

Supporting young people in Europe

Principles, policy
and practice



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Supporting young people in Europe: principles, policy and practice

The Council of Europe international reviews
of national youth policy 1997-2001 – a synthesis report

Howard Williamson

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Executive summary

The concept of “youth policy”, while broadly accepted throughout the world as a necessary dimension of public policy, remains unclear and contested in relation to both its breadth and depth. The objective of this report is to seek to “capture” some of the key themes, issues, lessons and perhaps omissions arising from the seven Council of Europe international reviews of youth policy carried out between 1997 and 2001. These have covered Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Romania, Estonia and Luxembourg.

The international review process was established to fulfil three distinct objectives:

- to advise on national youth policy;
- to identify components of youth policy which might inform an approach to “youth policy” across Europe;
- to contribute to a learning process about the development and implementation of youth policy.

The review process was agreed by the CDEJ (the European Steering Committee for Youth) in 1995, following its proposal by Finland. Each review has been conducted in slightly different ways. The common thread has been that participating countries have produced a National Report, which has served as the basis for initial reflection and informed the direction of the work of the international team. That team has usually comprised six people: a chair from the CDEJ, three researchers, a participant from the governing structures (statutory organs) of the Council of Europe, and an administrator from the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe.

The participating countries, whose material informs this report, are not, of course, homogenous. They are differentiated by political and administrative structures, by economic circumstances, by geographical characteristics, and by historical and cultural traditions. Nevertheless all, in their different ways, are seeking to strike an appropriate balance between continuity and change in their approaches to, and development of “youth policy”.

The case for such change and development is not disputed. Globalisation, mobility, migration and democratic renewal, amongst many other things, indicate the need to constantly review the nature of “youth policy”.

Furthermore, this has to take place within a sophisticated understanding of the changing patterns of youth transitions and the new challenges facing young people in all corners of Europe (and, indeed, across the world).

Conceptualising “youth” (theoretically), and depicting the “social condition” of young people (empirically) is itself problematic and subject to different approaches in the different countries which participated in the international review process. The ways in which this has been done have produced different ideas and orientations about “youth policy”, in terms of both its range and depth. There is also a dilemma in whether youth policy should be concerned with supporting young people in “being young” or enabling them in “becoming adult”. The international reports also identified a tension between youth policy which was focused primarily on young people in adolescence or on young adults in “post-adolescence”, the former requiring more attention to education and leisure, the latter demanding attention to employment, housing and family life. Of course, both the national reports which preceded the international reviews, and the subsequent international reports, are themselves locked in time, static observations within a dynamic process of constantly evolving youth policy development. Even as the international reports were being produced, the national youth policy on which they reported was moving on.

Nevertheless, the Council of Europe’s international reviews of youth policy constitute a form of “contemporary history”, throwing into relief the stage and state of youth policy in each of the countries which have been reviewed. Each may provide useful reflection for the countries concerned, but each also – albeit in many different ways – contributes to a slightly sharper view of what, ultimately, a youth policy for Europe may embody.

The concept and coherence in youth policy may be said to contain questions of coverage, capacity, competence, co-operation and, inevitably, cost. The international reports, in different ways, expose the fact that most, if not all, of the national youth policies reviewed, fell substantially short of the “holistic” approach to the framing and shaping of youth policy routinely advocated in policy documentation. Priorities and focus for youth policy were often much more narrowly conceived, and derived from a relatively narrow field of information and consultation.

The *delivery* of youth policy was differentially organised. Beyond formal legislation and different financial allocations, organisational arrangements varied considerably both vertically (in terms of national, regional and local tiers of implementation) and horizontally (in terms of cross-agency partnerships). Moreover, the role and place of youth organisations – often argued to be the locus for participation and autonomy – was very different.

Despite such variation in structural organisation and youth involvement, the overarching domains of youth policy were evident, as were the dominant challenges for youth policy. These comprise the substance of the report, for both approaches and responses on each of these fronts generate a host of questions about the shape of youth policy in the future.

At the heart of all youth policy lies the imperative of *education and lifelong learning* – both through schooling and wider non-formal learning. Questions of over-qualification and the relationship between the formal and non-formal arenas of learning, and the political undercurrent between the processes and outcomes of learning, were pivotal issues throughout the countries under review. The relationship between education and training and *labour market opportunities* – indeed, how close such a relationship should be – was a matter of concern in many of the international reports. Education was not, however, restricted to vocational preparation but was, equally, an important vehicle for the promotion of active citizenship and participation in civil society.

A second paramount domain was *health*, for although the physical health of young people is generally good, most countries are experiencing challenges in tackling the worsening mental health of young people, promoting sexual health and dealing with the ever more pervasive prevalence of substance misuse.

Although *housing* is often not considered within the remit of “youth policy”, a number of the international reports maintained that it is likely to become a major challenge for youth policy in the future.

Across Europe, young people have access to very variable levels of *social protection*, but this is rapidly disappearing from the radar map of youth policy, being replaced by a variety of (quasi-compulsory) vocational training programmes. Ensuring baseline social protection so that young people do not slip to the margins while simultaneously seeking to encourage – coerce – their continued participation in learning and training is a critical challenge for all youth policy.

Beyond child protection, *family policy and child welfare* is often not considered to be legitimate territory for youth policy. Yet it was argued that it is integrally connected to questions of housing and support for young people in transition, especially in relation to more vulnerable young people and “children at risk”.

In contrast, historically, *leisure and culture* have been a significant, and sometimes almost exclusive, focus for youth policy. Hence the common elision between youth “work” and youth “policy”. The challenge lies two

ways, both in terms of policy intervention in supporting young people's leisure-time activities and in terms of building on the creativity and cultural pursuits established by young people themselves in their leisure time.

Limited attention was paid to the question of *youth justice*, despite the fact that criminality among young people is both a cause and a consequence of social exclusion. More policy focus should perhaps be given to the matter of young people and crime, in relation to preventative strategies, early detection and intervention, and enforcement. The latter does not, of course, sit comfortably with the enabling and facilitating philosophies which invariably inform debate around youth policy.

Nor was a great deal said about the question of *military service*, though as compulsory military service is being abandoned in many parts of Europe there is an important issue as to whether anything should replace it. There appears to be some resistance to discussing ideas such as national *community* service, despite the potential of such an initiative to provide a common learning experience for all young people and perhaps a critical rite of passage to adulthood.

Across all these policy domains certain key issues for youth policy are prominent. Youth policy is concerned with *participation and citizenship*, and with *combating social exclusion and promoting inclusion*. It is concerned with ensuring that young people have access to *information* by which they can make informed choices. It is also concerned with *multiculturalism and minorities*, with *mobility and internationalism*, with young people's *safety and protection*, and with promoting *equal opportunities*. The emphasis attached to these priorities is different in different countries, but they are nevertheless the threads which inform and shape youth policy in a variety of policy domains.

Such policy development is assisted by *youth research*, although the weight attached to different forms of youth research "evidence" may differ considerably. It is also supported by *training* programmes for those who work with young people, although such provision is very uneven across Europe and also unevenly spread across relevant professions. Finally, more attention should be given to supporting youth policy development through the *dissemination of "good practice"*.

Youth policy in Europe is developed through a recurrent cycle of political decision-making and drive, professional delivery, robust debate on emergent challenges and difficulties, and further policy development. The impetus for such development may start at any of these points and, equally, may be obstructed, for many reasons, at different points in the cycle. For the momentum to be maintained, there needs to be rigorous reflection on the

current state of youth policy in different countries, and a close relationship between research, policy and practice. Of paramount importance, however, is the need for the political championship of new agendas for change in response to the emergent needs of young people and the societies in which they live.

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29 March 2002

Preface

“Youth Policy is a cross-sector, integrated policy aimed at young people, with young people and starting from the needs of young people. Its aim is to improve and develop the living conditions and participation of young people, encompassing the whole range of social, cultural and political issues affecting them and other groups in the society.”

(European Youth Forum perspective on European Youth Policy, adopted by the Executive Committee, April 3-5 1998, Vilnius, Lithuania)

The concept of “youth policy”, while broadly accepted throughout the world as a necessary dimension of public policy, remains unclear and contested in relation to both its breadth and depth. The overarching “vision” for youth policy proffered by the European Youth Forum (above) is very different from the framing of youth policy adopted by the European Commission in its recent White Paper “A new impetus for Europe’s youth” (launched in November 2001). It is one thing to have an assertive vision, quite another to accommodate “youth policy” within the realpolitik of public policy-making, especially at supra-national levels. National governments have, of course, become increasingly conscious of the need for various support and development strategies for young people, though their own vision for youth policy and their resource capacity to implement it has been very differently conceived. Nevertheless, a number of national governments have, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, courageously put themselves forward for scrutiny of their “youth policies” by international teams of experts appointed by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe.

The international review process was established to fulfil three distinct objectives:

- to advise on national youth policy;
- to identify components of youth policy which might inform an approach to “youth policy” across Europe;
- to contribute to a learning process about the development and implementation of youth policy.

Seven international reviews have, since 1997, taken place, and another (Lithuania) is under way. It is timely, therefore, to take stock of their observations and conclusions so far, in order to provide more flesh on the bones

of what is still to become a commonly-agreed framework for the development and delivery of “youth policy” at national and sub-national levels. Taking stock is valuable for three specific reasons:

- a substantial body of knowledge has been produced;
- common themes, but also significant differences, in approach to the making and shaping of youth policy have been highlighted;
- “youth policy” is now a prominent issue at all levels of governance – at supra-national, national and sub-national levels.

This report endeavours to draw together the conceptual themes which inform the production and implementation of youth policy, using illustrations of emergent practice from the material which has been gathered to inform both the national and international reports.

PART 1: CONTEXT

Introduction

The objective of this report is to seek to “capture” some of the key themes, issues, lessons and perhaps omissions arising from the seven Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy. These have covered Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Romania, Estonia, and Luxembourg. The review process was agreed by the CDEJ (the European Steering Committee for Youth) in 1995, following its proposal by Finland. Finland, indeed, was the first country to put itself forward for an international review. Having prepared its national report, the review took place in 1997. The concluding paragraph from the international report is an instructive place to start:

“ [This] international report is also part of a wider process of international reviews being undertaken of youth policy in a number of European countries. This is not a competition in which there are winners and losers, but an endeavour to allow for the cross-fertilisation of ideas concerning youth policy, not only within countries (through comparing and contrasting national and international reports) but across countries (making use of reports from other countries in order to refine and develop thinking about youth policy within individual countries). Finland, like the international review team itself, has paved the way for this process to materialise. Both the national report and the international report provide models (in terms of structure and content) which future reviews will no doubt consider before their work is undertaken. Neither the Finnish authorities nor the international review team had any blueprint for the process which was adopted. The process was therefore imbued with uncertainty (and, no doubt, anxiety). But the work of both the Finnish authorities and the international review team has pioneered a process which is designed to improve the development and application of youth policy not just within those countries participating in the review process but across Europe. The principles and practices of youth policy can facilitate or obstruct the life-chances and prospects of young people, can forestall or cement social exclusion, and can deny or enhance active citizenship. To steal a phrase from the Finnish context, the aspiration for youth policy must be to create an effective framework for the improvement of young people's ‘living conditions’ and for the advancement of the prospects of individual young people without disadvantaging others in the process.” (Finland IR, p. 130)

Each review has been conducted in slightly different ways. The common thread has been that participating countries have generally produced a national report – the exception being Estonia, which had not produced its report prior to the visit by the international review team. Each national report served as the basis for initial reflection and informed the direction of the work of the international team. The subsequent international reports have, inevitably, been constructed in different ways, according to the material at their disposal and the issues which have been considered most paramount. This report seeks to provide a synthesis of that material.

“Youth policy” is a challenging concept. It can be considered and addressed in a variety of ways. During the recent Council of Europe symposium “Youth – actor of social change” (which took place in Strasbourg in December 2001), there was a specific workshop on the question of youth policy, convened by Peter Lauritzen and Howard Williamson, to which the latter made a contribution which is worth repeating here. It was argued that a framework for conceptualising “youth policy” can be developed through reflecting on the following four dimensions.

First, there is the question of models, methods and measurement. In other words, youth policy can be “framed” in broad or narrow terms and at different levels of development and implementation (from the national to the local). This raises issues of *breadth and depth*. The methods of application of youth policy can span a continuum from the punitive to the participative: from coercive requirements to consensual involvement. And, whatever the mode of execution of youth policy, there are important questions as to whether it reaches the groups of young people at whom it is directed, and to what effect: a challenge of measurement concerning efficacy and effectiveness.

Secondly, there are questions of principles, policy and practice. There can be enormous gulfs between the rhetorics of youth policy, in terms of the principles and policies which allegedly inform it, and the measures taken to put it into practice. This applies irrespective of the breadth or depth of the “youth policy” in question.

Thirdly, there are key questions about coverage, capacity, competence, co-operation and cost. Coverage relates both to geography and social groups. Capacity refers to the infrastructure established to serve the needs of young people both generally and in terms of specific categories of young people. Competence raises issues to do with the skills and knowledge required to produce effective service delivery. Co-operation is concerned both with horizontal and vertical communication and collaboration arrangements, which are of particular importance given the interest of governments in decentralising and delegating responsibility for implementation and wider

preoccupations with ensuring “joined up” and cross-sectoral intervention. And cost refers, of course, to the (human and financial) resources made available for the development and delivery of policy and practice directed at young people.

Finally, there is the question of “extending entitlement” and ensuring that the “reach” of youth policy engages with those who are most in need of it. As societies become more polarised, many young people access the range of opportunities and experiences which enable them to become competent and self-directing adults without the need for public support and intervention. In contrast, some do not, indeed cannot. The task of “youth policy” (or at least important dimensions of it) is to address the challenge of social exclusion and to produce strategies and practice which will facilitate the inclusion and participation of those young people who will otherwise remain “on the edge” – with destructive consequences not only for themselves but for the societies in which they live and, indeed, for other arenas of public policy.

These are, currently, somewhat abstract considerations but, in reflecting upon the content of the national and international reports, they will take on a more concrete shape, and frame important dimensions and debates around “youth policy” which have emerged from those reports. But, to remain at this level of generality for a little longer, the observation made by Ms Pia Vitanen, Chair of the Finnish Advisory Council for Youth Affairs, to the Finnish Parliament in April 1996 merits recording:

“We must develop our society to be able to offer young people other options beside exclusion. The development of young people’s living conditions is much more than just mere youth policy, it is also social, educational, labour and housing policy, and everything in between.” (Finland NR, p. 70)

Broad conceptions of “youth policy” therefore include not only those policies which are *directed* specifically towards young people but also those policy initiatives within other policy arenas which *affect* young people, one way or another. Youth policy is, not just theoretically, those national and local policies which contribute to young people’s prospects and possibilities (or exclusion and disadvantage) – whether by intent, default or neglect. Recent years have, commendably, witnessed a commitment to the first: intentional and purposeful policies and programmes to support the inclusion and participation of young people. This is evident at not only national levels, but also at regional and local levels, and at supra-national levels. The youth policy review work of the Council of Europe has been complemented by developments within the European Union which, in November 2001, produced its White Paper on youth policy. Although pragmatically limited in range and depth, that document provides at least a symbolic commitment to young people in Europe (within the EU, but also beyond, in relation to the

pre-accession countries, which include Romania and Estonia). It acknowledges and asserts the societal responsibility to respond to the needs and aspirations of young people. What might once have been construed as “benign neglect” (“leave the kids alone”) is now tantamount to “malign indifference”, given the increasing complexity and risk inherent in youth transitions to adulthood, in a context of globalisation, health risks, the democratic deficit and ever more flexible labour markets. The case for supporting lifelong learning, promoting more active citizenship, cementing social inclusion and enhancing personal and community safety has become paramount on the political agenda.

The nations in question

The participating countries, whose material informs this report, are not, of course, homogenous. The most striking aspect of that material is, in fact, the dramatic differences which exist between the relatively self-assured “youth policy” positions of the two Nordic countries reviewed (Finland and Sweden) and the much more tentative and unfolding positions of the two countries reviewed from central and eastern Europe (Romania and Estonia). (The other countries fall somewhere in between, but lean towards the former.)

There are also many other wider characteristics differentiating these countries. Some lie on the strategic borders of Europe (Finland and Spain), while others are located at its heart (the Netherlands and Luxembourg). Some are large nations in terms of geography (Spain and Romania), though not necessarily in terms of population. Indeed, the challenge of serving dispersed populations of young people is a major one for youth policy in countries such as Finland, Sweden and Romania. The challenges are very different in countries where there is demographic concentration (the Netherlands), but also the greater possibility, indeed sometimes necessity, of mobility (Luxembourg). Further, some of the countries reviewed may be depicted as “flat” societies, characterised by general social and economic equality, while others are clearly more hierarchical, characterised by far greater inequality. This, in and of itself, has implications for the focus and nature of youth policy, though its direction can still not be wholly predicted.

In short, the heterogeneity of the nations in question derives from a range of specificities, which may be summarised as follows:

- political and administrative;
- economic;
- geographical;
- historical;
- cultural.

It is not necessary to go into each of these in any detail, save to say that all clearly bear on the possibilities for shaping “youth policy” of relevance to the twenty-first century. Establishing a balance between continuity and change remains an overarching question, but has to be considered in the context of the very different prevailing traditions which have framed the development of “youth policy” to date. Nowhere is this more striking than in the former communist countries (Romania and Estonia), but similarities can be detected with the situation in Spain, which was subject until relatively recently to a different kind of totalitarianism: indeed, Spain describes itself within its national report as a “young democracy”. The transformation of “youth policy”, from one which was either non-existent or centrally dictated, to one which incorporates more democratically participative practice (both in terms of the relationships between governments and youth NGOs, and in the direct involvement of young people themselves) clearly demands a much more accelerated process in those countries than in those which have more established traditions around such practice (Finland and Sweden).

