

Report: STUDY VISIT IN TALLINN

In the following text we describe our experiences gained during the MONO study visit in Tallinn that took place from the 4th to the 8th of October 2021.

In the text we do not intend to evaluate individual services, but to compare different aspects of services and practices, based on our experience.

When we wrote the report we reflected on the situations we have experienced or observed and conversations we have had with the workers of MONO Tallinn.

The resulting report combines several texts written from different perspectives, and the events described thus sometimes repeat or overlap.

MONO Tallinn

MONO – Mobiilne noorsootöö Tallinnas (Tallinn mobile youth work) employs 8 team members and one coordinator who work and carry out streetwork in Tallinn. The organisation is also involved in various programmes and activities that they organise.

The mobile youth work is based on the principle of street-based youth work, i. e. working with youngsters on the streets, focusing on young people who spend time on the streets and other urban and suburban areas. Mobile youth work is based on two basic principles: *outreach* – the organisation works with institutions such as schools, police, youth centres and the Youth Welfare Office and *detached work* – work that takes place outdoors, directly on the streets.

When we refer to mobile youth work we mean the whole range of activities and not only the streetwork. Thus, mobile youth work includes streetwork, individual planning, group work, various social events and workshops and projects like Jalatalla and Vaadetulevikku (more information is provided below).

Unlike many Czech organisations who work with young people at risk, working hours in MONO are 40 hours a week. Mostly from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m., or from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. If necessary, staff work longer hours and then take time off to compensate for the overtime.

MONO is the only organisation that operates in Tallinn, and it covers the entire city. Workers regularly visit four city districts that are most problematic.

During the outreach work they walk through parks and outdoor sport grounds, squares and very often shopping centres as well.

Most of the workers speak Russian, which is also important for communication with local youngsters as Tallinn has a large Russian minority. According to data, up to 38.5 % of the population are ethnic Russians and 46.7 % have Russian as their first language (2011).

On Friday morning we observed two “teatime hours” which were very inspiring - time is dedicated for individual discussions with employees, that were introduced by coordinator Aleksei. Employees can sign up in advance if needed and have time to address their work difficulties and needs with their supervisor. This is a tool to reinforce burnout prevention and to complement the regular team supervision sessions that take place at least 4 times a year.

The possibility of an individual meeting with the psychologists the very next day represents another tool to reinforce burnout prevention and professional consultation in youth work.

Contact with clients

Workers always walk in pairs, in exceptional circumstances they work alone, however, in such cases they only have contact with young people that they already know. First contacts are always done in pairs. They try to be mindful of national differences during all contacts. For Russian clients and workers, closer contact is natural; workers do not wait for the client's greeting but approach the clients themselves. They approach both couples and individual clients. They hug clients and also communicate with them outside of their working hours. Estonian-speaking workers have stricter boundaries and consider to a greater extent when and how to address clients. It is easier for all workers to communicate with people of the same nationality as themselves.

Experience with outreach work

Our first outreach work was organised on Monday, when we were divided into pairs and assigned to two Estonian workers. We stayed in the office at the beginning where our colleagues showed us the environment where their regular meetings and administrative activities take place. They also have facilities to store outreach material, which is not very different from ours.

Compared to our clubs and office spaces, Estonian colleagues really have plenty of space for their work. The youth centres are also a bit bigger than in the Czech Republic.

My colleague and I did our first outreach work in the centre of Tallinn. Firstly we monitored the area around the historic centre, where our colleagues showed us where and when the clients are usually present or in what activities they are engaged. A large number of the clients in Estonia are skateboarders, so they are not very different from our clients especially in the Neposeda organisation. It was this specific group of clients that we met in their neighbourhood – Freedom Square, with a monument commemorating the fight for independence. In skate culture, this place could be compared to an area around the former Stalin monument in Prague. Streetworkers together with these clients organise various skate events and races. Some streetworkers come from this community which is convenient and it could be one of the criteria for establishing a good relationship with clients.

