers of services for psychological or legal help or inspirational phrases like “Act now” or “You never know if it will happen to you”. The activity triggered the public’s interest, as many people approached the participants and the organization’s trainers to receive more information and collect relevant brochures. The activity was also broadcasted by the local media and one of the trainers was interviewed about the activity, mentioning possible ways of preventing domestic violence and protecting victims.

On the last day of the training course, the participants cooperated with the members of a local NGO which provides aid to unemployed and homeless women and children to organize a concert for the purposes of the NGO. In particular, the participants joined the music band of the public music school and together they sang and played music at the local stadium. The money from the tickets was given to the NGO to buy blankets, warm clothes, shoes etc. for homeless women and children. The above activities brought public awareness of major gender inequalities in contemporary societies and set a good example of how to address those inequalities effectively in everyday life in practical ways. The main point was to make the public understand that “…even a little help is appreciated…”, to use one of the participants’ words.
Apart from that, gender equality is always a key dimension of every Structured Dialogue workshop held by the organization. To be more specific, local, national and international decision-makers, such as entrepreneurs who run large local businesses, members of the city council, school principals, university teachers, members of the parliament, members of the chamber of commerce and industry, mayors and members of NGO and associations participate in monthly meetings in order to discuss about issues like women’s rights, LGBTIQ issues, physical and verbal domestic violence, gender stereotypes in the labor market, sexual harassment in the workplace, gendered power relations in the workplace, oppression, sexist behavior and discriminations in everyday life. After each voice is heard, those people work together with members of the organization, as well as with school and university students and youth employees, in order to make decisions and design rules and policies to address the above issues and resolve relevant problems of everyday life. For instance, a very successful recent workshop led to the University’s written commitment that all male and female employees – not only professors, but librarians, office employees etc. – will be paid equally for the same kind and amount of work, while last year the local maternity hospital was committed to providing its services to under-aged pregnant females free of charge.

All the above show that the organization’s members design, implement and participate in a very broad range of activities which promote (gender) equality, not only among its members but also in the local society and the European society at large. Unlike other organizations, which focus on addressing one kind of gender inequalities, e.g. financial (DeJaeghere & Wiger, 2013), political (Contu & Girei, 2014) or social (Phillips 2015), System and G aims at addressing inequalities in every aspect of everyday life and motivate as many people as possible to get involved in the process of developing practical and realistic solutions.

Apart from the above, my involvement in the organization has shown that the concept of “privilege” does not apply to any of the members, while trainers and volunteers make constant efforts to motivate as many people as possible to get equally involved in the organization and address inequalities and privileges. To support this observation, my starting point is the organization’s principle number 2, Development of solidarity and promotion of diversity, mutual understanding and respect among young European citizens (System and G Statute, 2017, p.3):
“The organization’s main policy to develop solidarity among its members and between its members and the broader public is to build partnerships with people based on their personal motivation for social offer rather than on their professional success and academic achievements. The organization’s main policy to promote diversity is to give the opportunity to as many individuals and social groups as possible to be represented in the organization, participate equally in its everyday activity and benefit from the different forms of non-formal and informal education. In such ways the organization supports and promotes the exchange of various cultural and social elements, which help participants understand each other better, treat each other with respect and accept each other’s difference and uniqueness. Those characteristics define the concept of contemporary Europe and European citizenship.”

Since I have seen the above principle in practice, I would say that the organization encourages its member and the broader public to harmonically cooperate with each other and create strong bonds with local people by taking part in common activities, such as intercultural events, workshops and charity events. Through those activities, participants realize the importance of equal treatment, respect for difference, solidarity and networking, which form the basis for interactional justice (Bies, 2015). Apart from that, one of the trainers has explained that “Such activities give youth the opportunity to acquire new international experience, knowledge and skills.”, stressing the importance of constant education in the frame of the organization.

Furthermore, the organization’s aim for mutual understanding and respect is described by its members as “...developing a set of competencies which will help them adjust and function in every setting and cooperate with every kind of people...”, showing how important it is to accept other people without criticizing their individual characteristics and identity. Following Roosevelt (1990), the organization’s trainers support that “diversity” is not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, creed, age, educational background and function, but includes differences of personality and corresponding skills and abilities. In this way, the organization embraces the concept of intersectionality as described by Knapp (2005), according to whom an individual’s multiple features – age, gender, ethnicity, race, color, religion, language, sexual orientation, (dis)ability etc. – can be combined in many different ways to form their specific and unique identity.
Therefore, the aim of equality within the organization is not to integrate individuals to a pre-existing culture, but to create a new, heterogeneous culture, “…where no individual is privileged over another…”, in order to achieve social change, distributive justice and progress. To use the words of the trainers, social change at a local, regional and international level is achieved through “…offering opportunities to as a wider range of people as possible…”, while progress is achieved through “…grassroots activities of non-formal and informal education…”, showing how interesting it is to learn and have fun simultaneously. Apart from that, as one of the trainers put it, “Trainers set a good example of democratic activities, where everyone can take part equally.”, showing that in the frame of mutual learning, the trainers and project coordinators do not consider themselves in a position of power but utilize their existing knowledge and experience to assist other people’s social participation and personal development. In this way, they promote the “family/ clan” type of organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2006), where stakeholders (in this case trainers) are perceived as mentors and leaders.

As for the promotion of solidarity and the creation of strategic partnerships, I am content to say that during my involvement I had the chance to meet many representatives and members of partner organizations from European, neighboring and partner countries, all of them willing to support us any time and cooperate with us on a permanent basis. I realized how important it is to have a broad network of people from all over the world who share the same interests, passion and goals with you and with whom you can exchange experiences, advice and good practices. Above all, I learned that in order to work with different people effectively you have either to find some common ground or to create it, to try out different communication channels, in order to turn "borders" to "bridges".

As mentioned above, in March I participated in an International Training Course in Latvia entitled “Appetizer: an Introduction to International Youth Work”, during which I built strategic partnerships with members from NGOs all over Europe. One of the course’s key points was that “Europe will not build on its own”, which means that as European citizens we (youth workers) will succeed and help other people succeed if we think about something else than our differences. This notion is in line with Liff and Wajcman (1996), according to which we have to deal with difference in different ways and move from “difference from” to “difference within".
In order to achieve solidarity, mutual understanding, and respect towards difference and diversity, NGOs should provide youth with common goals and objectives, but at the same time value each person and social group’s skills and contribution and provide them a wide range of activities and responsibilities to choose from, according to their interests and potential. As one of the trainers said: “Whatever young people can do, they should do!” showing the importance of encouraging each individual commit in a process of becoming more active in contemporary society.

Part of the above Training Course was a team-building activity called “The three colors”, which I also applied in the organization. I split the volunteers into three teams, each representing a different color/ culture. I gave them a description of their color/culture and asked them to practice the corresponding features and behavior, first among them and then altogether in a large group. Those features included values, beliefs, attitudes, verbal and non-verbal characteristics of communication style, norms and customs of business behavior, as well as greeting and style of addressing people. Then, I asked each team to create a draft project on intercultural learning, which would represent the features and behavior of their color/culture. Eventually, all three teams had to cooperate in order to create a common draft project, while each of them had to develop some arguments in order for the elements of their color/culture to stay in the final project.

While splitting the volunteers into groups, I made sure that some of them would have to act in a manner that was closer to their actual culture, while others would have to act in a more unusual way. All of them had the option to withdraw from the activity anytime. During the first phase of the activity, all of them enjoyed casual interaction in different ways and had the chance to see in action how several behaviors which are taken for granted in one culture are not acceptable or even problematic in another. The most evident differences among cultures were eye contact, physical distance and handshaking, gender (in)equality, power relations and (equal) contribution in decision-making, respect for religion, expression of feelings, time management and conflict resolution. During the last phase, however, all volunteers found it difficult to cooperate and work on a common goal while keeping the elements of their color/culture. Despite the fact that in real life they had been working effectively as a team for months, in this activity they very soon became a mass, acting rudely, yelling at each other and pushing each other away. Despite my
constant warnings that the time would soon be up, they didn’t manage to reach their
goal and create a common draft intercultural project.