The rationale for maintaining continuities or effecting policy change is itself of course premised upon that society’s view of its young people, who themselves are a paradox of continuity and change. As the Finnish international report observes:

“Youth policy itself is forged on the anvil of both continuity and change. There is a risk... of overstating the extent of change. We wish to emphasise that any youth policy reflects a ‘reading’ by those responsible for developing it of the situation of young people, which is necessarily a balancing of tradition and change, stability and risk, conformity and resistance. The danger in the construction of any youth policy is that it draws ideas from the most visible issues which create most public concern – projected by young people we have depicted as ‘the spectacular, the deviant and the bizarre’. It is important to be reminded that more invisible young people are usually highly conformist and aspire to a modest place in the existing order. They are neither deviants nor rebels.” (Finland IR, pp. 27-28)

Nor, one might add, are all young people in the vanguard of post-modernism! Indeed, the Romanian international report expresses concern that more disadvantaged young people in Romania are becoming trapped in almost “pre-modern” conditions, and its youth policy must urgently address this issue. Clearly, the preservation of some continuities while simultaneously engaging actively with change (which continuities, which change?) is a critical challenge for all national youth policies.

The case for change and development

But there is, without doubt, and despite the persistence of some traditions which require policy support, an unequivocal case for change and development in the construction of youth policies:

“It is important for every democratic society to familiarise the younger generation with democratic values and practices and with the humanitarian philosophy which lies behind our ideas about welfare and solidarity and thus prepare them for their active participation as citizens. Sharing influence and responsibility is not only a way for young people to learn democratic ways of living together, it is also a way to give them a more meaningful life.” (Netherlands IR, p. 30)

A myriad of connected explanations are routinely advanced to support the case for more robust and “holistic” youth policies. At their core lie challenges such as needs for the building or renewal of democracy, the combating of social exclusion and education and training for individual “employability” and societal economic competitiveness, and the maintenance of civil society. The Luxembourg international report identifies three reasons why “there is a widespread need for youth policies to be reviewed across Europe” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 5):

- changing patterns of youth;
- changing concepts of youth policy;
- changing conditions for youth.

The (draft) Luxembourg international report goes on to express concern that even the most commendable of youth policies (of which Luxembourg’s is one) are failing to keep up with the pace of change in youth cultures and conditions and contexts:

“Youth policy... needs to take on board new challenges facing young people between 15 and 25 and needs to recognise all the domains in which young people become adult, and all the new problems facing them during this increasingly complex and difficult transition. This should be part of the process of review and modernisation of youth policy, a necessary process in all countries.” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 10)

The case for change applies not only to *national* youth policy, however much this may be the axis for effective policy development. Report after report also points to the need for effective *regional and local* policy implementation (where it is often most accessible and meaningful to young people) and to guiding frameworks at a *supra-national* level, to establish core principles and values, key platforms of activity and the dissemination of good practice. In other words, there need to be strong *vertical* connections in youth policy formulation and development. Moreover, there also need to be more robust

horizontal links between different elements of youth policy, so that they are working in harmony and not in conflict. The international reports usefully highlighted various weaknesses on this front, which will be discussed below. Europe's ministers responsible for youth set out this aspiration for youth policy when they declared their aim of implementing:

"...from local to European level, an intersectoral, integrated and coherent youth policy, based on the principles of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Social Charter." (Fifth European Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, Bucharest, 27-29 April 1998)

Not that there is an aspiration to establish some single prescriptive model for youth policy. Indeed, one of the central messages from the international reports is that, even within individual states, there is a need for a diversity of youth policies if the needs of a heterogeneous youth population are to be met. There is no desire amongst either politicians or researchers to produce a fixed blueprint of what the precise detail of "youth policy" should be:

"We do not want, and cannot, work out an overall 'theory of youth and Europe'; that is much too ambitious and is a project which would involve many youth politicians and youth researchers." (Sweden IR, p. 39)

And the Swedish international review team also observed:

"A definition of what a European youth policy really is has never been made and, given the diversity of the member countries and the specifics of national youth policies and traditions – particularly since 1989 – this is not surprising." (Sweden IR, p. 13)

Acceptance that each country is, in many ways, in a unique position – for the reasons cited above – does not, however, preclude also acknowledging that there are common trends and common needs pertaining to young people across Europe. These include:

- multicultural compositions;
- role of informal/non-formal learning;
- differentiating youth within a life-course perspective;
- considering the role of youth in civil society;
- addressing concerns about social exclusion.

For all countries in Europe, there are major new challenges of retaining a sense of national identity when economic and social boundaries are becoming more and more permeable. This becomes especially acute with the (potential) out-migration of more able young people to more desirable countries and the retention of less able young people who invariably will have greater needs. As a result, it becomes clear that national youth policies

cannot stand alone but must also establish an international perspective, understanding that the ways in which each engages with its young people must be related to the patterns and practices of neighbouring countries throughout Europe. Hence the desire to build a broad concept of “youth policy” across Europe. But this itself is dogged by the lack of comparability of much of the information available. Key problems in “making sense” of youth policy within and between countries include:

- gaps in knowledge;
- transferability of policy;
- differential structures of reporting and sources of data;
- standardisation (concepts, statistics, etc.).

One of the purposes of the Council of Europe programme of intergovernmental reviews is, therefore, to develop an understanding of distinctive and common themes which could inform European-wide policy initiatives. Some of the international reports (notably those of Sweden and Estonia) have, indeed, had a stab at outlining some of the paramount themes. For example, the Estonian international report, drawing in part on the work of its five predecessors, suggests that the key “framing ideas” for youth policy are as follows:

- participation, development, peace;
- victims and agents;
- adolescence and post-adolescence (defining “youth”);
- heterogeneity;
- local – global; and
- theorising youth.

(source: Estonia IR, pp. 10-11)

The earlier Swedish international report offered a different set of “building blocks” for a European youth policy. The similarities and differences are evident:

Theoretical

- all European countries have problems and opportunities in common;
- multicultural compositions – intercultural learning and informal learning/education;
- modernisation of European education;
- youth is not a holistic category;
- youth in a European context should be considered together with the concept of civil society.

Methodological

- Comparative approach – international benchmarks; internal strengths and weaknesses;
- Triangulation – perspectives of politicians, youth researchers, and young people;
- Establishment of broadly agreed common criteria.

(Sweden IR, pp. 39-40)

These issues, and many more, form the basis of this report, which is intended to take one further step down the road to framing and shaping the dimensions and elements of youth policy across Europe. It is a road which has not been taken before. The Finnish international report opened with a poem written by the then Minister of Culture. Despite the reports which have followed, it remains pertinent to try to delineate policies for young people in Europe which may both support them in the present and prepare them for the future:

*"There is a road no one has taken before you
 Maybe it's yours
 If you find it, it will be
 It doesn't exist but comes into being when you walk it
 When you turn around, it's gone
 No one knows how you got here, least of all yourself"*

(Claes Andersson, *What Became Words*, p. 141; Finland IR, p. 11)

This poem captures the amorphous nature of the impact of much youth policy which produces tensions around the setting of targets and the measurement of outcomes. Youth policies provide frameworks which some young people need and others use, but – as active agents of their own lives – they are used in different ways, for different reasons and to different ends. It is not always clear how or why certain policy initiatives have been effective. But it is clear that, as youth transitions have become more complex and demand a capacity for "life management", so youth policies need to respond with a broad repertoire of (learning and development) opportunities and experience, tailored to the needs and circumstances of different groups of young people. The purposes of some will, naturally, be more explicit and transparent than others. The meaning of apparently similar policies in different countries is also likely to be different, contingent upon a variety of political and cultural specificities. Thus the framing and shaping of transnational guidelines is, like the very process of producing a commentary on national policy by "experts" coming from very different contexts, riddled with problems and pitfalls. But there are also benefits accruing from a "stranger's eye": rendering the familiar strange and thereby exposing both strengths

and weaknesses to those who may have become so familiar with issues and arguments that they have lost the capacity for critical insight. As Marris and Rein (1972) observed in their seminal account of social reform in the USA:

“The whole process – the false starts, frustrations, adaptations, the successive recasting of intentions, the detours and conflicts – need to be comprehended. Only then can we understand what has been achieved, and learn from that experience. Even though no one ever again will make exactly the same journey, to follow the adventures of the projects offers a general guide to the dangers and discoveries of their field of action.” (Marris and Rein 1972, p. 260)

Like research on “social action”, the Council of Europe’s international reviews of national youth policy arguably constitute “contemporary history”, throwing into relief the stage and state of youth policy in the country under review. Each may provide useful reflection for the countries concerned, but each also – albeit in many different ways – contributes to a slightly sharper view of what, ultimately, a youth policy framework for Europe may embody.

PART 2: PROCESS

The international review process

In 1995 the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) agreed to embark upon a process of international reviews of national youth policy. As a result of each successive review, a general pattern has been established, although at times there has been some deviation from this, some through intent, some through necessity and circumstance. Different member states of the Council of Europe have put themselves forward as candidates for review (I am deliberately avoiding the term "evaluation" – though this is sometimes what they were called). Once this has been approved, they have agreed to produce a national report on youth policy, which has provided the cornerstone for the international experts' initial deliberations. The form and content of these national reports is discussed below. The Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe has then nominated a team of international experts (usually, but not always, six) which has established its own distinct working methods. These have often been modelled on those which preceded them, though not uncritically.

The team of international "experts"

The international team of experts has generally comprised six people. Chaired by a member of the CDEJ, it has also included three youth researchers (one of whom has acted as the rapporteur), one representative of the governing structures (statutory organs) of the Council of Europe, and an administrator from the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe.

The international teams' visits and working methods

Visits by the international experts to the countries under review have typically involved two trips. The first visit has usually entailed a number of days in the capital city, meeting with representatives of various ministries and key (national) organisations responsible for youth policy and raising issues for clarification and of concern arising from the National Report. The first visit may be depicted as one concerned with strategic orientation. The second visit, some months later, has involved more of a "round trip", exploring specific aspects of the national youth policy and discussing policy and practice in relation to more regional and local concerns. The second trip may be depicted as one concerned with operational implementation.

Inevitably, the tone and structure of the international reports derives not only from the substantive “findings” from the international visits, but also from the theoretical and professional interests of the international group itself. While this has added to the richness of the international reports, it makes comparability between the international reports somewhat difficult, despite many common strands of concern and argument. Some international reports are certainly much more theoretical than others. Some have endeavoured to cover the territory outlined in the national reports, whereas others have (often rather repetitively) elected to focus on what are considered to be dominant critical themes. Some have been more dependent on the national reports to guide their deliberations, although the review process has always been explicitly about national youth policy, not a critique or an evaluation of the national reports per se. Indeed, many of the international reports have made use of information sources well beyond the national reports, both written and verbal. This synthesised approach to the production of the international reports was described in the Swedish international report as one of “systematised interaction” – seeking to “triangulate” the available evidence drawn from a range of quarters.

Prior to embarking on their deliberations, the teams of international experts immediately faced a number of dilemmas, many of which persisted through to the final publication of their findings. “Youth” is so broadly defined within and between countries; “youth policy” in the different countries is equally differentially conceived. An immediate question, therefore, was often whether or not the international team should work with the prevailing definitions in the countries under review (and review “youth policy” accordingly), or stamp its own perspectives on the review process and make (prospectively rather different) judgments on that basis.

These dilemmas merit some illustration here. The majority of national youth policies appear to be primarily concerned with enabling young people to become adults. But not all. Indeed, Sweden prides itself on having established a youth policy which is also concerned with enabling young people to be young. This is not, as the Luxembourg international report points out, a dichotomy of perspectives, an either/or – but it is a signpost towards where the priorities for youth policy may lie. The direction in which priority emphasis is established has important implications for youth research, policy development and service delivery.

Of course, rather than an “either/or”, the extension of the age range within which we understand “youth” suggests a need for both. For teenagers (adolescents), policy may remain focused on education and constructive leisure activity, which, historically, has been the focus of youth policy in some of the countries concerned. For older young people (young adults, post-adolescents),

needs are rather different and suggestive of a more “holistic” consideration of youth policy, one which is also connected to labour markets, housing and welfare issues. Most of the international reports worked within this “paradigm”, but it was not always one which was reflected in the national reports.

Coupled to this dilemma was the old chestnut of youth as a “resource” or youth as a “problem”. Some national reports clearly placed an emphasis on the latter, whereas the leaning of the international experts was invariably towards the former. The general position of the international teams was that national youth policies needed to adopt their stance more explicitly. The Luxembourg international report detected a trend that this was already taking place:

“Overall the trend is towards governments gradually taking the route towards recognising the difficulties contemporary society poses for young people in transition, and moving away from the concept of young people as a static and homogenous group which poses a problem for society.” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 18)

The question of the heterogeneity of the youth population also reared its head. Youth researchers recurrently assert the need to differentiate within youth, both vertically (chronologically) and horizontally, between different social groups and between different substantive experiences. That kind of differentiation was not always apparent within the national reports, which focused on young people in other ways.

Indeed, the national reports were each quite distinctive in the focus they adopted in outlining their youth policies. That, for example, the Netherlands focused on vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, Estonia emphasised the centrality of education, and Finland appeared to be preoccupied with integration and participation did not square with the international experts’ different, and more encompassing ideas about “youth” and “youth policy”.

The international reviews often produced more questions than answers; some of their initial questions, arising from a “reading” of the national reports, remained unresolved. This is not an attack on the integrity of the national reports, simply an observation that pressing issues deemed to be important by the international team simply did not have ready answers (in terms of statistical data or other research evidence). The international teams had to rely on anecdotal commentary if they wished to press their point – hardly a satisfactory basis for asserting the importance of a particular perspective.

Yet such assertions should not be ruled out simply because of the absence of “hard” data. The international reports were intended to be both summative (commenting on the substance of evidence available, within the national reports and beyond) and formative (indicating issues and policy areas which perhaps merited further attention and reflection). They were not “evaluations” per se: they were not about passing judgement on a country’s youth policy, but about identifying strengths and weaknesses in a constructive and instructive way.

Of course, as the Finland international report was first to note (in relation to young people’s refusal to take part in military service), a stranger’s eye can deceive. Far from exposing hidden concerns, there was a risk that international teams were “chasing phantoms”, seeking to bring to the surface issues that simply did not exist in the countries concerned. However pronounced issues such as “social exclusion” and “street kids” might be in Romania (or, indeed, the UK), they were not of anything like the same order at all in, for example, the Nordic countries which were reviewed (Sweden and Finland). Conversely, however, some issues were not “phantoms” but had been conveniently swept aside within some national reports, whereas they had been given prominent attention elsewhere. Substance misuse issues come to mind: the tolerant approach in the Netherlands and the more punitive approach in Spain contrast starkly with the view from Finland that it was hardly an issue worthy of debate. The Finnish international review team discovered otherwise.

The international review teams were acutely conscious that the warm welcome and hospitality that they invariably received from the hosting country was part of an endeavour to portray their youth policies in the best possible light. This was to be expected. But the international teams’ responsibility was to produce a critical edge to policy approaches which seemed normal and natural to the countries concerned. To achieve this, the international teams went through stages in which they sought to consolidate their understanding of the youth policy framework and then requested elucidation of what they considered to be key, critical questions. At times, however, probably to the chagrin of the hosting countries, the critical perspectives expressed within the international reports were possibly distorted as a result of the theoretical and empirical interests of members of the review team.

The international review teams were not, of course, expected to restrict their deliberations to the “face value” presentation of the national reports. While this was an essential “bottom up” building block for the production of the international reports, there was also the necessary “benchmarking” of national youth policies against features and frameworks which have already

been identified as legitimate pan-European aspects of youth policy. Working at this critical interface presented a significant challenge for the international review teams.

There were occasions when the international teams were frustrated by the absence of a completed national report in time for their initial visit, leaving them floundering somewhat in establishing their own orientation. The Spanish national report was not completed in time, nor was the national report on Estonia. Even the Finland national report, which had had a long preparatory run-in, was only available in draft form prior to the visit of the international team. But, as noted already, despite such procedural problems, the international review process was not an evaluation of the national reports, nor were the national reports ever intended to be the sole source of "evidence" for the international reviews.

By the end of 2000, the Council of Europe itself had identified a number of prevailing themes which had guided the work of the international teams, or surfaced during their reflections. These included the themes of participation, citizenship, democracy, tolerance, non-formal education and leisure activity, young people with special needs and young people in specific circumstances (Luxembourg meeting, December 2000). This report builds on those conclusions.

The national reports

The national reports which served as a starting point for the international review process differed considerably, both in their production and in their content, although most had predictably similar substance at their core. Inevitably, for example, formal educational provision and participation loomed large. But even the most common themes were given different emphasis and attention.

The production of the national reports was sometimes kept firmly in the hands of the national government, to the point of exclusion of other potential contributors. A case in point is that of Sweden, where the national report was prepared by the National Board for Youth Affairs (*Ungdomsstyrelsen*), which co-ordinates youth-related matters of the central authorities, with only an appendix offered by the National Council for Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU). (It should be noted that the Swedish international report was critical of the lack of political engagement by the LSU.) In contrast, the Finnish national report had four sections, prepared independently by government, the Finnish Youth Research Society, the national youth agency (Alliansi), and a final section providing a voice for youth organisations and drawing from statistical data from the annual "youth barometer". As a result, this national report contained contrary and competing perspectives

which, it argued, reflected a confidence in youth policy in Finland and provided what Minister Andersson described as a “polemic tension” within which the international review team could consider different angles. Elsewhere, the national report was “farmed out” to a research organisation (as in Romania). (The Romanian government subsequently expressed disquiet about some of its evidence and conclusions.) In Spain, the government also commissioned the bulk of the work to a research organisation, but then – through discussion and consultation – formally approved its structure and content. The approach of the Netherlands was more eclectic, in that the Inter-Departmental Youth Research Committee took the lead, devising a range of commissioning and consultation before the final report was composed under the co-ordination of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. Similarly, Luxembourg involved youth researchers and youth organisations as well as the central administration.