We spent the second day of our streetwork in the northern part of the city, where we were again monitoring and looking for a group with whom our colleague from Tallinn wanted to discuss a current topic: he already knew about a street fight between some young people and wanted to know what had happened. Unfortunately, we did not meet this group of clients during working hours. However, our colleague from Estonia got in touch with them after working hours. We noticed that our colleagues from Tallinn set boundaries in slightly different ways compared to our practice. In the Czech Republic we are more careful about our working boundaries and do not get involved with contacts outside working hours or outside of the areas where we do streetwork.

On the other hand, tools such as observation, monitoring, reaching out to the target group and contact work are very similar. The workers also try to act as mediators between the city and their clients.

Comparison of services

I work in the organisation Beztíže based in Prague and therefore I can compare the differences in services only with the Beztíže organisation. However, I believe that some of the parameters of our service are the same for all services in Prague and maybe even in the whole Czech Republic.

What is the difference between outreach work in Prague and Tallinn?

In Tallinn the organisation works under the Ministry of Education and is established and funded by the city. Therefore it is not bound by the Social Services Act as it is in the Czech Republic. Consequently, workers do not enter into contracts or agreements on provision of social services with the youngsters, i. e. their clients.

However, the services they provide and the contact social work they carry out shares the same parameters as our outreach work in the Czech Republic.

They look for and evaluate clients interested in the service in a similar or identical way as we do in the Czech services.

They keep a database of clients just like our services do and record information about the interventions they have made, just like we do.

What varies quite a bit are the working hours and days when they provide the services. In our organisation we provide outreach services on an average of 3 days a week, and only on week days. The time we spend on the streets of Prague is always the same, i. e. 5 hours. Our service

is designed to cover the free time of the youngsters and therefore we work during afternoon to evening hours.

In Tallinn the situation is different. The workers work every day for several hours. The working hours are not strictly determined and they even work on weekends. Workers rotate and therefore they are able to cover all the days to provide the service. Each worker works full time, on average 4 hours per day.

The outreach work is performed in a very similar or identical way to Prague. Workers approach young people in the streets, parks, shopping centres and other places in the city. A large part of the work takes place through social networks and in housing estates, as in the Czech Republic.

During our trip we visited, among other areas, the largest housing estate in Tallinn - Lasnamäe, where the population is largely made up of Russians.

There are separate Estonian and Russian schools in Estonia, with the Estonian language being compulsory in Russian schools. Russians communicate in their native language and also differ from Estonians in their culture. The streetworkers reflect the cultural differences of potential clients and approach them very individually. Most Estonian workers speak both Russian and Estonian. They use their knowledge of linguistic and cultural differences in their work to the benefit of their clients. For Russian-speaking workers, contact with Russian clients is much easier. They always do the outreach work in pairs and often in a combination of Estonian and Russian speaking workers.

We visited several shopping centres during the outreach work, where young people spend a lot of their free time. They work in a similar way to the Czech Republic. However, there are no "official" contact points in the shopping centres, as in selected shopping centres in Prague. They also do not commonly cooperate with management of the shopping centres.

I observed that in most cases workers were more personal, compared to our usual practice. They routinely hugged their clients and maintained very warm relationships.

We later discussed it with Aleksei who told us that this is common practice but they adapt the communication style to the target group.

Another topic I would like to address is the work-boundary setting. The work in Beztíže is primarily limited to fixed working hours. Unless in an exceptional situation, we finish working at 6 p.m. or 7 p.m., depending on the time of year, with the end of our working hours. At the

end of the shift, we may briefly evaluate the working day, which usually means an end of work for that day for us.

However, as I learned from the MONO worker, they do not stop working at the end of the working day, as they meet clients afterwards at the training and sometimes they communicate with clients through social media, sometimes even at night. I asked a lot of questions and we discussed the topic together. Our colleague from Estonia argued that if clients needed help, no one else would then be ready to help them. For example, if it were not low-threshold enough for them to call a crisis helpline.