The above activity is an excellent example of addressing stereotypes and
stressing the importance of equal participation in the achievement of common goals.
Through a realistic and instructive way, it made the volunteers realize the value of
interactional justice in everyday relations, in terms of treating difference with dignity,
respect and honesty (Jost & Kay, 2010). In the discussion that followed and the
written feedback I received, it was evident that all volunteers eventually felt
uncomfortable, even the ones that had to act more like their actual culture; to use one
of the volunteers’ words, “I realized how puzzling it was for us to work in a
multicultural environment through acting as cultural stereotypes.”. They explained
that there was a big difference between communicating and cooperating with people
from other cultures (“...we were focusing much more on disagreeing on basis of those
cultural traits than on finding a solution despite them...”) and realized the importance
of “...taking a step back...”, “...not overdoing our cultural difference...”, “...giving
up a part of ourselves...” and “...sacrificing our privileges...” in order to achieve
equal participation and “...come to an agreement with other cultures...” (“If we focus
only on what is correct for us, we will not be able to work as a team. The best way to
work together is to listen and be respectful. There is always a solution.”).

**Concluding points**

The organization facilitates activities which set a great example of diversity and
equality, reflecting its democratic philosophy and way of functioning. In some cases,
activities carried out in the frame of the organization represent and reproduce power
relations and inequalities in order to help participants address and overcome them.
Through active participation, volunteers realize the value of intercultural
communication, respect towards different features and behaviors, diversity and
mutual understanding in a practical yet educational way. Through non-formal
methods, members of the organization learn and let others learn the importance of
treating difference with respect and learn how to create opportunities for equal
participation, justice and inclusion.
8.3.2. Everyday life in the organization

When it comes to equality and organizational justice in the everyday life in the organization in general, I would say that heterogeneity and diversity are perceived as positive elements rather than obstacles to harmonic co-existing and cooperation. Interviewing the trainers about interpersonal relations in the organization, they characterized the relations among them as “...karmic...”, “…excellent...” and “...creative and instructive...”, and the relations between them and the volunteers as “…exceptional…”, “…productive…” and “…fruitful…”, which allows me to say that the experience of cooperating with different people, socializing, making friends, working on common projects and gaining new experiences is common for all the trainers I had the chance to meet and work with.

To mention some of the trainers’ comments regarding incidents of inappropriate behavior within the organization, they stated that:

“System and G has been the only environment in which I have never ever heard a single racist/ homophobic/ sexist/ Islamophobic comment. I have been involved for six years now and I am proud to be a member of this big family!”

“I sincerely can say I have never [experienced/ witnessed any gender/ ethnicity/ sexual orientation/ age bias, any racist/ homophobic/ ethnocentric behavior]. I consider any conflicts etc. have had nothing to do with anyone’s “genre” rather than some different views and perspectives.”

Such comments show that the trainers support, promote and do everything to ensure and secure diversity, equality, solidarity and justice in the organization, while occasional disagreement and conflict is not attributed to the members’ gender, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, cultural background etc., but to their personality traits and character. In particular, some trainers may not work as fast as others, may not be as good public speakers as others, or may prefer certain methods and tools of non-formal education over others. For this reason, some tension and some minor conflicts may occur occasionally, which are usually resolved through dialogue and democratic decision-making, promoting in this was the feeling of interactional justice (Bies, 2015) among members, which is crucial for the organization’s peaceful and successful function.
Nevertheless, during the nine months of my involvement, I occasionally witnessed some tension among the trainers, especially before important deadlines. This finding is in line with some comments made by two trainers during our interview. More specifically, both of them value difference in terms of mentality, culture and personal characteristics and they are both aware of the fact that each person works in their own pace ("We all have our way of working with deadlines."). However, NGO’s always have to work with deadlines when applying for a project and one person’s delay affects everyone else ("...we must bridge the gap between 'last minute' work and 'done before deadline' work..."), as well as the project’s progress. The way they put it, "We often have to find a common ground to work on.", showing the importance of mutual understanding and commitment to the causes of the organization and reflecting a key aspect of procedural justice (Bies, 1993), which is valuing similarities instead of differences during important procedures and decision-making.

About in the middle of my internship, one of the trainers asked for my help in order to manage his anxiety and constant stress, which affected both his decision-making abilities and his relations with the other trainers. More specifically, he knew that he was more productive when he had to work under pressure and he always managed to make it to the deadlines, even if he had to work until the very last minute. My intervention aimed at making him understand the impact of such an attitude and behavior on his colleagues, as well as on the image of the organization. More specifically, I used recent examples of project proposals or project reports which he had submitted on the Erasmus+ webpage just a few minutes before the deadline, making the rest of the trainers anxious and nervous. My aim was to show that, despite the fact that he eventually made it to the deadline, he had already caused negative feelings to his colleagues, who in turn were pushing him to work harder, which in turn made him more anxious. Apart from that, I reminded him of the fact that every project he works on is constantly evaluated by the rest of the trainers and the participants. Therefore, if he constantly receives negative evaluation because of his delay in submitting the necessary documents in time, it is very possible that he will not be chosen by other trainers as a partner in future projects, while the members of the Greek National Agency for the Erasmus+ program will be reluctant to approve the
funding of future projects to be carried out by the organization, affecting the organization’s credibility and reputation among youth NGOs and trainers.

At the beginning, he showed some resistance, due to his high self-esteem and faith in his abilities. He attributed his optimism to the fact that, as a person with special needs, he had learned to struggle in his life, work hard, but at the same time keep his character unchangeable and defend his uniqueness. It is obvious, therefore, that, despite my skills as a psychologist, it is not always easy to help other people change their point of view, attitude and behavior, and it is very possible that I experience resistance in my effort to do so. However, utilizing the knowledge I had acquired from my involvement in the organization, especially regarding teamwork, mutual trust and understanding and commitment to the organization’s principles, I made the trainer realize that part of his character was also the respect to other people’s feelings and limits and his excellent “team player” skills, which were valued by his colleagues. Soon enough he understood that he should reset his priorities and make a schedule that fits not only his pace and mentality but also the others’. Unfortunately, I cannot give more details about what exactly I did and said and which techniques I used to achieve my goals, because the content of my sessions with the trainer is confidential. Apart from that, my aim here is to show that every problem in the everyday function of an organization should be addressed by the right people. In this case, that person happened to be me. Thus, it is very crucial that an organization’s members are able to find the source of conflicts and ask from the suitable people to intervene in order to resolve them.

It took a few weeks for this plan to work, as it demanded quite some effort for personal change. Nonetheless, the main goal was to promote the common good in the organization, so soon enough the results of the intervention were obvious. In particular, the trainer agreed to keep working late at nights, during the hours that he felt more productive, but starting in time, and not just a few days before the deadline. After a while it was evident that the team worked better and more efficiently, which made both the trainers and the volunteers satisfied (“It is much better to work with less pressure and less anxiety before deadlines, which makes us happy.”) There were still some conflicts, of course, but all individuals were eager to discuss and find a solution as a team, which in turn led to the approval – and funding – of more projects (“Effective communication and discussion is the best starting point for a successful
project.”), as well as more positive feedback from the volunteers and the partner organizations. This finding shows how my intervention contributed to the achievement of interactional justice among trainers, which according to Axelrod (1984) is characterized by an organization’s members’ ability to turn differences and disagreements to productivity and change, rather than perceiving them as a threat to the group’s effectiveness and well-being.