Table 1: The coverage of “youth policy” in the national reports

	Fin	Neth	Swed	Spain	Rom	Est	Lux
Historical developments	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Demography and change	*	*			*		*
Social condition of young people	*	*	*	*	*		*
Development of youth work/policy	*	*				*	
Multiculturalism/minorities	*	*		*	*	*	*
Administrative structures and service delivery	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Central	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Regional	*	*		*	*	*	
Local	*	*	*	*		*	*
National Youth Council				*			
Policy arenas							
Education	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Employment	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Health (and drugs)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Social protection/means of support	*	*		*			*
Welfare	*		*				
Housing (and homelessness)	*		*				
Transport	*						
Child/youth care/protection	*	*				*	
Family circumstances			*	*	*	*	*
Crime, order/safety and justice	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Military service/defence	*			*	*	*	
Rural youth	*			*	*		

	Fin	Neth	Swed	Spain	Rom	Est	Lux
Specific issues							
Citizenship/participation/influence	*	*	*	*	*		*
Exclusion			*				*
Politics	*		*		*	*	
Values	*					*	*
Youth culture	*	*	*		*	*	
Leisure (and sport)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Youth information		*					
International links/mobility		*		*	*	*	*
Equality between men and women			*				
Identity				*			
Personal relationships				*			
Views on the world/Europe				*			
Religion					*	*	
Sexual minorities					*		
Media coverage					*		
Emigration					*		
Violence							*
Training of "youth workers"							*
Youth research	*				*		

Different approaches to the production of the national reports do not necessarily mean that their shape and form needs to be different. Much depends, inevitably, on the conception of "youth policy" which informs the process. But they were sometimes strikingly different, both in structure and content. The following chart illustrates the range of issues covered in each of the seven national reports (using Finland as a starting point). Where there are no asterisks does not mean that such issues were not mentioned, but they were given relatively limited profile in relation to other issues (see Table 1).

The ways in which these themes and topics were covered varied considerably, in both breadth and depth. Some were prefaced and defended by more theoretical input, others simply described the prevailing situation. Some were embedded within formal legislation, others paid greater attention to mechanisms for service delivery. There are, as it is said, many ways to slice a cake – and the national reports were no exception. Indeed, they themselves often sliced the cake in different ways, drawing on the different perspectives held by, for example, the administration, youth researchers, and young people themselves.

It is the responses by the international review teams to this coverage and the ways in which specific youth policy initiatives are explained which constitute the body of this report. For while issues such as "multiculturalism" or "drugs" may have been given attention in the national reports, the policy

agenda may well have been very different. At times, some issues were apparently conspicuous by their absence, even if the international teams might be accused of chasing phantoms (see above). For example, the international teams expressed concern about the lack of discussion of particular groups of young people in some national reports (such as immigrant youth in Sweden) or were critical of the absence of persuasive empirical data on particular issues (such as youth homelessness in Luxembourg).

There are, of course, important questions to be asked about the processes by which the national reports were produced, and the role of those who were asked to produce them. There are questions about who should be asked to contribute beyond national governments (the youth research community, youth organisations, young people), and at what stage in the process.

But this is not the issue here. The issue here is to draw on the content that was made available to the international review teams, in conjunction with the international reports that followed. This report will take note of that content, but its primary purpose is to consider the issues raised through the international review process, and the extent to which there are common threads or differences between the seven countries which have been reviewed. These, in turn, may be indicative of directions for the construction of youth policy or suggestive of the need for some caution and deeper reflection.

Both the national reports and the international reports are already, in some respects at least, out of date. It is important to remember that they themselves are locked in time. Indeed, the international reports were sometimes being produced at a time when the preceding national report was already dated, because the respective government was already effecting review and revision of a variety of policies concerning and affecting young people. Sweden, for example, was already well advanced in establishing a new law on youth policies following the submission of reports by a Commission on Youth Policies in 1997. The national report prepared for the Council of Europe international review had nothing, in formal terms, to do with that process. Similarly, Luxembourg was already in the process of reviewing its educational policies at the very time the international review team was visiting. Thus the somewhat static picture presented by the national reports conceals the dynamic of continual reflection upon, and re-shaping of, youth policy. It is to this dynamic – through the identification of overarching themes and challenges – that this report seeks to make a contribution, rather than getting bogged down in the detail of specific approaches in individual countries.

PART 3: OUTCOME

Conceptualising “youth”

Sociologists have long argued that “youth” is socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Historically, there may have been a case to be made that socially constructed “youth” coincided largely with biologically and psychologically determined “adolescence”. By the latter part of the twentieth century, however, such a connection had largely been fractured, with increasing theoretical assertion that “youth” had become a prolonged stage in the life-course. It had become characterised by multiple contexts of transition (from earlier “childhood” to later “adulthood”) and imbued with less certainty that such transitions would take a linear form (economic independence, independent living and separate family formation) and greater risk. In other words, “youth” as a concept embodied different issues and visions, not just in relation to the “age range” that it encapsulated, but also in terms of its character (a resource or a problem). Each has implications for policy. Indeed, to step for a moment outside of the Council of Europe’s work, the new Children and Young People’s Unit in England covers an age range of 0-25 (children and young people). It has sought to establish a policy vision for the younger age band in terms of “security and development” but one for the older age band in terms of being “in good shape and with an increasingly capacity for life management”.

The different countries involved in the Council of Europe review had very mixed conceptions of “youth”. Youth in Estonia ranges from 7 to 26, which the international team maintained had:

“...an extensive and administrative character... and reflects most of the age groups involved in some form of state-sponsored activity, notably the education system.” (Estonia IR, p. 20)

This was, according the international report, a *de facto* reflection of the “heavy pedagogical and instructional tradition” (Estonia IR, p. 24) which underpins and guides youth policy in Estonia.

The Netherlands simply does not draw a distinction between children and young people, focusing (like England) its policy response on the age range 0 to 25 (although it does often define a sub-group aged between 12 and 25). This was a matter for comment by the international review team, which maintained that this blurring of the boundaries between children and youth had both positive and negative consequences for “youth policy”. On a pos-

itive front, it ensures “seamless transitions” between policies for children and those for young people; on a negative front, it asserted that there was an inevitable drift towards a policy focus on children at the expense of young people. Indeed, the international report maintained that the national report should have been entitled a “national report on children and youth”, for there was too much information outside of the age band which the international team specified as “youth”: that is, young people between the ages of 15 and 25.

The Spanish international review team also took issue with Spain's concept of youth, which it found “relatively strained”. The Spanish national report argued that “to be young embraces all those between the ages of 14 and 30” and suggested that even this was now extending to 32 or 34, which is when many Spanish young people move to independent living. Notwithstanding post-modernist arguments, the international report contended that Eriksonian thinking remains important: if drives (for independence) are not fulfilled, young people become anomic (in a state of “identity crisis”).

The Swedish national report elaborated on a frequent reluctance to draw distinctions by age in conceptualising “youth”. Its youth policy did not want to make an absolute choice between the two competing notions of youth as a social category and youth as a phase in life. As with the Netherlands, the Swedish international report maintained that this had unfavourable consequences. There may be some rationale for making no clear distinctions between children, middle and late adolescence, and post-adolescence – but these are “markedly different life-phases, each of them with their own desires and needs” (Sweden IR, p. 18). Similar points were made in relation to Luxembourg where, despite the growing recognition of the needs of “youth” in post-adolescence, policy has remained (so far) focused on serving the needs of young people during their teenage years. Unlike the Spanish international team, however, the Luxembourg experts were willing to work with the definition provided for them in the national report: “by “young people”, we normally mean those aged between 15 and 25, but for the purposes of this report we accept the Luxembourg definition of 12 to 25 years” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 6).

Elsewhere in their analyses, the international reports repeatedly draw attention to the heterogeneity of youth. They point to the need for differentiated youth policy responses to address the needs of different sub-groups within the youth population (the most explicit references are made to more disadvantaged young people, young women, ethnic minority young people and, less frequently, young people with disabilities). Both within and between countries, the same argument might be advanced in terms of the “youth

concept" itself. (Some) young people in Finland and the Netherlands (and probably in Sweden, too) may display "post-modern" characteristics in terms of their values and life-styles. But the Romanian international report drew attention to the fact that a significant minority of young people in Romania were retreating (or being forced back) into "pre-modernity". The policy implications for addressing the needs of different kinds of "youth" are therefore evident. Not that "post-modern" youth necessarily have fewer needs. It is contended that they may in fact have a greater sense of uncertainty and "social dislocation", which has been closely associated with the growth in a number of psycho-social disorders. Indeed, the Spanish international report suggests that the "modern" young people of Spain are perhaps protected from the worst excesses of the anomie they experience as a result of problematic transitions to independence by the fact that they are still governed and guided by clearer norms, provided by their families and the church. They have yet to become the "post-modern" youth which is emergent in northern Europe: "The post-modernist mentality is not part of the mentality of young people in Spain" (Spain IR, p. 12). And only at the very end of its national report did Sweden consider different definitions of "youth" – as a social category, as a phase in life, and as a generation. The national report then usefully reflects on the problematics attached to youth policy which is either aimed at helping young people to become adult, or about helping young people to be young (see Sweden NR, pp. 265-276).

Beyond the theoretical battleground around definitions of "youth" lie more empirical issues about the "social condition" and "social orientation" of young people. These are equally contested and equally diverse, but there are some common signposts. The (draft) Luxembourg report provides a useful framework for considering these issues. It asserts once more the heterogeneity of youth and points to the rapid changes in the social conditions of young people as a result of:

- youth's own changing expectations;
- changing socio-economic and policy structures;
- wider global change.

The new "character" of youth transitions lies in the fact that they are extended and complex and vulnerable to what the Luxembourg international report calls "backtracking"; in other words, progression cannot be taken for granted and "forward" transitions can be reversible. "Citizenship" is less secure and less clearly defined. There are more polarised inequalities, between those able to make the most of new opportunities and those more vulnerable to risk and social exclusion. There is a new paradox in that more privileged young people now face more extended dependency but

ultimately more certainty in making successful transitions, whereas those at the “bottom end” experience more accelerated transitions but are more at risk. Some excluded and at risk young people are highly visible, and are therefore a key focus of public policy, because of the problems they are perceived to cause. But there are other less visible young people equally in need, but they are less likely to get an adequate policy response to the problems they experience. This new social and economic condition of young people is well documented, and raises policy questions about the role of the family in relation to the state, and the capacity of either or both to support the aspirations of young people for autonomy and independence.

There are also less well documented dimensions to the new social condition of young people, which surfaced in different ways in the international reports. Most of the international reports reiterated the “individualisation thesis” propounded in sociological and life-course theory. But they also portrayed some more general, and collective trends, within and across the respective countries. While, for example, (secure and well-paid) jobs are a paramount, if often elusive, priority for most young people in most countries, research in Sweden suggests that the priority for young people there is more active and authentic participation. Amongst adolescent youth, there remains a strong interest in leisure time activities and sport, raising questions about how much public policy should respond on this front. General trends can be detected around declining levels of participation in formal youth organisations, and increasing orientations towards the political right. There appears to be a growing disillusionment, and lack of trust and confidence in the capacity of political structures and public policy to support young people and respond to their aspirations. This is, indeed, very negative in Romania, rather more mixed in Finland. Furthermore, there is a general belief that young people are unlikely to achieve the lifestyles and standards of living of their parents. For many young people across Europe, there is a general pessimism about the future. Spanish young people, despite the concerns expressed in the international report about “anomie” and despite their particularly pronounced difficulties in moving to independent living, appear to be the exception to this rule: they are broadly happy with their living conditions.

Both conceptualisations of “youth” and depictions of their “social condition” – in all their diversities – highlight the challenges for “youth policy” and signal the need for the development and delivery of a range of interventions and support for young people. Yet quite how this is itself conceived and implemented is also a matter for debate. The international reports are testimony to this.

Conceptualising “youth policy”

Following a recent speech in the Lithuanian Parliament (the Seimas) on “The Idea of Youth Policy”, I was involved in a discussion about how things might be taken forward, building on the “youth policy concept” established in 1997. This triggered a thought that “youth policy” might be framed around five “C”s, which may be instructive to introduce here (Table 2).

Before elaborating on the commentaries of the international reports, it is worth elucidating such general framework thinking further. The international reports themselves drew attention to what might be called “cross overs” in policy, or the lack of them. Some youth policy was clearly separate and segmented, with little dialogue between the different strands. Other policy was the product of shared debate and, consequently, more synchronised. Yet this still begged questions about who took (or should take) lead responsibility for policy affecting young people, and who is left out or chooses not to engage in the policy development process. Such questions apply not only at the level of central administration, but also at regional and local levels.

Table 2: Concept and coherence in youth policy

- | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Coverage (geographical and social groups) – Capacity (the role and relationship of government and youth NGOs) – Competence (the question of training and qualifications) – Co-operation, co-ordination and coherence (hierarchically and horizontally) – Cost (the financial and human resources required) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The universally proclaimed aspiration is for an “integrated” youth policy. The United Nations argued recently that this now characterises the youth policy in over 90% of its member states, despite its concession that many are still dominated by preoccupations with education and training. The potential achievement of such integration, however, requires policy structures which both incorporate political and professional decision-making across sectors affecting young people and engage with representatives of young people who are likely to be affected by those decisions. This produces an imperative for effective structures and practice of consultation and participation (which will be discussed further below). As the Finnish international report indicated:

“‘Youth policy’ as a concept is the *product* of (international), national, regional (provincial) and local political decisions made within a range of policy sectors (such as education, training, housing or health). It is concerned both with the general population of young people and with specific sub-groups within that

general population (such as young women, offenders or ethnic minorities). It may even extend to highly focused initiatives directed towards such sub-categories around specific policy themes (such as young mothers, or ethnic minority unemployment). All these levels of youth policy are, however, informed by many partners and contributors – both within the administration and outside of it. Research data, youth organisations, media profiling, the defenders of public morals and different pressure groups all try to influence political thinking about the dimensions of youth policy, which may or may not be ‘appropriate for the positive development of young people within a society’. What they do, however, is to give shape to the priorities in youth policy.” (Finland IR, p. 30, emphasis original)

It might be added that the shaping of priorities provides strong indicators of the level of resourcing which needs to be attached to them.

The international reports, in different ways, expose the fact that most, if not all, of the national youth policies reviewed fell substantially short of this “holistic” approach to the framing and shaping of youth policy. Priorities and focus for youth policy were often much more narrowly conceived, and derived from a much more narrow field of information and consultation.

The objectives of youth policy were conceived in different ways. As noted above, most youth policies expressed some general aspiration to help young people to become adult, in terms of both “employability” and “citizenship”, but Sweden departed from this norm by asserting that its youth policy was about “helping young people to be young”.

In the process of seeking to form policy to help young people to become adult, some policies were more focused on the prevention of social problems caused by young people or their “cure” when they emerged. Others were less problem-focused and governed more by the provision of opportunities. It might be contended that opportunity-focused youth policy seeks to establish universal policy guided by the concept of youth as a resource. In contrast, particularistic youth policy (targeted at specific groups) is guided by a concept of youth as a (at least potential) problem. This, in turn, leads to questions as to whether youth policy is a mainstream or marginal component of public policy, and whether its approach is synchronised or segmented.

What is apparent, however, is that most countries have dramatically expanded their youth policy in recent years, both in conception and operation. As some of the preceding argument has suggested, the age range across which youth policy is applied has broadened considerably. And as Table 1 illustrates the policy domains and issues which are considered to be legitimate territory for youth policy have also diversified. It is one thing,

however, to engage in some grand rhetoric about robust and integrated youth policy, quite another to establish mechanisms for effective delivery.

Illustration

For rather different reasons, both the Estonian and Netherlands approach to youth policy were described by their respective international review teams as “paternalistic”. In the former case, this was because of an absence of a “youth voice”, as a result of the lack of a national youth council (see below). In the case of the Netherlands, it was alleged that there was a “residual paternalism” in Netherlands youth policy, epitomised by the terms “care” and “prevention”:

“Youth policy in the Netherlands throws down the obvious challenge to residual paternalism and at the same time shows how difficult it is to overcome.”
(Netherlands IR, p. 27)

A clustering of perspectives is pertinent here. The residual paternalism perceived in the Netherlands by the international review team led it to conclude that its youth policy had a “curative” and “problem-oriented” focus, one which did not take sufficient account of the subjective and active concerns of young people themselves. This is not dissimilar to the argument advanced by the international review team for Estonia, except in the matter of degree. It is also similar to the Spanish international team’s observations about the formal rationality of Spain’s youth policy at the expense of subjective rationality. The message is that the conceptualisation of youth policy must inject a stronger emphasis on an “opportunity-oriented” focus, which requires more effective strategies for ensuring the participation of young people (see below).