In another case we went to a restaurant together after work and the Estonian colleague met a group that was involved in the conflict earlier, so he approached the group and tried to find out what had happened. This practice is not common in our organisation – if we meet clients outside working hours then we do not approach them and do not work with them.

Youth Centres

During our stay we visited three different youth centres. These centres do not provide social services as low-threshold youth clubs in the Czech Republic do. The activities of youth centres in Estonia rather correspond to leisure clubs established in youth centres in the Czech Republic.

Individual centres are established and funded by the municipalities to offer quality leisure activities for all groups of young people in the area. Funding is based on 3-year periods, which provides some stability for their operation and development. Centres communicate well with schools, often due to their location close to schools. One of the main objectives of the youth centres is fundraising (in addition to funds provided by the city), generated by their own thematic workshops or other day activities which are also organised at weekends (sport afternoons, street art projects, etc.) The centres have established a single database (registration is compulsory during the first visit), which is shared by all the centres. As a rule, they are open on weekday afternoons until about 8 p.m. It was unusual for us to see cameras in the centres. We were assured that they respect the anonymity of the clients. When photographs are taken during routine and leisure activities, they ask the youth if they agree to be photographed, which is similar to the practice in the Czech low-threshold centres for

children and youth. Routine activities are based on regularly recurring monthly activities (Djingu, dancing and skating workshops, programmes promoting group cooperation, art activities, etc.). In addition, and similar to the activities organised in the low-threshold centres for children and youth in the Czech Republic, the youngsters may play various games or find a place to relax. However, workers in the centres who take care of the operation of the centres work differently, they act rather as animators than social workers. Participation of the young people in the operation of the centre is supported by simple scoring motivation programmes or by taking care of the communal garden. The centres that we visited, *Lasnamäenoortekeskus* and *KesklinnaNoortekeskus*, operate in the way described above.

The Raadikudistrict Youth Research Centre represents another type of centre for children and young people; it was established in a former apartment on the first floor of a block of flats and is based on grassroots activities of residents living in the city social housing in the Mustakiviv city district. The centre operates 5 days a week, closed on Thursdays and Sundays. The centre provides services to children from the neighbouring houses who often come from multi-problem families with a history of alcoholism, other substance abuse or domestic violence.

Police and schools

During our study visit in Tallinn, we talked a lot about cooperation with the police, which is still not very common in the Czech Republic, but in Tallinn has become a regular part of their work.

However, cooperation between the MONO organisation and the police was not always good. Aleksei informed us that the cooperation was evolving. At first, the police expected that MONO workers would inform police officers about what young people were doing, essentially “snitching”. The Tallinn organisation strongly objected to this requirement and gradually began to build a relationship with the police officers. Indeed, the police soon realised that working with the outreach workers would help them and bring new insights about the life of youngsters.

During the pandemic MONO workers cooperated with the police intensively and reported

the needs and concerns of young people and thus created a good relationship with the police. Therefore, they developed a partnership relationship – for example, when the police announced that they would be conducting a drug raid, MONO workers would then inform young people in the street about this plan. This helped them to prepare for the police raid and also to establish a stronger and more trusting relationship with the workers.

Police officers use the MONO organisation for communication with young people. Workers become to some extent mediators and facilitators of communication.

They have now established direct chat communication with police officers to address topics that spontaneously arise from their work in real time. The communication involves not only police officers but also representatives of the city. For example, in the past they were resolving conflicts related to skating in Freedom Square where some citizens were obstructed by people on skates. However, young people have been skating there for a long time and the city centre was their natural territory. Thanks to the MONO workers the whole situation was facilitated, and in cooperation with the city, they dedicated an area for skating and an area where it was not possible to skate. The skaters themselves were then able to participate in equipping “their” space and designing it; the city then paid for it.

The whole event would not have been possible without the involvement of the city counsellors, the police and MONO Tallinn.

A police prevention officer currently cooperates with the outreach workers and, if needed, can communicate suggestions from the MONO workers further and get support from the police.