Apart from trainers, during the interviews, I asked the volunteers whether they had experienced/witnessed any gender/ethnicity/sexual orientation/age bias, any racist/homophobic/ethnocentric behavior. All of them responded negatively and stated that “...despite the fact that we [the volunteers] were all coming from different countries, backgrounds and religions, everyday cooperation was perfect...”. This finding is very important because it confirms the founders’ philosophy, according to which differences between individuals should be utilized for the achievement of common goals. Apart from the environment of the organization (office and outdoor activities), the volunteers shared the same apartment, and most of them stated that they liked the fact that they had the opportunity “...to get to know each other better...”, “...to be as open and sincere as possible...”, “...to be more organized and to hear and try to solve problems among all...”. Such comments show that the volunteers co-exist harmonically and work as a well-bonded team (“Each one of us understands how everyone feels and that makes it easier to work together as a team.”). Heterogeneity has never been a problem mutual respect and understanding was taken for granted, as it happens in organizations where interpersonal justice (Bies, 2015) is achieved.

In most of the volunteers’ opinion, living together is a very “...beneficial...” and “...enriching...” experience, which “...offers opportunities to make friends...”, revealing that spending time with them outside the working hours is a successful outcome of creating a safe working space, where good interpersonal relations thrive. There were of course one or two volunteers who admitted that occasionally they needed to spend more time alone (“...just because we [the volunteers] live, work together with the same people...”) and that they were not equally bonded with all of their roommates (“Of course there are volunteers with whom I identify more and who I am closer but when one of us has an activity most try to support and help.”), but such facts can be attributed to each individual’s personal needs and character, rather
than the sharing of the same space itself. This finding reflects Axelrod’s (1984) description of collectivistic organizational cultures, where internal disagreements are perceived as an outcome of different personalities, rather than competitive contexts. As one volunteer explained:

“It was generally good but challenging in some cases. The lack of motivation of some volunteers affected the whole dynamic in occasions. However, it was good saving those cases.”

The above comment shows that everyday interaction and cooperation forms a good basis for problem resolution, which according to Jost and Kay (2010) can promote interactional justice, equal participation and balanced power relations in an organization; to use one of the trainers’ words, “We all blow in to the same coal and help each other out.”. Both trainers and volunteers perceive the organization as “...a big family...” and all trainers consider volunteers as peers and their work as equal cooperation (“I am thankful for every volunteer I had the chance to work with.”).

An issue related to gender equality and combating discrimination that was addressed during my involvement in the organization was the fact that one of the volunteers whom I met in the first few months of his voluntary work admitted that when he first came he had some strong homophobic elements, on which he had to work during his stay. In one of our mentor talks, he put it this way:

“I come from a very small country, and an even smaller town, where everyone knows everyone. We are a very young nation, with less than thirty years of history. Homosexuality and bisexuality are still much of taboos, and nobody discusses them openly. I am pretty sure there are homosexual and bisexual people in my country, I just simply haven’t met any, or even if I have, I cannot tell whether they are homosexual/bisexual or not.”

It should be taken into consideration that before starting his EVS this person had never been outside his country or met people from different backgrounds. For this reason, his volunteering experience, along with the fact that he had a homosexual roommate, made him get acquainted with homosexuality and get used to the concept of “difference”. This finding is in line with Van der Tuin (2009), according to which a person should be aware not only of what they identify with but also of what they identify against.
As the volunteer explained to me, he had to understand his roommate’s perception of himself, of the rest of the people and of the world, a process that made him realize that they had many common elements and more similarities than differences. Luckily, his roommate was a very open-minded person, eager to share his experience, views and beliefs. Soon enough, the volunteer realized that being homosexual is not just about having a different sexual orientation; instead, it is about having a different way of thinking, perceiving relations among people and seeing the world. Discovering this alternative way of thinking and behaving made him feel more comfortable sharing a room and having long, interesting conversations with the other volunteer. At some point he stated that he felt “less threatened” by his roommate, confirming the words of Halberstam (2005), according to whom homosexuality threatens people as a way of life, rather than a way of having sex.

During a mentor talk, the former homophobic volunteer admitted that his ignorance of homosexuality came from his implicit image of fixed “categories” of people, which his family and socio-cultural context had passed on to him. Thus, one of the first team-building activities I designed for the volunteers aimed at breaking fixed categories and valuing difference instead of targeting it.

The activity was based on a video called “All that we share” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8tjhVO1Tc [Accessed 15 April 2018]), which was produced in Denmark and showed different people in different “boxes”. Following the video’s mode, I was announcing a certain category and asking the volunteers to take a step forward and enter a box I had drawn on the ground if they thought they belonged to this particular category. The categories varied from simple characteristics like “Those of us who wear glasses” or “Those of us who do not eat meat” to more privat ones – yet very carefully formulated – like “Those of us who cannot legally marry their partner in their country” or “Those of us who have bullied people at school” and finally included some even more personal experiences like “Those of us who have been close to death”. I also made clear that the volunteers had the choice to pass or withdraw from the whole activity anytime.

The team-building activity gave all volunteers the chance to discuss their opinions and exchange questions and explanations in order to address labels and stereotypes and come closer to each other. The structure of the questions and the
vocabulary I used made language a powerful discursive resource in my hands and allowed a more intersectional type of “self” to be revealed and expressed by the volunteers. In particular, the volunteers were surprised both by other people’s answers and by the fact that they found themselves sharing a certain category with people they didn’t expect to. They realized that they belong to more categories than they imagined, which helped them adopt a broader, more intersectional image about their “self” and their “identity”, seeing in practice one of Puar’s (2012) main points, that “all subjects are intersectional whether or not they recognize themselves as such” (p.52).

The overall objective of the activity was to show that it is very easy to put people in “boxes”, but it is also very pleasant and rewarding to feel that we share our “box” with others. Apart from that, the former homophobic volunteer wrote to me about how interesting he found the fact that the same person can belong to many different “boxes”, to many different categories which intersect with each other and form this person’s special identity and uniqueness. By shifting boxes, the volunteers understood how important it is to change our point of view or, to put it in hooks’ words (1997), to shift our location, to question our position, in order to see the world differently and understand how behaviors such as racism, sexism and homophobia work. I explained to them that the next step is to deconstruct such behaviors and make this place a more humanistic place.

This finding confirmed the work of Puar (2012), according to which when we reject or exclude people from a certain category, we use specific terms to express “difference”. However, each term is depended on the term that it is trying to exclude, actually making the “excluded” necessary. Therefore, “categories” are never separate, but crossed-over. “Difference” actually means “accomplish”, and within each category there is a trace of another. The above activity made the volunteers realize that it is not the differences that separate us, but our refusal to recognize them; their ignoring and misnaming affect our behavior and expectations (Lorde, 1984). They also had the opportunity to see in practice that it is possible to be “Different but the same” (Mick-Meyer, 2016), indicating that the “small stories” that the volunteers shared form a “bigger story” of common characteristics and experiences and of life itself.
Another example from the everyday life of the organization is a team-building activity that I organized in order to address possible gender stereotypes, religious-related prejudice and corresponding behaviors among the volunteers of the organization, called the Forum Theatre. Inspired by one of the face-to-face weeks I spent in Linköping for my Master, I split the volunteers into two groups, each of which had to prepare a short play that would reproduce some stereotypical behavior. Each play would be performed twice and, during the second time, the people not participating in it would have the chance to stand up and kindly take the place of any of the actors, in order to improvise and change the flow of the story.

The first group had to design a job interview between a committee of male, successful, middle-aged businessmen and a female, inexperienced yet ambitious young university graduate. When they performed in front of the other volunteers, the male volunteers acted in a rude and offensive way to the female volunteer, by not listening to her, interrupting her, commenting on her external appearance, asking her about her skills in making coffee and preparing snacks, while ignoring her studies and aspirations. During the second time, both male and female volunteers took her place and tried to act in a more powerful way, while a couple of male volunteers took the interviewers’ place and acted in a less stereotypical and more democratic way.