Yet even Finland, with its apparently strong traditions of youth participation and a firm statement that “young people have the right to construct and the responsibility for constructing their own future” (Finland NR, p. 64) has adopted a “concern strategy” around the living conditions of young people. This might also be held to be “paternalistic” and therefore there is perhaps a need for caution in the use of such loaded terms. As the Netherlands international report in fact accepts, there is a dualism in the Netherlands approach to youth policy: it may appear to be seeking to intensify “control” over young people, but it also seeks to support the creative potential of young people. So while its youth policy may apparently focus on the problems caused and experienced by the 15% of young people considered to be at risk, there is also a declared orientation towards understanding youth positively (Netherlands IR, p. 16). We should not be surprised at all at this dichotomy. It almost certainly exists in conceptualisations of youth policy in all countries: the critical issue is the balance between the two.

The objectives of youth policy varied considerably. The Sweden international report argued that two main approaches were “promising” in the move towards a European youth policy:

- young people as a human resource, not (only) as a problem;
- citizenship and the fight against social exclusion.

The Estonian international report virtually repeated this point, maintaining that two promising approaches related to human resource policy and European citizenship.

These have been (at least dormant) threads which have informed the deliberations of a succession of youth ministerial conferences in Strasbourg (1985), Oslo (1988), Lisbon (1990), Vienna (1993) and Luxembourg (1995), although the dominant priorities, framed very generally, were as follows:

- participation;
- equal opportunities;
- social situation of the young in Europe;
- global and integrated youth policy.

By the ministerial conference in Bucharest in 1998, however, the essential focus of youth policy was considered to be:

- participation and citizenship;
- fighting social exclusion;
- non-formal education.

The question of access to the labour market (“employability”) ran through all of these areas. This is, indeed, always a core aspiration for youth policy, alongside a number of others. Where it has been possible to distil the key objectives of national youth policy, the following table has done so:

Table 3: Key objectives for youth policy

	Fin	Neth	Swed	Spain	Rom	Est	Lux
Personal growth and civic activities		*					
Promoting opportunities		*					
Opportunities for participation and influence				*			

	Fin	Neth	Swed	Spain	Rom	Est	Lux
Fostering the activities of youth associations						*	
Youth work/political participation							*
Young people's living conditions	*						
Opportunities for independence			*				
Education and employment				*			
Education and educational measures						*	
Education and integration							*
Internationalism	*						
Preventing the exclusion of young people	*						
Prevention and combat of dropping out		*					
Fomenting creativity in young people			*				

This is a crude guide to the priorities for youth policy within different countries, but it serves as an illustration of what the central objectives of youth policy might, and perhaps should, be. There are clear relationships between them. The promotion of participation is, simultaneously, a strategy akin to the prevention of exclusion. Education and employment are pivotal to independence and integration. Thus there is no clash or dissent about the core objectives of youth policy, although in some countries they are conspicuous through their absence.

Delivery of youth policy – structures and finance

Legislation

Most countries now have specific legislation concerning young people, though their relation to “integrated” youth policy remains a matter for debate, and specifically “youth” legislation is often restricted to youth work and formal education. Sweden, as noted above, is about to pass a bill on its new youth policy. Finland has its Youth Work Act of 1997, which supersedes three previous Youth Work Acts and is more broadly concerned with the “living conditions” of young people. Both Romania and Estonia have a raft of legislative decrees relating to young people which were passed during the 1990s.

But, as the Romanian international report points out, decrees and laws are all very well, but they do not necessarily lead to effective practice, unless appropriate structures for delivery are in place and the necessary resourcing made available. The same point is made in the international report on Estonia: “the use of acts expresses or reflects the wills and wishes of the society, but not necessarily the effects” (Estonia IR, p. 18). This is what is commonly understood as the “implementation gap”. Moreover, as the Spanish

international report is at pains to note, the formulation and implementation of youth policy needs to be grounded beyond a process of “formal rationalisation” (the explicit arguments of decision makers). It must also take account of “subjective rationalisation”, which considers the subjective perspectives of those affected by prevailing or intended legislation:

“In the opinion of the international group of experts the biggest deficiency of Spanish legislation is the neglect of subjective rationalisation and the abundance of laws which focus on formal reasoning in the name of democratic principles. Because of this, many of youth's social problems cannot be solved.” (Spain IR, p. 53)

This is akin to an argument I have propounded in relation to youth policy for many years. However well-intentioned and well-constructed any piece of youth policy, it will fail if it does not detect the hidden criteria which inform young people's responses to it. Such responses may be very different from those which had been anticipated and which had been the rational grounds for establishing the policy in the first place. (This, incidentally, reinforces the case for sensible structures for the participation of young people in decision-making: beyond complying with Article 12 of the UN Convention on Human Rights and providing learning opportunities for “citizenship”, it offers the promise of more effective practice.)

Youth policy, and the legislation which governs it, invariably flows from an ideological vision which informs the strategic orientation of youth policy. Such ideological visions were especially pronounced in Estonia (which attaches great significance to education) and Finland (which attaches great significance to youth work and its contribution to citizenship). Some international reports expressed concern that it was a lack of such an ideological vision – an “ideological vacuum” – which jeopardised the likelihood of establishing effective structures and securing cross-departmental and devolved commitment to the delivery of youth policy.

Finance

All the countries in question, for very different reasons, have faced fiscal pressures on the resources available for youth policy. There may be much rhetoric around views that young people are the future (our future) and that they demand appropriate investment, but there will always be issues of budgetary constraint. Some financial restrictions are, however, a false economy. The international reports often drew attention to the fact that youth NGOs were increasingly unable to secure “structural” (or core) funding from governments, which were only prepared to fund project costs. While this had sometimes made youth NGOs more entrepreneurial (as in the Netherlands), the downside was that many youth NGOs had to spend a disproportionate

amount of time seeking funding, at the expense of their core business of representing and advocating on behalf of young people and particular youth issues.

This is not the place to address the overall expenditure on “youth policy” in the countries under consideration. This would anyway be a mammoth and complex task. Suffice it to say that, while different countries clearly have different resource levels at their disposal, there has been a general trend to devolve financial responsibility away from central government. There may be admirable arguments to defend such action (that it permits greater local flexibility and self-determination, and that it enables greater autonomy for young people), but these may also be viewed as a convenient post-hoc rationalisation for the abdication of financial responsibility for youth policy. Regional authorities and municipalities are often equally stretched. The consequence is either that “youth policy” simply does not reach those at whom it is directed or that complex service delivery remains under-professionalised and under-resourced and, sometimes (as in Luxembourg) largely still in the hands of volunteers. Such problems are sometimes exacerbated by the levels of autonomy at regional and local levels. Central governments may provide frameworks, sometimes backed by law, but they cannot direct devolved government to deliver (see below). Without ensuring adequate resourcing, the “implementation gap” is likely to widen. As the Netherlands international review team observed, in response to an observation in the Netherlands national report that funding cutbacks had in some cases “caused general youth and community services to virtually disappear from the social map in municipalities”:

“[...] transferring duties and responsibilities to authorities in the provinces (regional level) and the municipalities (local level) has been accompanied by cuts in financing which limited instead of increasing the opportunities of local administrations to intervene in youth problems.” (Netherlands IR, p. 21)

On this front, the Netherlands international review team asserted that there was a need for legislation and extra resourcing if the visions for youth policy were to take effect.

Whatever the financial arguments, it is patently apparent that national youth policies are increasingly being delegated and devolved to more regional and local levels, with mixed consequences.

Structures for delivery

Vertical delivery

Most countries have a three-tier “cascade” structure for the strategic direction and operational delivery of youth policy. (This is the vertical connection

of youth policy and says nothing about the breadth or diversity of youth policy – where horizontal connections are equally significant.) Legislation is made and frameworks established by the central government and administration, which shape the possibility for service delivery by regional and local (municipal) administrations.

A fundamental question for youth policy is the extent of guidance, even prescription (and perhaps even hypothecated funding) that should be provided from the centre. Many countries involved in the review process (such as Finland and the Netherlands, and “obviously” Romania and Estonia) had formerly, for different reasons, much firmer centralised prescription. Romania, according to the international report, still does, and it is asserted that “attempts to establish local youth policies have not met with great success. There is a gap which needs to be filled... decentralisation is an advisable course” (Romania IR, p. 61). Elsewhere, however, the trend has already been to “enable” greater discretion and flexibility at regional and municipal level, within the parameters of central expectation. The case for giving greater freedom to the local level is made on the basis of the need for a more flexible localised response to need, permitting local interpretation and implementation, but this has also usually been in the context of fewer resources to deliver within a centrally guided framework. There are significant issues about the relationship between encouraging greater regional and local autonomy through a process of decentralisation. In the Netherlands, so the international report contends, central government fulfils core duties (facilitation, monitoring and innovation) and gives an orienting framework to the lower levels of administration. In Spain, of course, central policy cannot be enforced because of the existing autonomy of its regions; the negative consequence of this, according to the international report, is that youth policy aspirations at the centre are simply overlooked or neglected.

There is no doubt that there is a strong argument in favour of differentiated service delivery of youth policy within the same country, in order to deal with the diversity of social conditions of young people. The Sweden international report makes this case forcefully, contrasting the situation of rural youth in Sweden with those who live in the urban centres. But there will be a persisting tension between the desire to enable relevant localised responses, while at the same time ensuring a consistency of response to all young people, wherever they may live. (This is, in part, a question of “coverage” – see above.) The point was made concisely by the Luxembourg international report:

“National frameworks need to be flexible enough to be adapted according to local need but at the same time they need to ensure some evenness of provision.”
(draft Luxembourg IR, p. 57)

This comment derived from some concern that, because Luxembourg is a small country, there was no intermediary “regional” level between central and local administrations. The devolution of youth policy delivery to the local level was, by and large, commended and was arguably working effectively, but the international review team simply wanted to inject a note of caution. In fact, it was not alone in airing this concern. In Sweden, because of its demographic and geographical characteristics, there is also no “middle band” and the international review team wondered whether the “gap” between the centre and the municipalities was perhaps “too large” for some municipalities to discharge the responsibilities required of them by central government. In the appendix to the national report, the National Council for Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU) makes a similar point to that asserted in the Luxembourg international report:

“Decentralisation of youth policy and increased municipal responsibility can lead to an implementation of youth policy that varies in different parts of the country. It is important here to consider whether a policy that is only determined by guidelines can actually survive priorities when fewer resources mean spending cuts in the public sector.... What is lacking in the design of youth policy is thus not overall goals but rather some type of statement from state authorities in which they acknowledge a responsibility for ensuring that these goals are met.” (Sweden NR, p. 291, 292)

Illustration

The inadequacy in some countries of vertical structures for the delivery of youth policy, and the obstacles which impeded effective implementation, were subject to critical observation in the international reports. In Spain, the international report commented on the formal vertical structure and the central (horizontal) structures which produced an “elaborate and complicated system” for the initiation and implementation of youth policy. But it maintained that regional youth programmes were not well known at the local level, and that regional autonomy meant that centrally determined youth policy was sometimes ineffective:

“It is known that youth policies at the autonomous region level are relatively independent of those promoted at the central level. In this context, the group do not believe that in reality they are much influenced by the central policy as stated in the Spanish National Report.” (Spain IR, p. 49)

For other reasons, Romania was criticised in its international report for that lack of sufficient vertical structures. There was too much dependency on youth NGOs and, however important a role they might play for other reasons, “youth policy cannot – or rather, should not – be left up to the NGOs.

Only a small number of Romanian young people belong to them" (Romania IR, p. 59). More intensive criticism of the structures for the delivery of youth policy related, however, to horizontal issues at the national level (see below).

The Estonia international team also commented robustly on the weaknesses of horizontal structures at national level (see below), but maintained that the establishment of effective vertical structures represented an even more important challenge for the future (to prepare the way for effective horizontal co-operation at lower levels of policy delivery):

"There are some shortcomings mentioned in the cross-sectoral and comprehensive youth policy at the national or state level. But the greatest challenges for the coming years will be the realisation of the ideas of county and municipal youth work, and the accompanying models for the comprehensive and cross-sectoral work at local levels. This means how to bring together schools, traditional and modern youth work, child welfare, health institutions and professionals in a form of co-operation that breaks down the borders between them, and opens these fields for young people's active participation and influence on their own conditions." (Estonia IR, p. 38)

There was an urgent need for the "general reform in the structure of the units of public administration, and also a financial regime that does not exist today, if any implementations are to take place" (ibid.).

Horizontal delivery

There has also been a trend towards encouraging more networking between different dimensions of youth policy, often at all levels of the administration of youth policy. Governments have placed a lot of faith in the capacity of cross-sectoral and interagency partnerships to establish what in the UK has become known as "joined up" practice, to respond to the joined up problems caused and experienced by young people. Once again, it is a difficult argument to rebut, but it is an even more difficult task to put into practice. The rhetoric of partnership is an appealing one, but rarely converts easily into reality. Certainly, the international reports commented favourably on cross-departmental arrangements at government level (even when some apparently relevant ministries were conspicuous by their absence in such arrangements) but at more grounded levels, there still appeared to be some way to go. Recent developments in the Netherlands suggest that financial constraint and the delegation of youth policy implementation to the local level has in fact had the effect of creating new networks and more cross-sectoral co-operation. But the lesson from Finland is that while specific professional groups (such as youth workers, social workers or the police) may now be working more closely together across municipal boundaries, there are still limited initiatives involving multi-agency partnerships within municipalities.

Compulsory youth boards in Finland were “abolished” in 1995. This occurred at the very time when youth policy had become sufficiently important to require collaboration across a number of policy arenas. Yet “the organ for a discrete youth policy at the local level was subordinated and incorporated within political sub-committees with wider terms of reference and possible other priorities” (Finland IR, p. 38). Criticism was even more forthright in relation to Romania: “From what we were able to observe there does not exist adequate co-ordination between the main agents involved in implementing national youth policy... youth policies are characteristically fragmented and unco-ordinated” (Romania IR, p. 61, 62).

Illustration

It is perhaps invidious to single out Romania for such criticism, for “fragmented” youth policy is hardly unique to there. And, like Estonia, Romania is seeking to shape its national youth policy within many other dramatic changes that are taking place in its society. This will inevitably take time. But the view of the international review team is still worth repeating, for it articulates precisely the challenge for the making of youth policy:

“Since 1989 there has been no youth policy in Romania in terms of an overall strategy designed to promote the education and social integration of young people. There are only sector policies, not always consistent with each other, and rarely concerted... The challenge facing Romania in this sector is to broaden the scope of sectoral youth policies and to increase their effectiveness; but youth issues cannot simply be resolved by a set of sectoral policies. There is therefore the challenge of co-ordinating these sectoral policies in an integrated and overall fashion.” (Romania IR, p. 58, 59)

Similar points of concern might easily be made in the context of youth policies elsewhere, even where horizontal structures for delivery were generally viewed more favourably. For example, in Luxembourg, the three youth policy related “action plans” (see Luxembourg NR, pp. 106-118) have been defined by government, but responsibility for interpretation and implementation is largely devolved to the local level. Thus the vertical structures appear to be in place. But the shaping of the plans, through the *horizontal* structures at the level of central government, gave the international review team some cause for concern. The principle to the approach was right, in that the direction (see below – “A dynamic for youth policy development”) for the plans was guided by the *Conseil Supérieur de la Jeunesse* (CSJ). The CSJ comprises representatives from various ministries dealing with youth issues (Employment, Justice, Education, Health, Culture and Family, Social Solidarity and Youth), plus delegates from five youth NGOs. Action Plan 3 was concerned with a holistic agenda, one aim being “to ensure the socialisation of young people and their preparation for the many changes in the

economic and cultural domains". The other action plans clearly related to what might be called "transition policy". Yet neither social security nor housing is represented on the CSJ and this was viewed as a cause for concern by the international review team. Nor is the CSJ represented on the Sports Council or the Employment Council. The CSJ was, therefore, an "underdeveloped resource" for the strategic development of youth policy in Luxembourg (see draft Luxembourg IR, p. 60).

Most countries have established some kind of cross-departmental body at national level to consider youth policy issues, but many – like Luxembourg – do not include all the players that the international review teams believe should be represented. As a result, the framing of youth policy does not always add up to an "integrated" approach in terms of strategic and operational co-ordination at different levels.

Finland perhaps offers one model where an integrated approach is most apparent. The Ministry of Education (which, soon after the international review, became the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture) co-ordinates the involvement of other government ministries and takes advice from the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs, the national youth agency (Alliansi) and the Association of Finnish Local Authorities (AFLA). These framers and shapers of youth policy appear to have worked with a commendable level of harmony, to the point of constructing a new youth work strategy (NUOSTRA). NUOSTRA produced the "concern strategy" which has focused on employment issues, income support, independent living and health lifestyles as the strategic goals for Finnish youth policy (see Finland IR, p. 31). However, not all ministries are represented on the Advisory Council, and some declined to participate. This points to some of the challenges of persuading the senior political establishment of the importance of youth issues as a cross-cutting theme within departmental decision-making.

But other countries still have a long way to go to reach even this point. As the Estonian international review team observed, health, welfare, employment, housing and demographic problems:

"[...] do not seem to be recognised within the main youth policy agenda... [there is therefore] the lack or weak existence of a general youth policy framework connecting the isolated sectors and institutions into a comprehensive patchwork." (Estonia IR, p. 30, 31)

In the case of Estonia, it is perhaps the elision of education with the idea of youth policy which is obstructing the inclusion of greater horizontal connection of policy arenas which affect young people. Indeed, one of the recommendations of the international review team was for a strategic re-think of the relationship between education and youth policy.

