

## Open Badges: Many more ways to go with recognition

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Nerijus and Laimonas present the recent developments with the Open Badges initiative in European youth work. If you are new to Open Badges have a look at their first article [here](#) [3].

In late 2011, says Nerijus, I was introduced to [Open Badges](#) [4]. Since becoming a member of the Youthpass Recognition Team, I was much involved in promoting [Youthpass](#) [5] for the recognition of learning. Based on my experience, I can see how Youthpass may bring benefits to learners and how Open Badges can support the Youthpass process.

During the last three years I was involved in exploring what Open Badges are and how we can adapt them to our youth work activities in Europe. During the period from 2013 to 2014 together with six partners from other European countries we carried out the first project which enabled us to start using Open Badges. We created and started testing the first six badge systems, aiming to recognise learning achievements. Three of the badge systems created then are still in use now.

Our partner, [Think Forward](#) [6] from United Kingdom is using the Young Enterprise Solutions badge system to support the entrepreneurial development of young people. [GOEUROPE!](#) [7], the partner from Germany continued by setting up and using their regional [Youward](#) [8] platform to promote European youth mobility and youth achievements in Sachsen-Anhalt.

Our badge journey continues with [Badgecraft](#) [9] – a European platform which helps both learners to organise all their achievements online **and** organisations to recognise learning by using Open Badges. Recently we started testing and offering tailor-made badge recognition systems specifically designed for individual mobility activities within the [Erasmus+: Youth in Action](#) [10]



[11]

The Youth Exchangers

In the late summer of 2015 we started playing a serious European game '[The Youth Exchangers](#) [12]'

This game invites every participant of a youth exchange to become the Youth Exchanger by developing their competences and super powers. Everyone is challenged to complete specific missions and unlock digital badges which signify their (learning) achievements.

The game lasts throughout the entire time of the exchange activity. It promotes learning of participants in the areas of foreign languages and learning-to-learn. The game encourages participants' proactivity and supports intercultural learning. Young people complete missions of their choice, collect evidence of achievements and unlock digital Open Badges. By playing the recognition game, participants get a sense of achievement and can track their learning progress in a visually clear and attractive way. They can share their achievements online every day. In this way they show themselves as constant learners during the activity.

The idea of this game is developed following the concept of gamification - the use of game design elements in non-game contexts. We chose the type of gamification called '[serious game](#) <sup>[13]</sup>' to highlight two of the main elements: recognition can be a playful but at the same time a serious 'business'.

First tests of The Youth Exchangers are promising. If implemented effectively, the game engages young people really well. During the testing phase, the majority of participants joined the game by claiming at least one badge. On average, nine out of 12 available badges were claimed per participant. Later, the contents of the unlocked badges is reflected upon and transferred to the individual part of the Youthpass Certificate.

 <sup>[14]</sup>

An idea for development

Ideally, we would wish that participants could drag their Open Badges into the Youthpass tool easily online. This would enable them to review their learning achievements and personalise them for the Youthpass Certificate. We will see if this might be possible with the responsible SALTO in the future.

 <sup>[15]</sup>

The League of Extraordinary Youth Work Agents

We were motivated by the success of The Youth Exchangers and designed a badge system dedicated to youth workers' development. [The League of Extraordinary Youth Work Agents](#) <sup>[16]</sup> invites participants of training courses to become real-life heroes and heroines. This system has 16 badges waiting for youth workers who show determination to learn and develop their personal and professional competences.

All badges are organised in relation to the European reference [framework](#) <sup>[17]</sup> of 8 key competences for lifelong learning. There are two badges linked to each competence (except for the mother tongue). One badge encourages learning on a personal level, while the other one promotes professional development of a specific competence.

The game is the transversal activity embedded into the training programme. It starts at the beginning of the training programme with the session which focuses on learning and Youthpass. The participants can accomplish game missions at any time of the training course. The power to achieve the evidence of learning is in the participant's hands! All achievements are reflected with peers during the daily reflection moments and concluded at the end of the activity. Then the person can claim the badge based on personal reflection and feedback received from peers.

The game proves to be both engaging and rewarding. The majority of participants get involved and claim their badges. Later they use them to describe their learning achievements for the individual

part of the Youthpass Certificate.

We started using this Open Badges system for youth leaders and youth workers in the second half of August, 2015 and within three months time 1981 badges were issued during 10 training events with more than 260 participants from 33 European countries.

In future we would like to integrate features of badges that allow youth leaders and youth workers to include their achievements into both Youthpass for youth workers and the European [Youth Work Portfolio](#) [18]. Again, here we will have to see how the Youth Department of the Council of Europe will react.

 [19]

Trainer Competences

In September 2015 we moved forward by starting to design the badge system which would recognise the development of trainer competences. We chose to use the European Training Strategy (ETC) [Competence Model](#) [20] to promote the professional development of trainers and facilitators.

This badge system enables trainers and facilitators to review their competences and professional development in the light of a set of competences for trainers working at international level. We aim at offering badges for systematic review of professional practice and trainer development.

We started testing this badge system during with EVS trainers' pool of [SALTO Eastern European and Caucasus Resource Centre](#) [21] and other training of trainers projects.

We envision that when integrated with the [SALTO Trainers online for Youth](#) [22] (TOY) profiles of trainers, Open Badges could function as an evidence-based reputations system for trainers to show their expertise and for organisations and institutions to access a pool of validated experts.

In future, we plan to develop a dynamic CV online to enable better sharing of learning achievements by participants who learn in various contexts. The idea is to have tools which support young people and youth work professionals to create their CVs that include all of their achievements, formal, non-formal and even informal.

Going further...



We are committed to promote the use of Open Badges for recognition, and meanwhile we wait for their possible deeper integration within the existing European tools for recognition, e.g. [Youthpass](#) [5], [European Youth Work Portfolio](#) [18] or [SALTO TOY](#) [22] profiles.

Currently our organisation is part of 2 [strategic partnership](#) [23] projects which innovates with Open Badges in a European youth work context.

One project aims to promote further the use of Open Badges to support and recognise learning within European mobility projects. The project was set up by a consortium of youth (work) organisations and networks active in European mobility.

The other strategic partnership project 'Trusted Badge Systems' is focused on cooperation with representatives of the employment sector to achieve greater endorsement for badge systems developed and used by volunteering and youth work organisations.

Both projects started in September 2015 and will last until mid-2017. The projects are co-funded by the EU Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme.

We also support the [Badge Europe](#) [24] initiative which promotes the use of Open Badges in a variety of learning contexts. This initiative is carried out by a number of adult and higher education institutions in Europe and it is co-funded through the Knowledge Alliance action of Erasmus+.

You can stay up to date about the Open Badges initiatives in Europe by joining the Facebook group [Open Badges Europe](#) [25]. We are always open for cooperation!

[Association of Non-formal Education in Lithuania](#) [26]

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- [21] <https://www.salto-youth.net/eeca>
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