The second group had to prepare a debate on a TV show between a left-wing and a far-right wing politician about an imaginary event of a black Muslim massacring random people in a white, Western, Christian community. The left wing politician and the host acted in a very peaceful and democratic way, while the far-right wing politician acted in an aggressive and intimidating manner, by insulting the others, using unacceptable language and shouting. During the second time the play was on, all volunteers tried to replace him and act in a more compromising way, while some volunteers took the place of the host, in order to prevent tension and conflict.

In the discussion and written feedback that followed, all volunteers admitted that they experience or witness such behaviors in their everyday life (“The activity helped us think deeply imagining ourselves being on one of the sides.”) and they do not always have the power to intervene (“It is obvious that sometimes we do not know what to do, how to act.”). They all understood the meaning of preventing such incidents of inequality and injustice, not only by adopting a democratic and
unprejudiced attitude and behavior ("...training our ability to empathy...") but also by helping other people follow their example ("It is very important to learn how to deal and help others deal with current issues like gender violence in a non-formal but inspirational way."). Apart from the above, the successful implementation of the activity showed how the same methods can be used both in the frame of formal and in the frame of informal and non-formal education and have equally important outcomes.

**Concluding points**

Regarding organizational justice in the organization’s everyday life, I would support that gender equality, inter-religious dialogue and combating discrimination are key aspects of the organization’s cause and function and all members contribute equally to serve those purposes and spread their knowledge, experience and abilities. One of the organization’s main aims is to share the resources provided by the European Union and the Erasmus+ project in order to help its members as well as the general public to benefit from the activities of non-formal education, combating any kind of gender inequality and any kind of discrimination. Apart from that, the knowledge acquired from youth exchanges, voluntary work and training courses is disseminated to the members of as many organizations as possible, growing a strong and solid network of learners.

**8.3.3. Constant evaluation and improvement**

In my attempt to provide a detailed critical analysis of the organization’s main principles, I couldn’t but include the organization’s principle number 8, **Contribution to the constant improvement of the quality of support systems for youth activities and the organization’s capacities in the field of youth** (System and G Statute, 2017, p.6):

> "The organization’s main policy to achieve constant improvement and expansion to other cities and countries is oral and written feedback and evaluation by all of its members on a systematic basis. More specifically, the organization’s founders,"
trainers, mentors and project coordinators are obliged to provide monthly written reports (including photos and videos) to the Greek National Agency of Erasmus+ for each and every short-term or long-term activity they organize or facilitate. The volunteers hosted in the organization are obliged to provide monthly written reports to their sending organization and their home country’s National Agency of Erasmus+ for every activity they participate in. The individuals from the broader public that participate in the organization’s activities (workshops, seminars, events etc.) are kindly asked to provide oral or written evaluation to the organization’s trainers.”

The above principle reveals the organization’s effort for continuous improvement. The constant evaluation both “from the inside”, i.e. trainers and volunteers, and “from the outside”, i.e. broader public, brings to light issues of everyday life in the organization, incidents of injustice or inequality, unacceptable behavior or failure of activity, aiming at transforming the existing policies and adopting new ones.

As for the current policy analysis who led to the present Master Thesis, I should say that it was part of my internship in the first place, and thus it was supported by the organization’s founders in terms of access to official documents, permission to interview trainers and volunteers, as well as funding for the publication of the Thesis, which will form the basis for the organization’s new Guide for tools related to youth work (including team-building activities, mentorship tips and outcomes of Structured Dialogue workshops). Therefore, I would say that both the constant policy analysis carried out in the frame of the organization and the current Critical Policy Analysis carried out by me do not reproduce the relations between inequality and privilege in the organization, but on the contrary aim at improving them and addressing injustice and inequalities. Regarding my effort, my biggest contribution was the design and implementation of team-building activities, which involved all members of the organization and the broader public.

As mentioned before, I organized team-building activities on a weekly basis, in which I asked all the volunteers and the trainer/project coordinator to participate. I thought it would be of vital importance to include the latter, in order to promote bonding not only among the volunteers but also between the volunteers and the trainer/project coordinator. Apart from that, the team-building activities helped me bond with the volunteers and gave me a better understanding of each person’s
intersectional character, personality, attitudes, beliefs, life experiences, capacities, skills and talents, achieving interactional justice and equality. The weekly feedback I received both from them and from the coordinator was almost always positive and after a while they felt comfortable sharing even personal experiences, thoughts and concerns with me. What is more, apart from organizing and implementing the activities, I acted as a participant in several of them, revealing some of my personal experiences. In this way, I bonded with the volunteers and the trainer and built a strong friendship with most of them. I still keep in touch with the volunteers who have finished their work and returned to their homes and I believe that making good friends from other countries was one of the most interesting parts of my internship.

According to the trainers, the reason for the absence of organized team-building activities was the lack of a suitable person, an expert, who would have the appropriate background and be full of innovative ideas to promote bonding among the members and bring change to the organization. This is why they consider the intervention valuable for the improvement of the organization and its members. However, I wouldn’t say that my background in psychology and gender studies worked as a privilege in the frame of the organization. On the contrary, the whole experience was a process of constant mutual learning, out of which I gained valuable knowledge and developed various skills, while contributing to the continuous analysis and improvement of the organization’s current policies.

During the interviews, the comments I received about the team-building activities were almost exclusively positive, both by the volunteers who had participated in a lot of them and by the newcomers who had only participated in two or three of them. In particular, the activities were characterized as “...successful...”, “...awesome...”, “...favorite time of the day...”, revealing the volunteers’ satisfaction and joy. To quote just a few:

“The team-building activities have allowed us to learn about each other and understand each other, without creating much drama or putting us in uncomfortable positions.”

“I think we broke stereotypes and prejudices, definitely not reproduced them.”
The above comments show the importance of the team-building activities in forming the basis for good and functional interpersonal relations in the organization, promoting teamwork and addressing stereotypes. Two volunteers mentioned an additional reason why the team-building activities were valuable for the bonding of the group:

"I think the team-building goal was achieved. It was interesting every time and we found new things about ourselves every single time, as well as about the new volunteers we were about to work with."

"I think it is really important to do these kinds of activities at the arrival of new volunteers; impact is bigger and it for sure speeds up the adaptation for newcomers."

The above shows that the activities helped new volunteers feel comfortable upon their arrival and adapt to the organization’s environment, philosophy and overall function. This finding shows the achievement of interactional organizational justice, in terms of equal treatment, respect for difference, networking opportunities, close and effective relations and solidarity within an organization (Bies, 2015).

Some of the volunteers admitted that at first it was not so easy for them to open up to people they did not know well, but all of them attributed their difficulty to their individual traits and personalities, rather than the content of the activities. As two volunteer put it:

"The team-building activities help us to get to know each other better. For me, it is difficult to share in a group of people that I do not know, but I hope with time it will become easier."

"As a matter of fact, I found myself sharing some things that I usually don’t tell even to my friends."

"I think that some questions and comments might have been a little bit rush so it might have led to some uncomfortable feelings, but I think that wasn’t a matter of the activities, as much as it was up to the person and how careful he or she is with his or her comments. That is something we are all learning here of how to address some comments without being offensive to other countries or cultures."
The importance of such comments lies in the fact that the team-building activities allow participants to express their opinions, beliefs, attitudes and behavior in a safe, non-judgmental environment and aim at revealing common features among them, rather than letting differences become obstacles to the achievement of the organization’s goals and purposes. This is essential for the achievement of interpersonal justice, which, according to Jost and Kay (2010), encompasses honesty, respect, equal treatment and dignity. Apart from that, according to Axelrod (1984), utilizing interpersonal differences as motives for creation, progress and organizational change is an indication of success in collectivistic types of organizational culture.