Youth organisations

A key instrument for the participation of young people is through youth organisations. These have the potential to play a key role in the delivery of youth policy, from the point of advising on constructive developments to contributing, through partnership, to service delivery. Yet the role and place of youth organisations in structures for the determination and delivery of youth policy varied enormously and often remained unclear. Of course, "youth organisations" take many forms and there are questions about their representativeness. This notwithstanding, they are concrete examples of the active involvement of young people in civil society – something which is held to be an important cross-cutting vein of youth policy throughout Europe. The international reports made a range of observations about the youth NGO sector in different countries. They routinely drew attention to the declining membership of youth organisations, suggesting that young people today may have different priorities and purposes. Yet they also pointed to the growth of new single issue youth organisations, indicating – as most research findings do – that while young people may have "switched off" from traditional formal political participation, they have not switched off from political engagement completely. Issues such as environmental protection and animal rights remain firmly positioned in (some) young people's minds.

Of most significance here, however, are three points. First, local youth organisations appear to be "invisible" in the structures of youth policy delivery, although they potentially represent important "first step" building blocks for youth participation. Secondly, national youth NGOs are not always contributing to the youth policy debate to their full potential. Both in Sweden and Luxembourg, the international review teams made critical observations to this end. In Luxembourg, it was maintained that the potential of the *Conference Generale de la Jeunesse Luxembourgeoise* (CGJL) has not been fully exploited by the government and that its lack of contribution to the three action plans produced between 1997 and 1999 was a "missed opportunity". Similarly, in Sweden, the international report argued that the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU) had an "ambivalent role" and indeed criticised it for its unwillingness to engage at the sharp end of political debate about youth policy, at both national and local levels. This, the international team maintained, was an abrogation of its (potential) influence. Funding remains, of course, an issue. Just as municipalities have often been burdened with heightened expectations in a context of decreased funding, so youth organisations have sometimes had greater responsibilities placed upon them in a financial climate when they are least (or less) equipped to discharge them. This point was first made in the international report on Finland, but has been reiterated by others since. Young people

may wish to be more active agents in their lives (and less the passive consumers of the past) but they cannot do this in a vacuum and need an adequate resource base to support those endeavours. What may appear from the top to be a process to encourage greater youth participation and self-determination can seem at the bottom to be simply a case of passing the buck.

But, thirdly, there is no doubt that youth organisations themselves have to change. They face a crisis of legitimacy, evidenced by their declining membership. In the light of both the changing face of “youth” and the changing approaches to “youth policy”, as well as broader social change (particularly in relation to new technologies), they may need to change both the structural practices and strategic orientation. In the Netherlands, where the international report alleges that their “social relevance” has declined, youth organisations have been transformed by market pressures. But these have produced new problems: in their commendable efforts to stay afloat, their focus has shifted away from engagement with the political debate on youth policy, to ensuring their financial survival. The international report notes that,

“The National Report defines youth policy exclusively institutionally and fixes its structure hierarchically. The role of the NGOs has not been a subject of special analysis. The role of the voluntary sector is only referred to – it is not discussed on equal terms with that of other sectors and it is not expected to contribute to widening the scope or raising the effectiveness of youth policy.” (Netherlands IR, p. 17)

Clearly, given the espoused determination of most countries to establish an “integrated” and “cross-sectoral” youth policy, more work needs to be done to ensure effective vertical and horizontal communication and collaboration, and to support the involvement of youth organisations in the youth policy debate.

The Estonia international report expressed concern that, at the time of its review, there was no “sufficiently representative national umbrella organisation like a National Youth Council” (Estonia IR, p. 20). Some had been tried, but failed, during the 1990s. The international report maintained that Estonia had a somewhat “dominating paternalistic notion of youth”:

“There is neither a “youth voice” in the national report, nor political voices speaking independently from the administrative authorities.” (Estonia IR, p. 20)

It was conceded, however, that many structural and institutional arrangements in Estonia were quite new and much was still in a state of transformation: nothing was settled yet.

Dimensions of “youth policy”

As Table 2 illustrates very well, “youth policy” as described by the national reports encapsulates a host of policy “arenas” or “domains” and issues which need to be addressed within a “youth policy” framework. Some are, however, more prominent and “core” than others, at least in the views of the national reports. (The international reports make some rather different arguments, especially in relation to non-formal education, but they simply project different preferences and priorities.) Key policy domains (which are often sub-dimensions of broader public policy) include:

- education (schooling and non-formal learning/youth work);
- post-compulsory education and training;
- employment and the labour market;
- health;
- housing;
- social protection and income support;
- welfare and family;
- criminal justice;
- leisure (including sports and arts);
- national defence and military service.

Key issues include:

- opportunities for participation and citizenship;
- safety and protection;
- combating social exclusion and promoting inclusion;
- the provision and use of information (including new information technologies);
- mobility and internationalism;
- multiculturalism;
- equalities.

Although the bulk of these themes were addressed by most of the national reports and commented on within at least some of the international reports, what follows draws out the dominant arguments and messages, rather than debating each comprehensively.

Key domains of youth policy

Education, training and employment

Inevitably, both the national and international reports dwelt at some length on education policy, vocational preparation and their relationship to the labour market. Before considering some of the detailed argument attached to those deliberations, a broad sweep of prominent questions will be undertaken.

There is no doubt about the importance of formal qualifications as a protective factor against the risk of social exclusion. Nor is there much dissent from the view that a capacity for “lifelong learning” needs to be engendered in young people. But the burning question is how this is best achieved, and whether formal schooling and traditional education is sufficient to achieve this. In other words, it is the mechanisms for learning which are at stake, in relation to the specific goals of learning. At an individual level, the concept of “life management” is helpful. At a societal level, there is an increasing tension between a view of an educational strategy designed to connect firmly to labour market needs and one which is equally concerned with encouraging and enabling “citizenship” and participation. What is required, ideally, is an education for personal development, for active citizenship and for “employability”. In this quest, a number of countries (such as Sweden and Luxembourg) are currently reviewing their educational policy and provision. And within this quest lies the further issue of the role of non-formal education which, it is argued, equips young people with the “soft skills” (such as problem-solving, decision-making, communication) necessary for life management, participation and the workplace.

The tensions which stand out in the drive to extend and sustain educational participation and achievement are positioned both vertically and horizontally. Vertically, there is a downward pressure in the youth labour market. More and more able young people are unable to find employment commensurate with their qualifications and are taking jobs further down the line – jobs which are often low-paid, insecure and sometimes part-time. This “over credentialism” or “qualification inflation” (which is especially acute in Luxembourg and Sweden, but also very evident elsewhere) has the effect of leaving those without qualifications further on the margins, compounding their social exclusion and thereby producing a different challenge for youth policy. It is a case of policy “displacement”. The situation is apparently worsening, with a growing polarisation between young people who are actively engaged in learning, working (and often volunteering as well) and those who are doing nothing. Some of the international reports indicated that there needed to be more proactive strategies for ensuring that more at risk and excluded young people continued their education and acquired qualifications, but this is not wholly persuasive. It is, ultimately, a game of musical chairs if there are simply not enough jobs to go round. Very little was said of “demand side” measures in the labour market. In contrast, much was said about the need for a restructuring of education systems – but why, how, and to what end was carefully sidestepped.

Beyond education and schooling, many countries have established vocational training initiatives, apparently designed to equip young people with the skills for employability. The international reports were rightly sceptical of

some such initiatives, first asking whether they are better thought of as continuing strategies of prevention and support and secondly maintaining that such “special schemes” were often “sticking plaster” measures for the failure of earlier youth policy measures. Both are legitimate questions to raise, and demand attention.

Cursory attention was paid in both the national and international reports to the possibilities of youth enterprise, supported within a framework of youth policy. Yet this is often the vision of governments: if there is not work for young people, let them create their own. Once more, this is not an unreasonable assertion per se. But there is a risk of “blaming the victim”, and of compounding disadvantage (if it is the most disadvantaged – that is, the unemployed – who are expected to create their own work) unless robust support for business planning, financial start-up and ongoing business advice is made available through the mechanisms of public policy.

These are all critical questions and challenges for youth policy and therefore they merit more specific attention in relation to the particular circumstances of the individual countries which were reviewed, in order to provide a more detailed platform for debate.

Illustration

The acquisition of formal educational qualifications may usually be held to be a protective factor against exclusion and to offer the best chance of effective transitions to adult life, but this is definitely not the case in Romania. Romanian young people have a reasonable level of education, but it is the best educated who are at most risk of unemployment: the industrial fabric simply does not create job opportunities for them. It is, according to the international report, those young people who have “signed up” to post-modern values who are the worst affected, the “great victims of urban unemployment” (Romania IR, p. 21). Young people as a whole, relative to other sectors of the population, find themselves “in the most precarious situation”. However, those who have been able and chosen to retreat into “pre-modernity” have been somewhat protected from the worst effects: “the pre-modern economic structures in rural areas help to dampen the unemployment crisis” (Romania IR, p. 36). Not that this is a cause for complacency, for it has other significantly detrimental effects on the youth of Romania (see below). Over half of Romanian young people would accept any occupational activity provided it secures an income. But even when jobs are available, job insecurity is rife, and it is therefore not surprising that an “underground” and illegal labour market constitutes a substantial proportion of the economy. The international review team also noted that the Romanian labour market is highly segmented, by region, age and gender

(the most underprivileged category in the labour market in the 1990s was young women). Its conclusion was that the "employment structure in Romania suffers from serious imbalance" (Romania IR, p. 33). For the fortunate or desperate few, emigration had become the "solution" for young people. Within Romania, the international report was cautious not to presume what would work to rectify the situation and it makes the important general point that:

"The success of a policy is not independent of the context in which it is implemented. We would therefore advance with the concept of grounded interventions – by this we mean that all political interventions must be contextualised. A good measure in one context, if uncritically transposed to a different context may prove inappropriate." (Romania IR, pp. 38-39)

The international report does, however, advocate consideration of certain labour market issues and initiatives within the approach to youth policy in Romania. It suggests that there should be support for youth enterprise, particularly in rural areas. It recommends improved co-ordination of employment policies, and maintains that more attention must be paid to the exploitation of young people by employers. In its conclusion, it elaborates on some proposals in more detail and links education, employment, housing and family policies – demonstrating the close relationship between them and the need for an integrated approach (see Romania IR, pp. 72-74). However, it also argues the case for more thought about pre-employment policy, notably vocational training, careers counselling and, of course, education.

Education and training in Romania is, in the eyes of the international review team, "severely out of step" with the employment market (see Romania IR, p. 31). And because of its perceived irrelevance, there has been a fall in enrolment and participation. It is not hard to see why (the low wage economy does not require qualifications), nor that the underlying cause is a country undergoing dramatic transformation. Here lies the problem for two quite distinct groups of Romanian young people: "the older ones are overqualified in relation to the current job opportunities, whilst the younger ones are underqualified in relation to the future needs of the labour market" (ibid.). A quarter of 15 to 18-year-olds leave the education system prior to getting their diploma. At a national level, the situation in Romania reflects similar, though less apparent, phenomena in some localities elsewhere in Europe (rural Wales is a good example), where immediate labour market prospects do not seem to require educational attainment, and those who have achieved qualifications find that they are "over-qualified". (This runs counter, of course, to the pervasive political preoccupation with lifelong, life-time learning.) The Romanian international review believes that "a qualitative rethink" is needed:

“Educational policies should be based on curricular and teaching structures which ensure a solid basic education and which allow for vocational retraining and mobility in the future, in line with the rapid economic changes currently taking place and which are set to continue into the future... educational policies are needed which prepare young people for a market structure characterised by occupational flexibility and mobility.” (Romania IR, p. 32)

This paragraph could apply to the vision for educational policy and practice virtually anywhere in Europe. Of central importance is the relationship between academic education and vocational training, and between the core knowledge and competencies that young people need, from which they can build further cognitive and applied skills. Estonia is very strong on its formal educational policy, but apparently weak on the necessary accompanying structures and processes. According to its international report, “general levels of education among the vast majority are impressively high” (Estonia NR, p. 26). But the international review team was concerned that the “distances” between the many “winners” and a significant minority of “losers” must be growing. It was not apparent what was being done about this; indeed, there was no research evidence on it. Nor was there sufficient research on the relationship between the qualification demands of the labour market and the qualification structure of the educational system. The formal educational system, through which up to 70% of young people plan to proceed into higher education (Helve 2000), appears to stand in an almost glorious isolation. Schools have an “impressive” information technology strategy, which had been planned from the mid-1990s (see Council of Europe 1997), but there were no connections to the non-formal educational arena. These, the international report suggests, are challenges which belong firmly to the broader youth policy agenda which, it argues, is governed too much by a heavy formal educational ideology. A more cross-cutting ideology for youth policy and support is needed, if the problems produced by the education system (where some 20-25% of young people are not passing the basic compulsory education) are to be addressed and resolved. There is not, for example, any robust alternative vocational pathway (see Estonia IR, pp. 26-27).

In Luxembourg, education policy is under review, but the view of the international report was that it was “not functioning well” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 31), for many reasons which impinge on educational policy and practice throughout Europe. Integration is one of the key principles guiding education policy in Luxembourg. It is a particularly significant objective given that half of all school students are “of foreign origin”. (A contrast with Estonia here is instructive. There is no explicit intention in Estonian educational policy towards the integration of the 30-35% of young people in Estonia who

are “non-Estonian” – yet there are broad similarities in both aspirations and participation rates in mainstream and higher education between Estonian and “non-Estonian” youth – see Estonia IR, p. 26.) The question raised by the Luxembourg international report is whether the education system there is flexible enough to serve the needs of all the young people passing through it, or whether – put bluntly – “young people have to adjust to fit in, or drop out” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 31). Secondary education is a bi-partite system, with a third of students in general secondary education (ESG) and two-thirds in technical secondary education (EST). This was considered by the international review team to be divisive. Moreover, a tenth of those in ESG have to repeat the year and rather more than that fail their final examinations. The international report was concerned that children of Portuguese origin (the most significant minority group) appeared to be “guided” towards technical secondary education even when they were at primary school, which had implicit discriminatory connotations. And it asked whether the schooling system in Luxembourg placed too much emphasis and allocated too much time to language requirements. The major problem, however, was that too many young people were leaving school with low or no qualifications, through both the pull of a buoyant labour market and the push of an “inappropriate” education system (see draft Luxembourg IR, p. 33). Alternative vocational pathways appeared to be limited, and represented “sticking plaster” measures. In effect, they were having to deal with the failings of education. The international report concluded:

“There appears to be an important gap in provision here, and appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that children of school age are receiving education appropriate to their needs.” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 33)

It does not illustrate what, more precisely, this might entail. It does, however, argue that because the education system in Luxembourg is based on an ideology of equality, positive discrimination is discouraged. The consequence of this is even more protracted disadvantage of young people with special needs. At the other end of the learning spectrum, around one third of young people leave Luxembourg to study in higher education (there is no university in Luxembourg). Anecdotal evidence suggested that most graduates tended to return to work in Luxembourg. This is hardly surprising, given what the international team discerned about the labour market there. Information was limited, but it concluded that expanding sectors of the labour market were in need of graduates. This begged the question, in its view, as to what non-graduates did. This is the reverse question to the one first raised in the Finland international report, which was rhetorically captured as “so who cleans the hotels?”, if the vast majority of young people were remaining longer and longer in education and acquiring higher and

higher qualifications (see Finland IR, pp. 56-57). Those without qualifications in Luxembourg do indeed struggle, despite labour shortages at every level and good levels of pay, because more qualified young people from elsewhere want to work in Luxembourg: a case of "over-credentialism". In 1997, one-third of young people in Luxembourg who were over the minimum school leaving age, were in employment. In general, they are entering the labour market later as they extend their education. Meanwhile youth wages are falling. But unemployment is generally low, and usually restricted to unqualified young people. The international report suggests that "it is important to protect young people from unemployment by raising the level of their academic and vocational training through the normal processes of education" (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 40). But it does not acknowledge the paradox of its own argument: in effect, it is saying that young people need to acquire higher and higher qualifications in order to access lower and lower level employment. The broad youth policy question, pertinent to the whole of Europe, is double-edged. On the one hand, if education is primarily concerned with labour market futures, then it needs a content and structure commensurate with realistic labour market prospects and possibilities. On the other hand, if education is to be partially disconnected from labour market considerations, then what should it entail and how will young people be persuaded that it is "worthwhile" to sustain their engagement in learning?

The Netherlands has attempted to grasp this nettle. Over 90% of 15 to 19 year olds remain in an education system which is portrayed in the national report as a key aspect of preventative youth policy, with three major goals:

- to enhance personal development;
- to prepare for democratic citizenship;
- to prepare for participation in the labour market.

There is special provision for immigrants in order to combat inequality of opportunity. Schools have been given greater autonomy since the "secularisation" and "de-pillarisation" of Netherlands society (see Netherlands IR, p. 12 and p. 31). But they have also been given a new vision: to raise the importance of non-cognitive skills (such as independence, a sense of responsibility and flexibility) which the education system should develop. As the international report favourably observes:

"These new social and emotional skills should enable young people to adapt to the new computer information age." (Netherlands IR, p. 31)

By and large, there are good prospects in the Netherlands labour market for young people, but the international report does highlight some (by now rather familiar) developments. Many of the jobs available are temporary and

of poor quality. Those who get (take?) them are often overqualified, at the expense of more poorly qualified young people:

“The low skilled jobs for which they qualify are taken by young people with higher education or by those still in education.” (Netherlands IR, p. 36)

Nevertheless, the international report commends the “comprehensive” youth labour market policy which has been developed in the Netherlands. School leavers are channelled towards a job or training through a nationwide network of employment services. Vocational training programmes appear to be strikingly successful, in comparison with many others elsewhere, in securing the progression of participants into work, education or another scheme. The deployment of social funds for job creation and the reinforcement of the contribution to be made by the municipalities has, in the view of the international review team, increased the effectiveness of this policy (see Netherlands IR, pp. 36-37). Given that unemployment is second only to personal danger in the concerns of young people in the Netherlands, there is a reassuring harmony with the orientation of youth policy in this direction. However, the international report suggested that greater attention needed to be paid to careers guidance and development, if more qualified young people were to move at the earliest opportunity into occupational activity more commensurate with their potential.