In Estonia, unlike the Czech Republic, there are so-called community police officers in every district, representing a possibility for citizens to get in touch with the police. These police officers then deal with the problems of the community. The police are therefore not considered to be as anonymous and such oppressive institutions by the citizens. People know whom to contact, they know them and the community police officers then address the issues with their colleagues, creating a support network.

Regarding the schools, we did not discuss cooperation in such depth, but Aleksei told us that cooperation with schools is also not ideal and explained that the situation in the education system is similar to the Czech Republic: people have been working in the education system for a long time without changing their behaviour and they feel that “they understand the youth issues”. Introduction of new trends and changes is therefore slow and demanding.

Tallinn Centre for Children at Risk

This is a Centre for children and young people who face danger or are without parental care. The Centre also provides various services to family members. It provides support, a place of safety and helps to prepare for independent living; it is funded by the city.

The Centre targets youngsters aged 10 to 18 who do not have to come from Tallinn.

Staying in the Centre is completely voluntary and depends on the decision of the individuals.

It is an alternative option that does not have to be used, but if chosen, a trial period will take place. There are cases where, on the other hand, the Centre may refuse referred children.

The programme in the Centre is scheduled for 9 to 10 months, with a capacity of 40

individuals, 20 girls and 20 boys. There are 4 departments, 2 for girls and 2 for boys, differentiated according to age: for children 10 to 14 years and for youth 15 to 18 years.

Children or young people who speak the same language usually stay in one department and everybody is assigned to a specific social worker.

The Centre was originally established primarily for addicted youngsters, mainly heroin addicts. Nowadays clients stay for a variety of reasons.

A similar centre for young people aged 3 to 18 was established in Tallinn and it is used for all kinds of leisure activities. Children can spend here from as little as one night to 14 days. The centre was designed for the acute protection of children and youth.

The Centre for Children at Risk also provides school lessons substituting education if children cannot attend their usual schools. This means that the children do not have to repeat the school year when they return from the centre. However, it is not a traditional school. Teachers from primary schools and grammar schools come to the centre and teach in classes with a capacity of a maximum of 4 pupils.

The programme also develops social skills and skills relevant to everyday life.

One component of the programme is group work led by psychologists and psychological work in the form of individual and family therapy.

Physical and sports activities, occupational and music therapy are organised in the centre.

The programme includes aftercare and Vibroacoustic therapy to help manage stress, anxiety, improve sleep disorders and muscle tension.

A regular daily routine is essential. Each day starts at 7.40 a.m. with a wake-up call, personal hygiene and room cleaning. Breakfast is at 8.30 a.m., followed by lessons starting at 9.30 a.m. Lunch starts at 2 p.m., followed by a break and time for homework. From 4.30 p.m. there is time for sports, group work and recreation. Dinner starts at 6.30 p.m., followed by free time to be spent outdoors or with computers. Evening group starts at 9 p.m., followed by preparation for bedtime and lights-out at 10 p.m.

There is a rehabilitation unit for minors under the influence of addictive substances, but without signs of aggression, incorporated into the centre. Youngsters are brought here once they've been examined by a physician and have an accompanying report describing their medical condition and a statement that the condition is not life-threatening. Minors are allowed to spend the night here in a safe environment and leave the centre in the morning, with a worker present at all times.

The MONO organisation cooperates with a centre for minors. The advantage is, for example, the possibility of joining the Jalatalla programme.

Hoogsisse

When we listened to Christjan explaining this programme, we asked how he would translate Hoogsisse. He explained that *Hoog* means "speed" or "movement" and *sisse* means "in", it loosely translates as *moving forward*. And that is what the programme is striving for. It is designed for minors in Tallinn aged 15 to 26 years, who have not completed school education and are not in employment. In Estonia, as in other countries, the term NEET (not in employment, education or training) is used.

In 2021, there were 4,400 of these young people in Tallinn and 7% of them were involved in the Hoogsisse programme.

The programme was launched in 2019 and is expected to last for three years. It is funded by the Ministry of Education and the European Social Fund. A multidisciplinary team of 6

members work in the programme and they cooperate with different organisations, such as MONO.