The above comments show how constant feedback helped me tailor the activities to the volunteers’ needs, and of course they always had the option to quit part of the activities or do not participate at all. Reflecting upon this aspect of team-building, I would say that despite the fact that all activities were designed based on my academic knowledge and the available Erasmus+ toolbox provided to me by the organization, it was always important to have in mind that some activities might have a stronger impact on some participants or receive stronger resistance. For this reason, I did my best to take into consideration and value diversity and heterogeneity among volunteers and utilize each person’s singularity for the benefit of the whole group.

Asking for feedback from the trainers, I received very positive comments regarding the activities, which motivated me to become better and better. One of them said characteristically:

“I find the team-building activities great and educational. And you can see lots of things coming out of the participants; lots of things that make me understand these persons much more, which I actually enjoy.”

I would also agree with them that team-building activities also reveal elements of the personality and character of the person who designs and/or facilitates them, which makes them a process of self-reflection and a means of self-evaluation:

“Hidden feelings, opinions, emotional condition, ups and downs of living in another country sooner or later pump out through participation in such activities. Here is the crucial point, to know how to be a coordinator, mentor, supporter, advisor.”
“By watching and participating in the team-building activities I always learn something about myself, which I wasn't aware of before.”

Concluding points

Regarding constant evaluation and improvement of the organization’s policies, I would say that in the frame of non-formal education it is not only appropriate but also beneficial, to adopt the role of a mutual learner, instead of an expert, and analyze the organization’s existing policies from a critical point of view in order to enhance them. Combining my formal education and my social skills I managed to improve the bonding of the organization’s members and develop their work as a team, as well as their commitment to equal treatment and mutual respect. The feedback I received shows how important the sharing of experiences was for the promotion of interactional justice, based on equal participation and involvement, as well as organizational change and progress “from the inside”.

8.4. Achievement of organizational and social change

To respond to the fourth Research Question, “How is organizational and social change achieved through the activity of the organization?”, I should first remind the reader of the conclusions of the previous chapters, according to which trainers and volunteers are equally participating in important decision-making processes regarding the organization’s policies, activities, goals and aspirations, while everyday cooperation between trainers and volunteers is very effective and pleasant for both sides.

I think it would be more useful to start with an example of decision-making in which I was personally involved, and therefore I can give a detailed image of change inside the organization.

I reminding the readers that System and G is a non-profit NGO, which is funded by the European Union in the frame of the program Erasmus+ and therefore the distribution of financial resources is based on the requirements of each project carried out by the organization. Luckily, the building which hosts the organization is
an offer by the Prefecture of Macedonia Eastern and Thrace, which also covers all its costs. During my internship, however, I realized that the fact that the organization has no capital or income of its own occasionally causes problems to the distribution of financial resources, which need to be resolved. At some point, I faced such a problem of distribution of funds, which was also related to the founders’ honesty and credibility during the process of partnership-building. Soon after my arrival, I detected a key element missing from the information pack that coming volunteers’ were receiving before their arrival to Komotini. As it happens with Greece at large, Komotini is a town which has been hit by the financial crisis, a fact that has a direct and severe impact on people’s basic rights and needs, with one of the most prominent being heat and electricity. More specifically, Komotini’s heating system is petrol, while in the past two or three years many people have decided to use air conditioning instead. However, the very high taxes which have been applied both to petrol and to electricity are making heat less and less affordable, which means that local people use it for one or maximum two hours per day. The volunteers could be no exception, as the organization is non-profit and the budget from Erasmus+ for heat and electricity bills is specific and cannot be exceeded.

That was something that the coming volunteers were not aware of, so one of my suggestions to be included in the information pack was a warning to future volunteers about the heavy winter in Komotini and some advice to use the heating system wisely and get used to the idea of wearing many layers of clothes and two pairs of socks to stay warm at home. According to Ely and Meyerson (2000), the first step of organizational change “from the inside” is the critique of privileged positions and power relations in the organization. Using this as a starting point, I talked to the founders, trying to make them understand that the fact that they are aware of the heating problem in Komotini and yet deny to inform the volunteers about it is unfair and jeopardizes the organization’s credibility, while it is controversial with their general effort to be seen as equals with the volunteers, and not as superiors. Unfortunately, there was a lot of resistance from the founders, due to the fact that such a warning would stop prospective volunteers from coming to Komotini, which in turn would mean a budget cut and have a negative influence on the organization’s reputation. Therefore, my suggestion was rejected.
As a result, many of the volunteers experienced discomfort during their stay in the apartment that the organization rents for them and they kept complaining that they were cold and getting sick often because of the lack of heat. This was when I decided to try the second step of Ely and Meyerson’s (2000) model of organizational change, which is bringing to light every member’s narratives. To be more specific, I shared with the founders everything that the volunteers said to me during the interviews, like “You should inform people from other countries to bring warmer clothes.”, stressing the importance of providing important details and information to the volunteers before their arrival. Another volunteer characteristically said:

“Well, in the organization’s call it should be mentioned: ‘Greece is a poor country which cannot afford heat. Would you like to come here and spend ten months in the cold?’ But, of course, I understand that such a call would mean zero participants.”

This comment made me feel very uncomfortable and sad, especially after I realized that I was not able to help. It also revealed serious restrictions in the distribution of financial resources in the organization, as well as resistance from its founders to the idea of transforming the existing information pack, which is a document of great importance in building partnerships with volunteers. Unfortunately, instead of my suggestion for a written warning to the prospective volunteers, the founders suggested that I would inform volunteers about the weather conditions and heating restrictions after their arrival, in the form of friendly advice. At the time, my activity and power in the organization were limited so, unfortunately, I had no choice but to comply with the rules. At that point, my response to Diem et al.’s (2014) question “Who is not sitting around the decision-making table in the organization?” would definitely be “Me”.

However, the fact that the coming volunteers would experience such a disappointment upon arrival kept bothering me. I was trying to think of a possible solution which would show the volunteers that their needs are respected, and I came up with the idea of putting the third step of Ely and Meyerson’s (2000) model in action: experiment on new practices. To be more specific, part of the volunteer’s information pack was the fact that Greece is going through financial crisis and therefore the volunteer’s social offer is valuable. Thus, I thought that it would be better if we made clear to the volunteers that the organization will offer them the best
possible accommodation and living conditions, but taking into consideration the country’s restricted resources and the need to use them wisely. My suggestion was accepted and the initial information pack changed, so that prospective volunteers could have a clearer image of what they would face. Fortunately, this change had no negative impact on the number of the applications of potential volunteers. Two or three candidates asked for more specific information regarding the available resources but didn’t express any further worries after they found out the actual financial situation of the country. On the contrary, they said that they appreciated the founders’ honesty and one of them said that this finding made her more eager to offer voluntary service in this specific country (Greece).

This incident reveals the need for compromise in order for the organization to function effectively. It shows how non-profit organizations rely on funding from the European Union to operate, which sometimes does not take into consideration the actual financial condition of each country. So far I didn’t have the chance to make an actual change in this, but through my participation in the National Working Group for Structured Dialogue on Youth I will for sure be given the opportunity to add this aspect to the Position Paper that my group and I will submit to the upcoming European Union Youth Conference in Vienna this Autumn. To be more specific, me and my fellow members of the National Working Group will meet before the Youth Conference and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the organizations we are involved in. We will create a Position Paper with suggestions for enhancing youth work in our organizations and in general, which will include the need for additional funds from the European Union in order to cover the costs that youth organizations in Greece pay for heat, electricity and other relevant facilities. This Position Paper will be presented and discussed with the rest of the representatives of European youth organizations during the Youth Conference, with the aim of finding realistic and achievable solutions.