The shape of education and training, partly in relation to the labour market but also in relation to “citizenship level” qualifications, has been the pressing question for youth policy in Finland since the mid-1990s. It has led to the establishment of a network of youth workshops, outreach work, family support, the re-structuring of youth services, and youth enterprise initiatives. It is almost taken for granted that education is a “good thing” and that young people cannot have enough of it. As Minister Andersson commented at the time of the international review: “education, self-enhancement, always pays”. While not necessarily confronting this view, the international report does express concern about the apparent lack of critical debate about education in Finland. It suggested that three issues in particular merited deeper reflection (see Finland IR, p. 56):

- the incessant drive towards higher qualifications, despite increasing pressure on the labour market for jobs commensurate with those qualifications;
- the relationship between academic and vocational education, and who should be served by such different provision;
- the extent to which education should remain independent of the labour market, and also be concerned about “citizen level” attainment.

The international report maintained that it was not helpful to adopt an unequivocal approach to the pursuit of higher and higher qualifications, since educational policy needed to be contextualised within wider social and economic realities. It also asked if young people in Finland were generally so highly motivated towards education and training, had legislation been required making participation in training effectively compulsory for young people who were unemployed. This was despite opposition to the law from the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs, which considered it as undermining "no more or less than citizens' fundamental rights and equality" (Finland NR, p. 77). This alerts us to another point of general relevance: where many elements of youth policy are firmly concerned with choice and self-determination, can elements be accommodated, reconciled and justified which are concerned with compulsion and direction?

There is no doubt that in Finland education and training have contributed significantly to the "social net" which has alleviated the worst excesses of unemployment. But the international report did produce some criticisms, issues and concerns, though in the context of generally applauding youth policy development in Finland. Within education policy, it was argued that it needed to be more closely related to wider social and economic strategies. Vocational training programmes and the youth workshops certainly contributed to a dramatic fall in youth unemployment. But like most such initiatives, there was a convenient vagueness about precisely what they were intended to be doing. Indeed, they were often described in different ways, which may have reflected different programmes but, equally, may have reflected the different perspectives of those connected in different ways to those programmes. For example, is such provision about skill formation or re-socialisation, about something to do (what is sometimes known as "warehousing") or giving a new sense of direction? There are different ideologies of training which link to "youth policy" in different ways. Promoting an active lifestyle is very different from equipping young people with appropriate skills for the labour market. These are, once again, general issues to be faced by youth policy development across Europe. Other key general issues in relation to "training" also surfaced during the international policy review of Finland.

First, the youth workshops were not subject to central strategic planning. They were the responsibility of the municipalities. This produces one of the key overarching youth policy questions about the balance to be struck between central strategic direction and local flexibility in implementation. Second, more specifically concerning "training", there is the "work or not work" question, and the place and influence of trade unions in determining what may be permissible in this area. It is, of course, undesirable for temporary training programmes and other publicly supported training initiatives to

displace proper employment, but they also represent, at minimum, a safety net for the young unemployed. Thirdly, there is the question of progression and destinations (which, as noted above, is a strength of the Netherlands youth labour market policy). Irrespective of the type and quality of the training provided, destinations are invariably highly contingent on the buoyancy of the local and regional youth labour market and obviously demand-side volume within particular sectors of the youth labour market (see Banks et al 1992). Fourth, there is an important question about the emphasis placed on the acquisition of qualifications, and who does the “low level” jobs. There are possibly three dimensions to an answer: that the “low level” job sector may be declining; that qualifications do invariably permit more choice; and that even low level jobs now often require training and certification. As one young person commented, “Finland is constructing education and training programmes for everything, however irrelevant they are to the capabilities to do the job” (Finland IR, p. 66). But not all low level jobs have been vocationalised and require certification. Furthermore, there is the issue of the currency of some vocational “qualifications”, which young people may discover are virtually meaningless (and thus ignored) by prospective employers. The sixth, often unspoken, question is whether low level jobs are, de facto, left for immigrants (as in Korea, or Luxembourg?). Seventh, and finally, there may need to be some scrutiny over the levels of allowances, grants and wages paid to young people in education, training and employment. The ways these are structured, as noted particularly in Luxembourg, may provide disincentives to work or incentives to leave education prematurely.

The Finnish international report also considered the issue of enterprise and entrepreneurship (see Finland IR pp. 68-68 and p. 73), even though only 1% of all Finns (not just young people) are in self-employment and only 3% of young Finns want to be young businessmen (sic). It suggested that consideration should be given to more robust building blocks for youth enterprise, particularly in new arts, media, technology and cultural industries. There are major challenges around the idea of youth enterprise (MacDonald and Coffield 1991), but in the creative industries (some) young people are clearly “ahead of the game” and there should be some attention to this within the overall framework of youth policy.

Over the past decade, Finland has undertaken a dramatic restructuring of education and training. Much appears to have been developed in the right direction. But, as elsewhere, the 10% or so of unqualified young people – those who do not pursue qualifications beyond the minimum school leaving age – remain a problem. In the past, they got jobs. Now they get displaced by more qualified young people for whom “qualification inflation” means that they have to compete for those jobs, whereas in the past they themselves would have set their sights somewhat higher. Whatever provision is

made for them, it needs to be recognised that “early drop outs” are not a homogenous group, which suggests a need for flexible and sometimes individually-tailored responses if re-engagement and renewed motivation is to be engendered.

The final counterpoint to the problem of over-qualification in relation to labour market opportunities is that a good level of education is now necessary for individuals to be able to play an active part in increasingly complex societies. This is an argument which is consistent with other policy assertions deriving from individual countries around the “learning age” and, indeed, from the European Union (European Commission 1995). As the Finland international report noted:

“It is acknowledged that there is still the belief in Finland that education should remain (at least partly) independent of the labour market: that higher levels of education are necessary in complex societies to achieve a ‘citizen level’ which permits individuals to play a full part in their societies.” (Finland IR, p. 56)

The national report on Sweden discusses its educational policy in great detail and recent educational reform, which talks about the need to give every young person a good start in life through providing opportunities which are sufficiently flexible that they can be tailored to individual need. The international report recognises that education policy in Sweden (as elsewhere) has become an increasingly important pillar of youth policy, as more and more young people stay in the educational system much longer. But it expresses concern that while some 90% of young people follow upper secondary school programmes, by the age of 21 one in five who have followed these programmes still do not have an upper secondary qualification. Moreover, around a third who participate in them would in fact rather work instead – if jobs were available. Swedish young people apparently do not think highly of their schools in terms of participation and influence, despite the exemplary reputation of Swedish schools on this front held by many from other parts of Europe (for a fascinating study of Swedish schooling, see Lundhahl and Oquist 2000). The Swedish national report itself acknowledges various “weak points”, including the limited influence of students, (still) too much standardisation (like Luxembourg), the uneven representation of students from different social backgrounds, and the low motivation of those forced to stay within the core curriculum. Perhaps because educational policy is currently in a state of change, the Swedish international report does not discuss it to the same degree as other international reports. It does, however, make two rather forceful critical remarks:

“The Swedish educational system has made great efforts to modernise its vocational provision and develop special programmes for unemployed young people and young people difficult to employ, but it is rather late in recognising the effects

of globalisation and adapting the educational and qualification system accordingly. Only now is Sweden beginning to develop a modern apprenticeship system to be integrated in comprehensive schools. As in other European countries, the Swedish school system has become a reservoir for young people with low qualifications." (Sweden IR, p. 24)

Of implicit significance here is the elision of (vocational) apprenticeships with (academic) comprehensive schooling. The case for young people being able to engage in a "flexible package" of learning (and also perhaps even earning) is increasingly strong, rather than virtually compelling reluctant learners to remain in school, not because of its intrinsic attractions but because of the absence of any more attractive alternative. Combining academic and vocational study, possibly part-time working and some "participation" through service to the community may become an increasingly persuasive dimension of "learning policy" within the broad framework of youth policy. The risk, however, as has become the case in Australia, is that more privileged and competent young people may take it all and leave those less able and more disadvantaged with none – thus reinforcing social polarisation by strengthening the inclusion of many but confirming the exclusion of a significant minority (many of whom are likely to be "minorities"). Indeed, the Swedish international report points to the disproportionate vulnerability of immigrant youth and the low qualified, but argues that the public policy measures to rectify this situation offer unattractive jobs and very low pay. This is a common issue across Europe and is hardly the basis for securing the motivation required if such young people are to be "re-engaged". It is a far cry from the "participation" agenda which is also a central plank of most youth policy.

Low level employment is the best that many Spanish young people can hope for and education policy does not have a great deal of direct influence on who is likely to obtain it. Education in Spain, according to the international report, is the pivotal point for the democratic development of the country. Despite regional autonomy, it has been managed through central state policy and has aligned itself to the educational standards of the European Union. The National Youth Council (CJE) is less convinced that aspiration has authentically been converted into reality:

"In the opinion of the international group of experts, the CJE proposes a shift in education philosophy from the abstract level of democratic principles (necessary but not sufficient) to that of effective application." (Spain IR, p. 28)

The CJE engages in a detailed critique (about social inequalities, cost, weaknesses in vocational training and dropout rates) and makes a number of proposals (see Spain IR, pp. 27-28). The international review group also focused its concerns on repetition of study years, cost and dropout. Furthermore,

Spain faces the challenges arising from “standardisation”, in the same way as Sweden and Luxembourg. And like Estonia, there is limited vocational provision, and only 10% of secondary school students are guided towards it. Those who leave education at the earliest age possible (some two fifths) are viewed as social failures. But there is little real incentive to do so, beyond dissatisfaction with the education system itself.

In the context of Spain, though, perhaps none of this is as important as elsewhere. Even those with qualifications face widespread youth unemployment. Conversely, half of employed youth perform jobs that do not need a qualification. Jobs are routinely acquired through personal contacts and patronage:

“Nepotism (*enshufe*) functions in Spain as the main channel for the integration of Spanish youth into an active social life.” (Spain IR, p. 19)

A very different picture emerges of the relationship between education and the labour market and, indeed, of the structure of the labour market itself, which in many other parts of Europe has become more flexible under the forces of globalisation, and the old protectionist powers of trade unions have been dramatically diminished. The international report attempted to capture the problems as they would appear to “western Europeans” (suggesting that Spain is not part of western Europe?):

“The main problems of the Spanish working system are *enshufe* (that is, a lack of account taken of competence), rigid labour market legislation ... and the out-dated working systems of Spanish companies – there are many small and medium-sized family firms which subscribe to the philosophy that ‘if things are running well, don’t change them’.” (Spain IR, p. 20)

The international report also draws attention to a flourishing “black market” (informal and sometimes illegal economy) in Spain. It makes all these points in the context of suggesting that, slowly, Spain is eradicating them as it moves towards becoming a modern European state. But for broader youth policy considerations, we might turn the argument the other way. In the “formal rational” reflections that generally inform the youth policy debate, it is easy to lose sight of the persistence of many of the characteristics identified in Spain which influence young people’s pathways through education into work (or unemployment). They may not be so pronounced and are certainly less visible, especially in contexts officially governed by “equal opportunities”. But, at a local level, especially in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods and in relation to lower levels of the labour market, work often continues to be secured through word of mouth, personal knowledge and local reputation. Where this still prevails, education can be rendered almost meaningless.

The Spanish international report nevertheless properly observes that:

“The whole picture indicates that youth employment is a difficult issue that must be solved by Spain's youth policy.” (Spain IR, p. 21)

Quite how this might be done is not proposed! The policy response in Spain so far has not been to favour young people (by, for example, perhaps requiring employers to offer real work experience), but to reduce the cost of labour and to increase training. Mainly temporary training contracts have been introduced.

The international report concludes, in harness with the perspectives of the CJE, that there is a distinct “lack of fit” between education and the labour market. For the international review team, two “essential facts” emerged from the CJE analysis. First, there needs to be a more robust “youth integration policy” (integrated youth policy?) in order to establish a better correlation between the education system and the labour market. Secondly, this collaboration must be adapted to the needs and desires of young people who are at present too little involved in defining their social roles (see Spain IR, p. 23). The international report adds a third point, seeking to emphasise the continuing importance of the family in modern Spain (a point which threads throughout the international report). Rather as in Romania, families support and protect young people, who are often unable to “get by” in any other way. Not that young people elect to be either dependent or unemployed. Two thirds of young people in Castille and Leon declared that they are prepared to accept jobs below their level of qualification. But they might not pay enough to become independent: only one-third of young people in employment can live exclusively on their wages.

Here, once more, we detect the necessity of seeing “youth policy” in the round. Family support in Spain routinely offers a kind of protective shield against the most negative consequences of unemployment, and without the detrimental effects of having to return to a state of “pre-modernism” which characterises similar processes in Romania. The low level of youth wages raises questions about additional social protection but, as in Luxembourg, some kind of “guaranteed minimum income”, in the context of low youth wages, acts as a disincentive to work. Yet without a sufficient income, young people experience sometimes insurmountable difficulties in moving to independent adulthood and autonomous housing. Whether educational participation and attainment – which is promoted as the central plank of much youth policy and which currently still does confer the greatest set of possibilities on those young people who succeed – in whatever framework of educational delivery will serve as the key that unlocks the other doors to effective transitions in the future is, given the changing structures of the labour market, debatable.

In conclusion to this section, the “social formation” through education of young people is clearly a pivotal dimension of youth policy. But there will always be tensions demanding resolution about what this should contain and what its differential effects may be. Key challenges include issues about both over-achievement and underachievement. The capacity of an educational system to reconcile both the attainment and inclusion agendas requires constant review. The relevance and connection of the different overarching goals of formal education – preparation for the labour market, preparation for participation in civil society, and preparation for autonomous “life management” – will recurrently call for reflection and evaluation. The allocation of different groups of young people to different parts of education and systems, and actual participation rates within these different sectors, will need to be subject to analysis in terms of equal opportunities and different life-course trajectories. Above all, there is likely to be an increasing challenge of sustaining the motivation of young people to participate in education and training – systems which may increasingly look like “intensive care units” and “waiting rooms” until the labour market is prepared to take them. Whatever the structural need for young people to acquire knowledge and skills, there is prospectively the strong possibility of a deepening cultural disillusionment with “learning”, as higher qualifications do not fulfil expectations but are needed simply for a symbolic rite of passage, and without which exclusion is far more probable.

Youth work and non-formal education

(Note: Youth work and non-formal education overlap in different ways with both an education policy agenda and with a broader participation and citizenship agenda, as well as touching on other areas of youth policy. Inevitably, there will be some overlap here with those other areas – this should be taken as a matter of reinforcement of certain key youth policy questions, rather than repetition.)

Surprisingly, given its prominence in the work of the Council of Europe, limited attention was often given to the “associative” sector, its place in youth policy, and its potential contribution to inclusion, participation and citizenship. Some countries, of course, such as Finland, have strong traditions in this policy domain, to the point of maintaining that it was such provision which vitiated the worst excesses of exclusion when youth unemployment reached a dramatic peak in the mid-1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Others, such as Romania and Estonia, are in the process of trying to establish an autonomous youth work sector, but perhaps have more pressing priorities – although the Romanian international report maintains that “state intervention is essentially geared to fostering the activities

of youth associations" (Romania IR, p. 57). The challenges of doing so are also mentioned in the Estonia international report, despite limited attention being paid to this within the national report:

"But the more difficult questions concern the realism of building up an associative sector based on western models if the society does not share the same long history of how these associations developed. There are no such reflections or discussions in the national report." (Estonia IR, p. 25)

Yet although western European countries may have "long histories" on this front, the situation of youth work and non-formal learning often remains fragile. It got short shrift in the national report on the Netherlands, and for this was subject to criticism by the international report. The educational approach to the Netherlands general youth policy (rather than the problem-oriented approach to its "curative" youth policy) seemed to overlook the role of non-formal learning:

"One overall aim of a youth policy might be to create the opportunities within all policy areas for youth to learn to develop and prepare themselves for their future society. To pursue such an aim may necessitate a renewed consideration of the concept of participation... The rejuvenation of learning and practical training for democracy is a non-formal educational challenge for any youth policy, the concept of which seems to be almost totally absent from the National Report." (Netherlands IR, pp. 29-30)

In contrast, youth work in Finland has historically been believed to play a major part in supporting social integration. Young people "seem to have kept themselves within the network of social relations and activities, largely thanks to local youth work" (Finland NR, p. 54). New expectations have been placed upon youth work, well beyond its historical role in providing activities for young people in their leisure time. The Helsinki Youth Department asserted that youth work in Finland was about the promotion of citizenship, through social, cultural, political and economic participation. As a result, youth work methodologies have diversified (with the development of approaches such as street work, or detached work, although this is done largely by volunteers), as have the issues it seeks to address (such as alcohol misuse, and sexual health).

Thus, at the very time when eastern Europe is looking for models for new forms of "associative life", western European youth work is being subjected to having to specify its task and what it can deliver, thereby justifying its claim on the public purse. It has to be acknowledged that this will be a tough challenge, for it confronts the whole *raison d'être* of non-formal education and learner-centred pedagogy. As I once wrote, "youth work is an act of

faith, not an act of science” – the testimony to its efficacy is the retrospective accounts given of their experiences by successful young adults who participated in it.