The main objective of the programme is to find these young people and, according to their needs, involve them in active life. This programme for young people is set up for 6 months from the first contact with the worker. It is divided into three stages. The first stage is about contacting young people - the programme obtains contact details for this target group from a social services data register called *STAR*, from municipalities, partners and also from the public. For example, it shares the stories of clients in local newspapers, on social media and on Tallinn's municipal website. Potential clients may contact them themselves. They contact clients by email or by phone and introduce them to the service – if clients agree, they are enrolled in the programme.

The next stage is dedicated to identifying the client's needs and wishes, to motivation and increasing social competences such as writing CVs, emails, looking for new jobs or educational options with individual support from the workers. It also includes working with the client's relatives. These initial stages take 4 to 6 months.

The last stage starts afterwards – young people are no longer in a NEET situation and join the education system, training for work or become employed. However, workers continue to be in touch with clients and monitor how they develop.

International programmes and study visits

The home organisation participates in two programmes that offer young people an opportunity to travel abroad: ***Jalatalla*** and ***Vaadetulevikku***. The *Jalatalla* programme is structured in three parts and is funded by the *Erasmus+* project. The first phase of the programme aims to contact the target group, reach out to those interested in the programme, select mentors and, most importantly, organise an event where those interested in the project learn about the conditions they need to meet in order to participate in the programme. In the first phase, selected candidates will attend 13 meetings with their mentor (who is chosen according to mutual preferences). Two camping trips outside Tallinn are also included. The motivation of young people is high at the beginning of the programme since a trip abroad is included in the second phase. If everything works according to the agreed

conditions and the young people participate in the meetings, then they can take part in the exchange visit to a European Union country. The third phase of the programme is volunteering, i. e. working experience/study visit abroad.

An alternative is the *Vaadetulevikku* programme, which develops cooperation with schools within the city. It is therefore implemented at a municipal level. The implementation process is similar – the first step is to identify the target group and the schools, followed by the actual approach of schools to set the terms and conditions of the cooperation. The programme itself consists of 12 meetings for participants aged 13 to 14, with an afternoon leisure activity once a month. The advantage of this programme is that half of the content is chosen and planned by the young people themselves, therefore they are effectively involved in the project and their role is that of both participant and creator. It thus offers the opportunity for young people to discover and explore their interests, hidden talents and other opportunities for action.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in the text above, work with (vulnerable) youth in Estonia differs both at the individual and structural level. At the individual level, differences can be observed especially in the worker-client relationship, where workers have shifted their personal boundaries towards the needs of the client. This may appear at first sight as acting in favour of the client, but it could become a nuisance in the long run.

With clearer boundaries, workers could avoid both burnout syndrome and maintain a consistent role that doesn't slip into that of a friend.

On a structural level, it is primarily about the way services are funded – in Tallinn, this service is funded by the city, and about the independence of the service from the Social Services Act which is different in the Czech Republic.

Youth centres are not conceived as low-threshold centres for children and youth as in the Czech Republic, but rather as a space for leisure activities. They are larger in size and therefore provide a more diverse range of services.

Czech streetwork differs from the *Mobile Youth Work* mainly in the content and number of activities offered to clients. In Czech organisations, these activities are usually part of the clubs' offers, while in Tallinn it is the other way around and the offer of activities is provided by the *Mobile Youth Work*.

We consider the cooperation between the Tallinn Police and the MONO organisation to be significant, as Aleksei and his team have achieved constructive and effective cooperation. International study visits, such as *Jalatalla* and *Vaadtulevikku*, which offer foreign experience to young people, represent another opportunity for self-development. The same applies to the *Hoogsisse* programme, which offers youngsters who are unemployed and not in education a systematic six-month preparation for future employment.

An interesting experience for us was a visit to the Centre for Children at Risk, which is based on voluntary assistance to children who find themselves in a difficult life situation, are endangered or are without parental care.

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