Thus, regarding the process of decision-making and bringing organizational change inside the organization, I would say that it requires the contribution of all people involved in an organization, according to each individual’s position and abilities.
However, when it comes to System and G, decision-making is not limited to everyday issues within the organization. Part of its founders’ aspiration is to encourage its members to participate in important decisions regarding social issues which concern the local community, as well as the contemporary society at large. My main focus is the organization’s principle number 1, Promotion of youth active citizenship (System and G Statute, 2017, p.2):

“The organization’s main policy to promote youth active citizenship is to encourage young European citizens, especially those with fewer opportunities, to organize and express their views together in order to actively participate in the making of crucial decisions regarding education, economy, civil justice, sustainable development, environmental protection and healthy lifestyle. In particular, active citizenship is defined by the European Economic and Social Committee (2012: 4) as “the glue that keeps society together” and translates as a continuous dialogue between civil society and decision-makers. To achieve this goal, all members of System and G are encouraged to participate in the activities of Structured Dialogue on Youth, such as workshops at a local and regional level, as well as seminars and conferences at a national and international level.”

Interviewing the organization’s trainers, I asked them how the concept of “active citizenship” translates to them, both at an organizational and at a personal level. According to them, to be an active European citizen means “…to demonstrate virtues such as democracy, social justice, empathy and respect for difference…”, which shows the importance of solidarity and mutual respect and support among people, as well as “…self-esteem, self-confidence and self-effectiveness…”, which shows that European citizens should be characterized by a strong personality and character in order to achieve personal and collective goals. To quote two other trainers:

“To be a contemporary active European citizen is a never-ending process of learning in an interactive, experiential and exciting, non-formal way.”

“For me, to be an active citizen means to make good use of my studies and background in my everyday life, to keep learning and to become a better person.”

Those comments are in line with the organization’s aims of adult life-long learning outside the official educational system and defend the organization’s name,
‘System and Generation’, meaning that it has the ambition of creating a new system of learning for the new generation of European citizens. In order to achieve the goals of non-formal education and take part in crucial decisions at a local, national and international level, the organization encourages its members, especially the volunteers, to organize and participate in the monthly activities of Structured Dialogue. Unfortunately, I cannot describe the exact function and outcomes of Structured Dialogue workshops before my internship in the organization, so I present an example of my own experience, through my participation in the National Working Group for Structured Dialogue.

More specifically, after I received positive and encouraging feedback from the volunteers for the first month of my intervention, my supervisor and founder of the organization registered me as a candidate for the National Working Group for Structured Dialogue on Youth for 2017-2018. Right after I got accepted into the National Working Group, I applied for a prolongation of my internship until June 2018. One month later, I represented System and G in the Annual National Meeting of Youth-related Organizations, during which I contributed to the setting of the goals of youth work in Greece – and by extension in Europe – for 2018, which focus on gender mainstreaming equal opportunities, justice for citizens, as well as cultural heritage and general wellbeing. My experience sets a good example of organizational and social change at many levels, which are defined by Jacobs et al. (2013) as micro, meso and macro levels.

To start with how organizational and social change is achieved at a micro-level, which includes the psychological aspects and consequences of change at a personal level, I would say that in November I felt honored to participate in a Structured Dialogue workshop which brought together students between 15-18 years old, university students, youth workers and young employees with local decision-makers and entrepreneurs in order to set and develop “Strategies and Actions for the Empowerment of the Youth in the period from 2017 to 2027”. In my ‘round table’ we created a plan called “Justice for growth”, which aims at decent and sustainable working conditions for young European citizens. The main objectives are the protection of the citizens’ rights, as well as their equal treatment, participation and opportunities, regardless of their origin, religion, physical and/ or mental abilities, gender and sexual orientation.
During this phase, I had the opportunity not only to express my personal experience and thoughts but also to get acquainted with other people’s opinions and needs, which helped me contribute to the formation of suggestions to make our town a better place and bring social change at what Jacobs et al. (2013) call a meso-level, which in this case translates as my town, Komotini, where the activity of System and G is valuable and outstanding.

The next step was to present our group’s suggestions and carry out an open discussion with the rest of the working groups, which led to the creation of a common position paper to be discussed in the Greek Parliament and in turn in the upcoming European Union Youth Conference in Bulgaria. Apart from the objectives of my working group, the rest of the position paper’s targets are the reinforcement of youth participation in Europe’s democratic life, the promotion of youth independence and the support in the youth’s transition to adulthood, the enhancement of education at all levels and the confrontation of stereotypes and prejudice in an effort to reduce any kind of inequalities. The overall aim of the position paper is to contribute to a general effort “to make Europe a friendly and open to the youth society; a better place to work and live in” (European Commission 2017). This experience is a good example of organizational and social change at a macro-level, which according to Jacobs et al. (2013) includes the impact of change on the broader social context, political system and actors around the organization. Thus, I can say that my internship in the organization made me feel like a very important person, capable of contributing to social change in my town, country and European society.

**Concluding points**

Regarding my fourth Research Question, “How is organizational and social change achieved through the activity of the organization?”, I would respond that through decision-making on contemporary social issues, the organization offers its members great opportunities for “active citizenship” as a way of making themselves visible in a European society, of participating in meaningful activities and being an agent of change at a regional, local, national and international level. In order to become such an agent, members of the organization learn to promote change not at an individual level, but at a collective one, and this makes the organization effective and successful.
8.5. Future of the organization and personal involvement

So far I have described the inception for the creation of the NGO System and G, its main principles and corresponding official policies, as well as its everyday life and function. I think it would be of great importance to expand on how my experience in the organization has changed me and its members and how it has contributed to our plans for the future. I start by sharing the volunteers’ overall experience from their involvement in the organization, which is in line with my own experience. The overall experience of the volunteers, trainers and me has many dimensions, with the most prominent being socialization, personal development, future plans and suggestions for the future of the organization.

Starting with a general finding, all volunteers whom I had the chance to work with expressed positive feelings regarding their experience, making statements like “...my experience exceeded my expectations...” and “...my personal project was really successful...”. To be more specific, the volunteer’s personal projects reflected their own personal needs and motives (e.g. “I always knew that I wanted to work with people who really need it...”) and gave them the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge and experiences (“Because of the work with the refugees I saw the good and the bad parts about those jobs but luckily there were more good than bad things.”). Furthermore, many volunteers stated that their voluntary work provided them with the motive to be further involved in education, either in formal ways (“Before I came to Greece I was a little bit tired of school but now in the end I realize how important this is and I really want to finish my studies and maybe even start another bachelor.”) or in alternative, non-formal and informal ways:

“Well, due to this EVS experience I decided to quit my studies in forestry and study international communication instead. Despite my parents’ negative reaction, I believe that this is not what I want to be doing for the next three or four years, so I found a new career path and I intend to follow it. I have already started the procedure of founding my own NGO back home and so far I have received positive feedback and support. For sure System and G played a key role in this decision. My experience taught me not only what to do but also what not to do in an organization, so I think that is a starting point for my future plans.”
"It’s, at the very least, safe to say it did make me realize there were some other professional opportunities I could look for, thanks to what I have had the chance to do for my personal project. I still do not have very precise plans, but I feel much more confident than 6 months ago, which means a lot to me.”

The above comments show that an important outcome of the volunteers’ experience in the organization was the fact that it contributed to their future plans and helped them take into consideration new career paths.

Another important finding was that the volunteers commented positively on their interaction with the local people and the Greek mentality and culture, which had a good effect on their socialization and work; to put it in one of the volunteers’ words, “The locals where very open and helpful against us and I’m thankful for that because it made it easier to make friends.”. Other volunteers, however, stated that there are many differences between their culture and the Greek culture (“…unorganized, people were late, nothing was clear, misunderstandings…”), which, up to a point, was perceived as a negative aspect of their voluntary work:

“Our supervisor kept saying ‘No plan is the best plan’. Well, it sounded good at first, but after a while it totally lost its meaning, as we needed someone to guide us to choose activities or organize our own.”