Illustration

The idea of youth work is a relatively new departure for youth policy in Estonia, guided by the Youth Work Act 1999, which describes its function as the provision of activities and education for development. It was welcomed by the international review team:

“At the moment the Youth Work Act is probably the most valuable instrument for further development of a co-ordinated and comprehensive youth policy, for the development of NGOs and new forms of youth work, and for decentralisation and the building of local youth work and policy.” (Estonia IR, p. 37)

This observation is made, however, in the context of the impression that there is a “remarkable absence of topics related to civil society”:

“... it is difficult to find serious attention to these issues in Estonian youth policy, whether it is concerning the associative sector, some development ideas for youth NGOs, citizenship, or youth participation. Estonia appears in these matters as a prolongation of the traditions of “the strong state” instead of fostering dialogue and participative principles in their youth policy.” (Estonia IR, p. 36)

Nevertheless, even if it remains conceived of in “heavily pedagogical” terms, “youth work” in Estonia enshrines “youth policy” beyond formal education. It is co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education, through a Youth Work Council. The international report applauds some of the aspirations for youth work and the concrete plans for the management and practice of the Youth Work Centre, but even with a rather narrow perspective on what constitutes “youth work”, it expressed some concern about the relationship between its different elements – the Ministry, the Youth Work Centre, Youth for Europe, and the state hobby centres:

“There is no problem in seeing that they all have a job to do, but what is meant by a comprehensive youth policy is to find a more general developmental and co-ordinated idea or plan for the connections between these agencies...” (Estonia IR, p. 31)

The overall question of communication, co-ordination and coherence, both within and between different youth policy domains, remains a major challenge for youth policy development in virtually all European countries. Some countries, of course, have only an embryonic “youth work” policy domain. The Romania national report speaks loudly about following “a European policy” and invokes the frequent concepts of citizenship, integration and participation, development, mobility, enterprise, and so on (see Romania NR,

p. 59). (It is important to note that the national report has been superseded by a National Youth Action Plan – but this is not part of the remit of this report.) However, “youth work” appears to still be limited largely to support for national youth NGOs and engagement where possible with the European Union “Youth” programme (see “Internationalism” below). The international report comments that the 1990s marked the beginning of the “association boom” but expresses the concern that youth NGOs are often organised to promote particular goals, rather than in harness with the broader goal of developing a distinctive youth work sector. There is apparently very little “youth work” at the local level. (One of the recommendations of the international report, in keeping with the expressed wishes of young people in Romania, is for the establishment of a youth worker profession.) The same applies in Spain, where even in the national report’s discussion of the place of “participation” within the two youth plans which have informed youth policy development to date, there is no mention of “youth work” or non-formal learning. This is despite aspirations to promote “youth associationism”, develop mobility within Europe, and improve information provision for young people (see Spain NR, pp. 173-174).

Youth work and non-formal learning is, of course, somewhat more firmly established within youth policy in northern Europe, although there are exceptions. For example, the Netherlands international review team observed that there was very little mention or recognition of non-formal education in the national report, despite its strong advocacy by leaders of youth organisations (which, the international report also notes, tended to be led and managed by adults!):

“Our considerations are therefore aimed at youth policy-makers in the sense that non-formal education should first and foremost be seen as an invaluable asset and as a complement to formal education. Furthermore, decision-makers need to recognise that youth organisations are essential in the development of active citizenship in a civil and democratic society.” (Netherlands IR, p. 27)

In Luxembourg, however, youth centres (Maisons des Jeunes) are described in the national report as a central instrument of youth policy devolved to the local level (see Luxembourg NR, pp. 118-125). The international report looked favourably on these “youth houses” (in the context of criticising Luxembourg for its continuing focus on activity provision for a younger age group) and restricted its specific criticism to the fact that the majority of youth work was still undertaken by volunteers. There had, however, been “considerable progress in professional youth work since its inception only 10 years ago” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 51). Beyond the diverse activities organised through the youth centres, the international report describes broader youth work practice – specific local projects such as the information bus, work on addictions, ecology education, the cultural centre, and

exchange visits. The international report does not debate the pedagogy and practice of youth work in any detail, but it does raise the important question about the balance to be struck between professionalism and voluntarism in the delivery of increasingly diverse and sophisticated youth work. Despite the growth in professional youth work in Luxembourg, perhaps too much emphasis continues to be placed on volunteering:

“The state is demanding more accountability and more professionalism, but without providing additional funding for this aspect of the work... The feeling was that volunteers are being asked to do too much... Clearly, these very real concerns need to be addressed, if volunteers are not to feel that their goodwill is being exploited.” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 61)

There are many issues here, relating to funding, training, commitment and credibility. Young people sometimes prefer “naïve” volunteers who are giving time freely to them than “informed” professionals who are being paid to “help” them. Volunteers are precisely that because they are strongly motivated to carry out the work and relish their autonomy and flexibility. Most countries simply could not financially sustain the range of their youth work without a strong dependency on voluntary involvement. But, as was noted in relation to Finland:

“This begs the question of the recruitment and selection, registration, training and support of volunteers... The challenge for the future, if effective youth work is to be extended through the use of volunteers, is what these processes are to be and how they will be resourced.” (Finland IR, p. 97)

Effective volunteering, if valuable non-formal learning opportunities are to be extended to young people facing complex difficulties during transition, does not come cheap. It can be a sophisticated task, and one which requires a flexible and skilled response. In Sweden, with its tradition of what the international report called “educationalised leisure” (see below), the international review team called for more fluid distinctions between organised and non-organised activities, if more effective “youth work” was to be delivered. The prevailing rigid distinction was a historical discrepancy:

“At a time when in many European countries the dividing lines between organised and non-organised youth activities are becoming fluid through a sharp increase of informal communication and organisation between young people as individuals... It is therefore necessary that new forms of participation be tried out within existing organisations as well as through new forms of state support for non-organised or more loosely organised youth activities.” (Sweden IR, p. 31-32)

“Fluidity” is a useful term, for it is necessary both for the reasons expressed above and in relation to distinctions between “general” and more “targeted” youth work. Increasingly, “youth work” has come to be expected to deliver effective interventions with specific groups of (often “problem”)

young people. Financial support has been contingent upon the achievement of demonstrable outcomes. This has placed youth work in a dilemma. Its credibility with young people lies essentially in the processes it adopts to engage with them, which reflects its core attachment to “non-formal” learning methodologies. These, when discharged “professionally” provide a quality of learning opportunity but the specific learning outcomes can be elusive. Yet the credibility of youth work with politicians who control the purse-strings lies in the delivery of outcomes, which can be difficult to detect and demonstrate in concrete, measurable forms. Hence the precarious position of “youth work” within frameworks of youth policy which accommodate it (and, as we have seen, some do not). Finding a path between the two positions probably represents one of the most pressing challenges for youth policy in Europe today, if the aspirations for (social) participation and citizenship and (individual) life management and self-determination are to be achieved.

Health

Young people, by and large, are generally healthy, even though they may be vulnerable to certain health risks such as suicide and road accidents. Health is rarely actively considered as a “core” youth policy concern in relation to physical health, although the encouragement of sport and healthy eating is obviously geared to this end. However, there is increasing youth policy focus on other aspects of the health of young people, notably:

- mental health;
- sexual health;
- substance misuse.

These are, indeed, important new challenges for youth policy. There is persuasive research evidence that the psycho-social disorders which have increased in recent years in young people (such as suicide amongst young men and eating disorders amongst young women) are correlated with a sense of “social dislocation” (Rutter and Smith 1995). The solution may therefore lie elsewhere: in providing a greater sense of certainty and security about the future, or at least equipping young people more effectively to cope with the uncertainty about the future.

With greater sexual activity amongst the young, especially in the context of their greater mobility, there are new concerns about sexual health, in particular the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases and the risk of HIV infection. Here educational strategies, probably invoking non-formal learning techniques, become an important element of youth policy.

And there is also a growing prevalence of substance misuse, both legal drugs such as cigarettes and alcohol, and a range of illegal drugs. Patterns vary considerably across Europe. Many European countries are still far from the

“normalised” position of illegal drug misuse by young people which now appears to be the case in the UK (see Parker et al 2001). But in most countries, there is still an important youth policy challenge on this front.

Illustration

The overarching youth policy question is the balance to be struck between “regulation” and “rescue”, and between preventative and punitive positions. The Luxembourg international team asserted that the prohibition of drugs in Luxembourg made primary prevention difficult. Not that it was necessarily advocating legalisation, though the more “tolerant” attitude which prevails in the Netherlands was held to be a benchmark by its international review team, worthy of attention and, possibly emulation. Surprisingly, in view of the international attention given to the Netherlands drugs policy, the national report deals with the issue in a very low-key and matter-of-fact manner. Indeed, the international report says that it does not even consider the topic:

“And yet, the decisive territory on which society encounters the drug problem is connected particularly with children and young people... Without wishing to sound too melodramatic, the Netherlands experiment is of historic significance; if it fails, only the people of the Netherlands will be the losers; if it succeeds, we will all be the winners. But the time for conclusion is still far in the future.” (Netherlands IR, p. 39)

The policy in the Netherlands is a far cry from that in Spain (and, indeed, elsewhere). Drug consumption amongst young people in Spain is on the rise, but a new tolerance of soft drugs has not led to a reduction in hard drug use. The Youth Council of Spain suggests that this is because the policy analysis of the issue is deeply flawed. Drugs should be a health care, not a delinquency issue. There is a lack of an intersectoral approach to this phenomenon, which would reflect its complexity. Instead, the authorities pursue a strictly repressive vision (see Spain IR, pp. 43-44).

At the time of the Finland international review, the use of illegal drugs was effectively denied by the authorities. Its low prevalence was met with a firm punitive hand, and any debate around decriminalisation or harm reduction strategies was considered to be “a big taboo”. The international report noted that there was a risk that simplistic stances would be taken on what will always be a complex issue: the use of illegal drugs needed to be carefully contextualised in relation to the wider life circumstances and possibilities of young people (see Finland IR, pp. 84-85).

Health policy for young people inevitably focuses on specific health issues and risks affecting young people. Many of the national reports usefully outline their predominant concerns and major areas of focus:

Table 4: Health Issues and Priorities for “youth policy”

	Fin	Neth	Swed	Spain	Rom	Est	Lux
General health and hygiene	*				*	*	
Suicide (and depression)	*		*				
Smoking and alcohol consumption	*	*	*		*	*	*
Drug misuse	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sexual health (STDs, HIV, pregnancy, etc.)	*	*	*	*	*		
Nutrition and physical exercise	*		*		*		*
Psychological well-being		*					
Accidents		*				*	
Eating disorders			*	*			
Bullying			*				
Violence				*			
Tuberculosis					*		

Little comment was made on health issues in the Swedish international report. The Finnish international report observed that the promotion of healthy lifestyles in young people is an active strategy within Finnish youth policy: through sports, health education in schools, and specialist medical and mental health services. As the national report had already stated:

“The goal of youth health policy is to influence lifestyles and attitudes through health education given from compulsory schooling to general and vocational secondary education.” (Finland NR, p. 99)

The biggest health challenge for youth policy in Finland, as in many other countries, remains the excessive use of alcohol but, despite some level of official denial, the use of illegal drugs is also becoming a source of concern. Finland has introduced peer-led prevention programmes and “Just Say No” campaigns, although there appears to have been limited critical reflection on the provenance of some of the initiatives they had adopted. Nevertheless, the aspirational framework is an appropriate one, encapsulated in relation to the policy goal around alcohol use: “to support a process by which an abstinent 7-year-old becomes a responsible and discerning young adult drinker” (Finland IR, p. 84).

The Netherlands also has an extensive system of youth health care services, according to the international report, with specialised programmes for young people with disabilities and specialised agencies for supporting young drug misusers. It noted, however, some concern that the fact that 5% of young people have made one or more attempts to commit suicide and a further 10% have considered suicide (sometimes or often) was viewed by the national report as a “normal element of this life stage” (see Netherlands IR, p. 33). Suicide, and other psycho-social disorders, including the excessive use

of legal and illegal substances, and eating disorders, are increasing in many parts of Europe and should be viewed as a legitimate dimension of youth policy concern.

In Spain, many young people start using alcohol and tobacco at a relatively early age, but the national report makes "no mention of special political measures for the reduction of alcohol and cigarette consumption" (Spain IR, p. 45). The national report does, however, draw attention to the fact that Spanish young people's concern over Aids (HIV) is greater than in the rest of Europe, but their knowledge about its transmission is lower (Spain NR, p. 82). The spread of HIV/Aids in Spain remains largely through injecting drug misuse, according to the international report, but the highest rate of infection is amongst 15 to 20-year-olds. There is insufficient data to explain this with confidence, but the international report points out that the habit of condom use is closely related to the young person's educational level. This is a common issue and may have broader implications for youth policy in terms of effective sexual health strategies. The Spanish international review team felt somewhat frustrated by the general lack of data on the health of Spanish young people and concluded:

"The expert group can only suppose that the health of Spanish young people is relatively good because of [diet, sport and standard of living]. But it must not be forgotten that there are psychological problems." (Spain IR, p. 46)

Indeed, the Spanish international report recurrently refers to the prevalence of "anomie" amongst young people in Spain, as a result of their frustrations over their inability to achieve adult independence and independent living. Yet, somewhat in contradiction to this theoretical argument, the international report accepts that Spanish young people are well integrated into their communities and protected, even "cushioned" from the effects of unemployment (which are experienced much more negatively elsewhere) on account of the sustained support provided by their families. The more general issue arising from the international report is that Spanish youth health policy, where it exists, is "front loaded": it is primarily, almost exclusively, concerned with the reduction of risk exposure, not with individualised treatment and "cure" solutions. Prevention and reduction of risk is, of course, the priority, but for young people who succumb to the prevailing risks, access to appropriate treatment services is also a necessary aspect of policy.

The Romanian international report does not comment on health policy in a discrete way, attaching it to family policy instead, particularly in its consideration of gender issues. This is because of what it describes as the "ruralisation" (and, as a result, domesticisation) of young women in Romania which, in turn, is a consequence of their extremely disadvantaged position in relation to the labour market. The international report records that there is no

legislation aimed specifically at the needs of girls and young women. Those needs cluster at the interface of labour market, family and gender policy. The specifically “health” issues within this matrix relate to the lack of satisfactory family planning programmes, especially in rural areas, and the exploitation of young women in the sex industry. Young women are therefore prone to both early (and sometimes unwanted) pregnancy, and/or vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases. There is a high percentage of abortions. Contraception is not widely used by young people, although the use of modern contraceptives is higher amongst young people than adults. But there are problems about getting access to contraceptive advice, the financial cost of contraception and, indeed, the psychological and moral costs in a deeply “conservative”, Catholic country. As a result, abortion is an approved and most widely used method of birth control. The international report asserts strongly that:

“A far greater commitment is needed to information campaigns on the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and on sexually transmitted diseases.” (Romania IR, p. 43)

Sex education is being introduced into Romanian schools, but the international review team was not aware of the extent of this development. It also raised the question of the role of the church in relation to the health risks now being faced (and, in Romania, often experienced) by young people, which were simply unknown to their parents’ generation. Despite the serious issues and deficiencies identified in terms of “youth health policy” in Romania, it at least had a (small) profile. In Estonia and indeed in Luxembourg, discussion of a health dimension in youth policy was only conspicuous by its absence from the international report.

Health policy covers an enormous diversity of issues, some of which are more pertinent to young people than others. The critical point is that “youth policy” accommodates those issues which significantly impair the potential development of young people, and jeopardise their choices and opportunities.

Housing

Housing is not often considered within the remit of “youth policy”, on the grounds that young people live with their parents until they achieve sufficient independence to move into independent living. Yet, as both the Sweden and Luxembourg international reports maintain, housing may become the big youth policy issue in the future. The situation in Spain, where the average age for leaving home approaches 30, suggests that this may be so. Young people (or, more precisely, young adults) eager to leave home to achieve independence from their families of origin, have a diminishing capacity and opportunity to earn the resources in the labour market to allow

them to do this within a free housing market. The result can be a sense of frustration, and sometimes, in extreme cases, family conflict leading to homelessness. This is not in fact the case in Spain, where young people appear to live harmoniously in the parental home, despite some of the limitations and frustrations this causes. But, as the Luxembourg international report argues, young people need affordable housing appropriate to their needs. How this is addressed in different countries varies enormously.

As noted above, one consequence of the housing crisis affecting young people is the possibility of increasing levels of youth homelessness. Margaret Thatcher saw no reason, in the UK, for government to consider youth homelessness, since homeless young people already had homes – “the homes of their parents”. This was far from the truth, for young people often become homeless because the parental home has become intolerable, on account of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Precipitated leaving of the family home leaves young people ill-prepared for independent living and their homelessness is often accompanied by other problems, such as unemployment, mental ill-health and substance misuse. The case for housing issues to be considered as an element of youth policy is therefore unequivocal, if truly integrated and cross-sectoral provision is to be developed.

One response to the crisis of housing (and unemployment) has been the growth of the foyer movement, which was initially established in France and has also been received favourably in the UK (see Ward 1997). Foyers were designed to provide both accommodation and vocational preparation for young people. They have, however, had a mixed reception and have sometimes shifted focus and purpose: as the Luxembourg international report asks, are foyers only available for those already in work?