Such comments made obvious that the organization’s philosophy to let participants follow their own path and in their own pace and leave their personal mark to the history of the organization was not equally appreciated by all former volunteers. Despite the fact that the volunteers’ liberty to design their own activities and organize them their way was in general characterized as a positive thing by the majority of the volunteers, it was perceived by some of them as lack of organizing and guidance, and the trainers’ skills were doubted. Therefore, the need to bridge the gap between the trainers’ idea of expanding the volunteers’ potential and the volunteers’ need for counseling and role models was evident.

For this reason, the fact that I am a psychologist was appreciated by the founders of the organization, who asked me to provide both mentoring and psychological help to the volunteers. My role was first of all to discover each volunteer’s background, life course and experiences, interests, ambitions and motives, in order to help them choose from the existing activities and design their own
activities, tailored to the needs of the local society. Secondly, my role was to provide encouragement and support on a weekly basis and give volunteers’ constructive feedback, in order to improve their self-image, boost their self-esteem and increase their self-effectiveness.

The results of the intervention in this field are reflected in the interviews with the volunteers, during which I received positive feedback regarding my and the project coordinator’s contribution (weekly meetings, weekly mentor talks and weekly team-building activities) to the volunteer’s commitment to the organization (“Anssi [the project coordinator] and you [Glykeria] were always there for us, eager to offer help and support.”), as well as our personality and character:

“You [Anssi and Glykeria] always care about us, come to us and ask, ‘How are you? How do you feel? Is there anything you need?’ You treat us as people, not just volunteers. This is very important, especially for new volunteers and younger volunteers. For example, I am 25 years old, I do not need any special help. But there are volunteers 18 or 19 years old, who have never been abroad before, who need someone to encourage and support them.”

Comments like the above reflect the founders’ aspiration of building partnerships with people who demonstrate skills like empathy, human interest, understanding, caring and support. Such skills promote team-bonding and create a good climate in the organization, making it a pleasant place to work at. Apart from that, the volunteers who received information about the Greek mentality and culture by me before they started their voluntary work were more tolerant to some elements of the typical Greek behavior, like for example, being late. By the end of their voluntary work, the people I had worked with adopted a positive attitude towards local people and stated that they liked and appreciated them. A volunteer said to me: “I wish that in Belgium we have some more influence of the Greek way of living...”, showing how important it is to make use of one of the organization’s main principles, exchanging cultural elements and experience with other people and learning from each other’s difference.

Despite the intervention, however, the organization still gave some of the volunteers the impression that there is a lack in guidance and limited assistance in the development of personal projects. However, the weekly mentor talks with me and the
weekly meetings with the project coordinator soon gave them the motivation they
needed and, after a couple of weeks, they seemed to be enjoying themselves. During
the interviews, one of the volunteers gave a very characteristic overview of his
experience:

“System & G mainly revolves around all volunteers’ personal projects, while we do
have to do some other tasks related to System & G’s usual activities. It was disturbing
at first, because I had expected to be given specific tasks on a busier schedule.
However, once I was ready to put my project into practice, it felt much better, and my
concerns disappeared.”

Thus, this finding shows that the organization is open to a very wide range of
different people with different mentalities, attitudes, priorities and needs and therefore
the successful communication of the organization’s aims, philosophy and ways of
functioning should always be ensured.

Except for the overall experience from the organization, I asked both trainers
and volunteers about their suggestions for the future of System and G and its
expansion in other regions and countries. All trainers seemed to understand that the
organization’s main objectives, flexibility and individual initiative, should be adapted
to the volunteers’ need for guidance and feedback, in order to help the latter expand
their potential to the maximum. As Gruenfeld et al. (1996) explain, the key to
effective organizational change is the ability of the leader to set a good example for
all the members who are involved and inspire them to gradually change their beliefs,
attitude and behavior instead of indicating to them what to do. Setting a good example
for others was always one of the trainers’ main priorities, as well as assisting
volunteers in their effort to find what they were best at. As the project coordinator put
it, “The volunteers should have an easy beginning in the organization and build their
ambitions steadily with constant supervision and revision.”, which reflects one of the
organization’s main principles, to encourage personal development and growth.

Another key dimension of future planning mentioned by one of the
organization’s founders was the possibility to give potential partners some space for
self-reflection in the partnership-building process, in order to make them feel more
comfortable and communicate their personal motivation more effectively:
“It is difficult to find the right people to work with, as the main pillar of everything we do is based on voluntarism and at the same time it involves a huge self-loading and it has to become a lifestyle to work as youth worker.”

Besides the above, the trainers recognized the need for more detailed future planning, so that the organization’s activities are based on short-term as well as long-term goals and objectives (“We need to have a schedule including our aims for the whole year, not just for the next couple of months.”). As Meyerson and Scully (1995) support, instead of aiming at the elimination of all possible discriminations and inequalities at once, the leaders of an organization should aim at incremental changes, planning a short-term and a long-term agenda and following a “small wins” strategy. In this way, both trainers and volunteers will be given more time to adapt to changes, which can be either visible or invisible, and do not experience the feeling that change comes “from above”.

As for the volunteers’ main suggestions for the future of the organization and its expansion to other regions and countries, they revolved around the importance of personal projects and group activities (“Try to give the volunteers as much responsibilities as possible and encourage them to work together and to develop their talents.”), as well as teamwork (“Group activities give the feeling of being friends with everyone and makes the organization feel like home.”) and socializing (“Coming out of your comfort zone helps you learn new things and people.”). Other volunteers mentioned how beneficial the combination of local and international projects is to the success of the organization. To use one of the volunteers’ statements:

“It [the organization] must be international in its scope, and local in its daily action. We leave in an age of Globalization, but I prefer to talk about “Glocalization”. “Think global, act local.”

Perhaps the most inspiring suggestion for the creation of a new organization was the following:

“Stand out. Don’t be just another branch of the System and G tree. Find what makes you different so when people talk about System and G they’d always mention that this particular System and G organization is unique.”
Those words reminded me of my Master’s professors and once more the words that once Åsa-Karin Engstrand told me came to my mind: “We should open the world in order to change it.”

Two volunteers sent me the following message before they left:

“Glykeria you did an amazing job! I would like to thank you for everything you did for me. Have fun with the other participants and give them the same good feeling as you did with me. I will miss you a lot!”

“I thank you once again for your activities; I enjoyed taking part in all of them for the whole length of my EVS. I wish you all the best and hope to meet you again in the future!”

Moments like this made me realize how important my contribution has been both at a professional and at a personal level. At a personal level, I feel that during those nine months I had the opportunity to get acquainted with other cultures and mentalities, develop a better perception of intercultural cooperation and enhance my skills in handling diversity and intersectionality. I keep in touch with all former volunteers and make plans for future cooperation with some of them. Through our interaction in the organization and socialization in our leisure time, we have bonded and developed a very friendly relationship which helped both sides commit to the organization even more and evolve as individuals.

As for the professional level, for the first time in my life, I feel that I do not need a specific career plan; just to be in the right place at the right time. During my studies I had found myself worrying about my future opportunities and employability, wondering if I could find a job related to my skills. Through the internship, however, I realized that the point is not to fit in an existing workplace, but to create my own job, utilizing my existing background and my recently acquired knowledge and experience.

According to Lykke (2010), following a career path in Gender Studies is about succeeding personally in a globalized world market which needs to change through networking, collectivity and solidarity; it is about fighting for justice and equality with transformative work and change in your arsenal. In this sense, I will move from studying youth work and non-formal education “from the outside” – which means as
an intern – to studying EVS “from the inside” – which means as a volunteer myself. Starting with bringing organizational and social change at a regional, national and international level, I will aim to become part of the change I wish to see in the world.

**Concluding points**

To respond to the last Research Question, “How do I see the future of the organization and how does it affect me?”, I would say to the readers that that no matter how good a person is as a professional, no matter how much academic knowledge they have, what matters most when working with other people is to be human and to treat others as humans, and this is the starting point for building a new future for the organization. I believe that a key element of the success of my intervention was the fact that I was approachable, always available and open to discussion. I enjoyed every moment of my involvement with the organization and, even though there were some difficulties and issues to be addressed, my pure interest for the volunteers and my strong faith in the purpose and aims of the organization made me feel efficient and successful. Those nine months improved my self-confidence and self-esteem, promoted my professionalism and contributed to my innate tendency to help other people. Apart from that, I gained a new respect for non-formal and informal forms of education and intercultural learning, making this internship a life-changing experience.
9. CONCLUSION

The main contribution of the present study is the fact that it is one of the first attempts to investigate the field of youth organizations related to non-formal education and provides valuable results which can be utilized not only in the field of youth work, voluntarism and activism but also in Academia, under the umbrella of Gender Studies and Intersectionality. Combining my background in Psychology and Gender Studies, I combined three different research methods (interviews, policy analysis and participatory observation) to work on an innovative research plan, which led to valuable results. Focusing on my experience as an intern in the NGO System and G, I have shown how a study can actually work, not by taking for granted that there is a certain “problem” to be solved, but by revealing the ingredients of an organization’s recipe for success. Since I believe that it worked for me, it is only fair that I share the experience and spread the results to the broader public.

System and G is a Greek non-governmental, non-profit youth organization which was created by people with fewer opportunities for people with fewer opportunities, regardless of their biological sex, social gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, (dis)ability, age, educational level and sexual orientation. Therefore, my first Research Question is related to the people who shaped the organization’s main principles and to the ways in which those principles evolved over time. The organization’s Statute, as well as the interviews with the founders, showed that the existing educational policies emerged from the founders’ aspiration to spread their experience from youth volunteering in order to motivate other people for social change at a local, national and international level. In the eight years of the organization’s function, its initial main principles and corresponding policies were developed with the contribution of all the people who have been involved, either as youth workers (trainers, mentors, project coordinators) or as volunteers (in the frame of European Voluntary Service – EVS). Unlike previous studies, the contribution of the study lies in the fact that it doesn’t focus on the gender perspective only, but utilizes the experience of the members of an organization which is open to a very broad range of people, regardless of their individual features, such as their gender. Through my analysis I have shown how important it is to produce feminist knowledge in different ways, following an intersectional perspective, rather than stressing the importance of gender equality in youth organizations.
Moving on to the second Research Question, the organization’s internal culture is a combination of three different types of previously known organizational cultures. In particular, the organization’s inclusive, intersectional and non-judgmental philosophy makes it a safe space for volunteers and trainers to express themselves and work together as peers in a mutual-learning process (“personal involvement culture”), grow their potential and expand their knowledge and skills (“openness to change/innovation” culture), while developing emotional proximity and close relations with each other (“family/clan” culture). Therefore, one more aspect of the contribution of the study is that it reveals how System and G has developed a culture of equal participation, intersectionality and partnership-building, which embraces all people with a genuine interest for social offer, rather than for profit, no matter if they are people with fewer opportunities themselves or not. As for me, I feel honored to be a member of this culture and I hope I motivate other people to get involved in similar organizations.

Regarding my third Research Question, all forms of organizational justice and equality are achieved through the organization’s main principles. First of all, procedural justice is achieved through offering partnership opportunities to individuals based on the same criteria, which include intercultural communication skills, respect and willing to defend other people’s rights, openness to personal and social change, team spirit while working in heterogeneous groups for common purposes, valuing diversity, intersectionality and individuality, and motivation to learn and help others learn. Furthermore, interactional justice is achieved through continuous support from the founders, mutual evaluation and solidarity among all members. Moreover, distributive justice is achieved through the equal distribution of duties, activities, experiences and knowledge among its members, as well as dissemination of the results of non-formal and informal learning activities to the members of partner organization and to the broader public. Thus, unlike previous studies which focus only on one aspect of inequalities or injustice, the present study provides an intersectional approach to the achievement of organizational justice and equality in NGOs.

As for my fourth Research Question, organizational change is achieved through the liberty of the organization’s members not only to use the existing methods of non-formal and informal education but also to develop and try out their own
methods, such as workshops, field trips, charity events etc. In this way, the organization’s policies are under constant evolution and change, through a process of mutual learning between youth workers and volunteers. What is more, social change is achieved through raising awareness of local people regarding equality, justice, anti-discrimination laws, intersectionality and human rights protection by organizing and participating in relevant events and workshops. The most prominent of such activities is the Structured Dialogue, during which young people (usually high school and university students), NGO members (usually volunteers) and local decision-makers (usually politicians) discuss and resolve social, financial and cultural issues of everyday life. Since I was given the chance to be part of the National Structured Dialogue Group, I gave the readers an image of how it works in practice and how important its outcomes are for contemporary societies. Thus, regarding my fourth Research Question, the present study gives an example of how organizational and social change can be achieved “from the inside”, setting a good example that can be followed by other organizations with a similar philosophy, character and activity. My experience, of course, is just the tip of the iceberg and cannot be generalized to all organizations and settings, but spreading the idea of using alternative ways to achieve organizational change is how I personally perceive “social change” and “progress”.

Regarding my fifth Research Question, motivation for further non-formal and formal education, contribution to future plans and search of new career paths, interaction with different cultures, lifestyles and mentalities are some of the main benefits of working or offering voluntary service in the frame of System and G. As for my personal involvement in the future of the organization, now that I have already studied non-formal education “from the outside” – as an intern – my next step is to do it “from the inside”, as a volunteer myself, through the European Voluntary Service (EVS). The process of voluntary work, in parallel with the creation of a branch of System and G in Cyprus, will actually be a process of “worlding” (Wilson, 2017), of making a new world, based on alternative constructions of existing cultural and social worlds. With my involvement in NGOs, I will attempt to bring social change at a local, national and international level and assist next generations in building an alternative future, more intersectional, less normative, less hegemonic, less hierarchical and less exclusive.
10. REFERENCES AND USEFUL LINKS


Useful links


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8tjhVO1Tc [Accessed 15 April 2018]

www.humanlibrary.org [Accessed 20 March 2018]
Organizational Culture, Justice, Equality and Change in Youth Organizations
The success story of the non-governmental organization ‘System and G’

Glykeria Kalamata

Abstract
The current study analyzes the official policies and everyday practices of the youth non-governmental organization System and G, located in Komotini, Greece. Through a combination of Critical Policy Analysis, Interviews and Participatory Observation, this Thesis provides a broad image of the organization’s internal culture, with great emphasis on the relations among its members. The results showed that the organization’s philosophy, causes and corresponding policies have emerged from its founders’ personal life experiences, which motivated them for social offer to people with fewer opportunities, developed through cooperation with other youth workers, equally motivated to help people in need, and changed with the contribution of volunteers – also people with fewer opportunities – with innovative ideas and ambition to bring social change. As a result, an intersectional culture has grown in the organization, which is characterized by diversity, emotional proximity, mutual support and solidarity.

The study also analyzes the organization’s social stratification and power relations, which are characterized by equality among all its members, making trainers and volunteers feel that their voice is heard and appreciated. Therefore, the organization succeeds in the achievement of all forms of organizational justice (procedural, distributive, interactional). What is more important decision-making within the organization requires the equal participation of trainers and volunteers alike, while when it comes to decisions with an impact on local society, the organization gives its members the opportunity to express their opinion and design social policies through cooperation with local entrepreneurs, politicians and other decision-makers. In this way, organizational and social change are achieved and promoted. The future of the organization includes its members’ ambition to spread the methods and results of non-formal education to other regions and countries, and I consider myself lucky and honored to be part of this effort.

Number of pages: 102

Keywords
Youth work, organizational culture, organizational justice, equality, organizational change, social change, non-formal education