Illustration

The two international reports which raised housing as a crucially important dimension of youth policy were those from the very contrasting contexts of Spain and Romania, although the transition to independent living for young people throughout Europe is becoming increasingly problematic. Housing is often integrally connected to family circumstances, and rightly so, since the inability to secure independent accommodation means that young people are “forced back” on their families, sometimes acceptingly and with acceptance, sometimes reluctantly and with reluctance. And where this is, for whatever reason, not possible, the spectre of youth homelessness emerges. The Spanish international report elected to consider “family and housing” together:

“...because the family is, for the moment, the main support in youth development. Good housing is synonymous with having a good family life in one's parents house.” (Spain IR, p. 14)

This is despite the fact that 70% of Spanish young people say that they are not satisfied with their accommodation. Yet there are tolerant relationships between parents and their children. The dissatisfaction expressed does not lead to conflict in the family. Young people are happy. Parents consider them to be immature: passive and “Peter Pan”-ish. The average age for leaving the parental home is now around 30. The international report, which placed much store by its theoretical assertion of the “anomic” state of Spanish youth, maintained that “youth anomy [sic] is generated by excessive delay in getting a house” (Spain IR, p. 16). Various new initiatives are being established to address this problem, including subsidies through community support, plans for rented housing, loan subsidies for private housing, and the rehabilitation of town centres to provide rented youth housing. The international review team welcomed these proposals, with the proviso that:

“...these projects must be correlated with other policies ensuring real independence for youth in such a way that acquiring an individual house should not be a problem.” (Spain IR, p. 17)

This is an implicit reference to the need for decent employment for young people, and wage levels which are sufficient to sustain economic and housing independence. The same might be said in relation to Romania where, as noted elsewhere in this report, unemployment has “driven” many young people back to the country, or kept them there – in the communities where their parents and extended families still live. Unlike in Spain, however, where the family provides an emotional and cultural haven, the family in Romania serves an instrumental function for young people, according to the international report. Most unmarried young people live with their parents. Only 6% live independently. Half of young couples, with or without children, still live with their parents. Unlike the older population, where three quarters are satisfied with their accommodation, 78% regard the chance of finding a suitable home as a “very serious problem”:

“The housing problem therefore affects young people more severely... Creating housing in the countryside, possibly with the help of the young people who need it, is urgently needed, in order to make them independent of their parents’ homes.” (Romania IR, p. 41)

The international review team contended that the housing shortage in Romania was a barrier to workforce mobility, flexibility and inability to adapt to the process of economic restructuring. It made the somewhat self-evident observation (though one which is not always executed) that “economic changes which involve migratory flows should be accompanied by appropriate housing policies” (Romania IR, p. 42). The point can be extended in relation to broader issues within youth policy: housing opportunities and limitations clearly influence the mobility and decisions of young people. New

initiatives may be required within youth policy to facilitate the independent living of both mobile and (by choice) less mobile young people. Experimentation has started in some countries, with loan and subsidy arrangements, and even self-build programmes (which have the added advantage of equipping young people with practical vocational skills). There may need to be consideration of hostel and supported housing arrangements for young people with particular additional needs. These are likely to require development in the future. They remain patently under-developed for the most part at present, despite an evident housing crisis for young people. In Luxembourg, there is no legal or policy framework for providing housing for young people who are unable to live in the parental home. The median age for leaving home has increased to 24. The international report raised a number of questions about the adequacy of housing provision, and housing market structures, for the changing housing need among young people. One general point was that with more young people staying in education, and family formation occurring later in the life-course, there is likely to be an increase in the housing demand from single young people. The Luxembourg international review team were "left wondering where young people live" (see draft Luxembourg IR, p. 43). The international report observed rather loosely that "young people need affordable housing which provides appropriately for their needs" (ibid.). It noted that the national report says that housing subsidies do exist, and that a quarter of the beneficiaries are under the age of 25, but it makes no further comment on this (though this indicates to me that there is some policy focus on youth housing needs.) Youth homelessness in Luxembourg is not discussed in the national report, but the international team was informed that there are around 60 homeless people in Luxembourg, who are mainly under the age of 30 and usually unemployed and unqualified:

"Since it is very likely that homeless young people may suffer from multiple disadvantage, such as unemployment, a disadvantaged family background, lack of family support, early history of truancy and low educational achievement, and perhaps also current behavioural problems, there should be appropriate provision for them, including supported hostels." (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 44)

This is an important observation for a general consideration of youth policy. Youth homelessness is invariably linked to other aspects of difficulty and disadvantage. It is therefore not just a housing question, but one which also relates to health and education policy. The case for integrated youth policy is made once more.

Within the NUOSTRA "concern strategy" in Finland lies the objective to "make it possible for young people to become independent of their families

at the right point in their development" (Finland NR, p. 65). The national report makes reference to certain financial provision to support housing for particular groups of young people (students, single parents, conscripts). But little is said beyond that, although studies were under way into the housing conditions of young people which the national report suggested "may influence future youth policy" (Finland NR, p. 114). The key issue remains, like elsewhere, that reduced access to resources (notably through remaining in education or because of limited opportunities in the labour market) makes it difficult for young people to move, with confidence, to independent living (see Finland IR, pp. 79-80). The international review team, like the one for Luxembourg, identified the general challenge for youth housing policy as a need to:

"Experiment with different models by which the housing aspirations of the young can be linked to wider policy issues around training and the economy." (Finland IR, pp. 85-86)

Sweden also has some special initiatives regarding the housing needs of young people (subsidies, allowances and home-saving accounts), but the pressing issues are, once again, resources and employment. The only comment on housing made by the international report was in the context of its discussion of "participation", but it is a telling one:

"The question is how far Sweden's Government wants, and is able to go in allowing young people more economic influence and independence. This especially concerns a totally 'inadequate housing supply' and thus forced prolongation of dependency on parents, and exclusion from insurance systems. A youth researcher to whom we talked coined the expression 'boomerang kids' for young people moving in and out of the parental home, depending on their economic situation." (Sweden IR, p. 25, my emphasis)

Following this, and rather predictably, the Swedish international review team recommended that Sweden should "create sufficient housing for independent young people as well as young families; the role of the state could be more active in this field. In view of limited resources, there needs to be a new setting of priorities" (Sweden IR, p. 35). However, the international report did not provide any illustration of what these might be and, like all youth policy development, the devil is in the detail. There is always space for easy rhetoric, against which it is impossible to argue; conversion into relevant realities is the challenge.

There was no mention of housing issues in either the Estonian or the Netherlands international reports, reflecting its virtual invisibility within their national reports.

Social protection

The question of adequate social protection (through social security and welfare services) for young people is a contested one, notwithstanding the very different responses and provision across Europe. The general policy position is that young people should be engaged in learning or work or some other kind of "purposeful activity", not unemployed. Indeed, the rationale for the withdrawal of social protection from 16 and 17-year-old young people in the UK in 1988 (with the exception of some special cases) was that they should "not have the option of unemployment". In its place was a guarantee of a youth training place, but within a decade it was apparent that significant proportions of young people had dropped out of education, training and the labour market altogether, with no visible means of support. Many had sunk into a "tangle of pathologies" including early pregnancy, crime, homelessness and drug misuse. By the late 1990s, this group had re-established itself as a youth policy priority in the UK; its re-surfacing threw into relief the challenge of combating social exclusion.

On the other hand, high levels of social protection are probably unsustainable even in those countries which currently provide it, and equally probably undesirable. But what is the alternative? Where social protection is available, it is often comparable to wage levels in the lower echelons of the youth labour market – and therefore there is little incentive to work. There are some tough youth policy decisions to be made here. In Luxembourg, for example, the Guaranteed Minimum Income (RMG) is now available to those over 25 (formerly it was 30) and a high percentage of the total level is accessible to those under 25 on temporary contracts and traineeships. But RMG is set at a level similar to unemployment benefit. It is easy though necessary, therefore, for the Luxembourg international report to state:

"Since there is no separate minimum wage in Luxembourg, there seems to be little incentive to encourage unemployed young people to seek employment."
(draft Luxembourg IR, p. 48)

This may not particularly be a pressing policy issue right now, for the Luxembourg economy is buoyant and reasonably well-paid jobs (well above the RMG) are readily available, but it is a legitimate question for the future. Unfortunately, the Luxembourg international report does not propose any answers. The two obvious responses – to set a higher minimum wage or to reduce the level of social protection – are perhaps best left unsaid, since the former is probably politically untenable and the latter "academically" unspeakable and socially risky, for the research evidence is that it is as likely to propel young people into exclusion as into poorly paid work.

The question of “social protection” and income support seems often to have almost disappeared from the radar map of youth policy; it seems to be assumed that if young people do not secure employment, they will be purposively engaged in education or training. Conversely, because more and more are engaged in the latter, they are not experiencing unemployment. But financial support is an important youth policy issue, if desirable pathways to adulthood are to be followed. The issue is not restricted to supporting those who become unemployed, but to consider what may be necessary to support (some) young people to remain in learning, when family circumstances do not provide it. In a policy discussion in the UK, I once observed that the life-course/transition decisions of poor young people from poor families in poor neighbourhoods – whose key priority is to obtain some money – are often the reverse of those which public policy believes would benefit them most. A graphical depiction of that argument is as follows:

Table 5: The perversity of youth choices when governed by financial pressures

Desirable youth policy priorities [in descending order]
Participation in education
Participation in vocational training
Employment in the legitimate labour market
Employment in the informal economy
Activity in the illegal economy
Desirable youth choices [in ascending order]

Social protection must thus be “weighed” in the context of competing demands and alternative choices which may be made by young people if a sufficient level of state income support for whatever they are seeking to do is not available.

Illustration

Only the Luxembourg international report dedicates a chapter to the consideration of social protection, although this relates to family relationships and child protection as well as questions of financial support. It notes that where young people remain in education, their families can receive financial support for them up until the age of 27; otherwise this “child support” stops at the age of majority (18). The international report comments:

"There are many young people who do not receive financial support from their families and who may need social protection in the form of state benefits." (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 46)

Elsewhere, the international reports are silent on any specific consideration of social protection issues and their relation to other dimensions of youth policy, apart from the general and repetitive rhetoric that young people need more support, including financial support, to enable and ensure their transitions to independent adulthood.

Family policy and "child" welfare

It is often argued that the family is essentially a private sphere which is not a legitimate focus for public policy, beyond the realms of child protection. Any further public scrutiny and intervention is alleged to smack of moral policing. Yet, with the emergent research evidence that young people remain increasingly dependent on their families for a longer period (because of the problematics of economic and housing transitions) and with wider state policy often relying on the family to provide additional support to young people over a longer period of time, "family policy" is integrally connected to "youth policy". This assertion was made by the Finland international review team which, despite the superficial coverage of family policy in the Finland national report, remained "convinced that it is pertinent to a full understanding of youth policy" (Finland IR, p. 80). Family policy is not simply concerned with "children's policy" but, for different reasons (such as those outlined above), must be related to youth policy. As the Luxembourg international report indicated, in its discussion of the capacity and volition of families to support young people for longer and young people's desire (but often inability) to achieve independence earlier:

"These issues will increasingly create problems for youth policies which focus on the young people as an individual without taking full account of their family contexts. All policies for young people affect their families, and many family policies affect young people." (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 24)

Beyond the emotional and material support which it often provides, the family represents a place from which to progress, but also a place to which young people may need to regress, for instrumental reasons – as in the case of Sweden's boomerang kids and many young people in Romania. It may also represent other things as well for young people, but it is critically related to the policy challenges of housing transitions and the move to adult independence.

Illustration

Family relationships are often most fraught during the adolescent years and, for different reasons, are likely to produce tension if young adults have to remain – contrary to their wishes and aspirations – in the parental home. The resolution of poor parent-child relationships in Luxembourg is restricted to a mediation service. The idea of “child protection”, which elsewhere would apply to children and young people up to the age of 18, is relatively new to Luxembourg, and the very principle of removing children and young people from their families continues to be “strongly contested” (see draft Luxembourg IR, p. 47 and Luxembourg NR, p. 81). The international report calls for further attention to the question of “children at risk”.

Children at risk in Luxembourg are, generally, hardly likely to experience as profound disadvantages as street kids in Romania, whose current realities are invariably a product of broken family relationships or no family relationships at all. Part of a package of “child welfare” measures propounded by the international review team included a recommendation that street children should, where possible, be placed in substitute families: current practices of permanent institutionalisation is seen as the worst solution (see Romania IR, p. 56). The Romania international report also suggests a review on “child abuse” procedures and practices, and stressed the need for young people with disabilities to have “special opportunities for education and work at protected work places” (Romania IR, p. 76). In particular, it focused on the needs of young women, especially those in rural areas. Beyond the need for more robust policy attention in the direction of contraception and sexual health (see above), it supported the government initiative to support young mothers financially to encourage them not to place their children in shelter institutions (see Romania NR, p. 42). However, the international review team was not aware how successful this measure had been, although it was clearly important, given that 6.5% of Romanian families with children have only one of the parents present.

Many young people in Spain say that they do not wish to have children. The majority of young people aged 15 to 29 are not married. Finding a stable partner is a problem, exacerbated by the housing crisis. Living together per se, and certainly living together in a parental home remains completely unacceptable. However, a vulnerable group consists of the 26% of young people who have a child born outside marriage. Beyond any material difficulties this presents, there is also the need to address the stigma, in a country where the sanctity of marriage and the family remain very strong. The international report had no proposals about how to respond to the needs of this group.

Family policy was not addressed in the otherwise extremely comprehensive Finnish national report, because it was not considered to be part of “youth policy”. Child welfare and child protection strategies, which invoke both preventive and supportive, as well as in the final resort protective, measures are part of a different remit.

It is quite astonishing how little is said about families, parents and relationships – in the context of both young people’s families of origin and their families of destination. This almost confirms their disappearance into a private sphere, beyond the orbit of public policy. Yet given the influence of parents and families on young people in so many ways, one would have thought that it might have been a basis at least for discussion, even if the policy implications might be difficult to extricate and the capacity to execute them might be heavily constrained. This is not a *carte blanche* advocacy for the automatic inclusion of family policy (including child welfare) within a youth policy framework (one could argue just as well for the inclusion of youth within a family policy framework), but it is to say that family policy cannot simply be overlooked when wider reflections on youth policy are taking place.

Leisure and culture

Leisure (and sport) have, historically, been a primary focus on youth policy. Hence the common elision between youth “work” and youth “policy”. And while leisure and sport remain a significant priority for youth policy (as in Luxembourg), it is clear not only that this is not sufficient but that “leisure” itself is changing, presenting both new opportunities and challenges for emergent youth policy. There are key questions to be asked (and answered) about whether or not youth policy in this arena should attempt to shape the leisure time of young people or support their autonomous leisure priorities. Leisure time is not simply about “consumption” but is also about “production” (see Willis et al 1990): it can be a creative space for learning, especially in the new social contexts of eastern Europe, despite it often being depicted as the “weak link in the chain of socialisation”. In the light of this, Sweden, for example, places considerable emphasis on supporting new cultural activity by young people (see also Fornas et al 1995). But the “free time” of young people is not just about new culture and creativity; it is also linked to cultural inheritance. In Spain, it is argued that young people’s connection to a variety of traditional cultural activities has provided them with important support in their currently difficult circumstances. There are, therefore, important issues for youth policy around the “autonomous” leisure and cultures of the young, more organised leisure and sporting activities and, indeed, what one of the international reports depicted as “educationalised leisure”.

Illustration

Spanish young people dedicate much of their time to “free time”: meeting friends, watching TV and playing sports. Their involvement in youth associations is mainly around sports and single issues. The international report, in its discussion of youth cultures/subcultures concludes that “a cultural policy is well developed in Spain and serves the interests of the young consumers and producers of culture” (Spain IR, p. 36). This is achieved through the active work of INJUVE, the National Institute for Youth, which was once attached to the Ministry of Culture:

“...and still promotes interesting cultural programmes: it financially supports shows, competitions, plastic and photographic art exhibitions, production of video films, music creators, theatrical tours, and individual and university research in the fields of art and culture. The Spanish National Report mentions that INJUVE supports the ‘promotion of new creators and new cultural practices’.” (Spain IR, pp. 33-34)

Spanish young people nevertheless still pursue a lot of their free time in “autonomous” leisure activities, albeit guided by longstanding traditions (see Spain IR, pp. 29-30). Sweden has some very different traditions: a tradition of organised activities. And, despite the shift in youth policy in Sweden in the 1990s to take account of emergent youth unemployment, “leisure still plays a decisive role in Swedish youth policy, probably more so than any other European country” (Sweden IR, p. 20). Some 80% of 13 to 25-year-olds are members of an association (again mainly sports). The free time of young people, according to the international report, is filled by adult-designed and guided activities – hence the international team’s use of the term “educationalised leisure”. Young people in Sweden have become used to relying on organised support systems. Recently, however, there has been some crisis of legitimacy in youth organisations, as participation levels dropped (a feature in many other countries, too). As in other countries, Swedish society “seems to be confronted with a youth generation which is beginning to break away from the old tradition of a guided and organised youth life” (Sweden IR, p. 22). The challenge, therefore, is the extent to which youth policy is adapted to support new preferences and participative practices in the leisure time of young people, and what objectives this may serve in the context of the strategic aspirations of the wider youth policy.

This is a challenge which has also had to be confronted in Finland, in which the links between various themes which are separated out within this report become strikingly apparent: youth work, leisure, participation, and the role of youth organisations. Historically, youth work in Finland was concerned with leisure-time activity. Youth organisations were viewed as an important

mechanism for youth participation. But some traditional avenues for participation have eroded and, as in Sweden, "it is argued that young people have lost interest in the participation routes through youth organisations" (Finland IR, p. 88). Hence the need to find new models for participation which are attractive to young people in their leisure time. A case in point is the development of an Internet information system under the auspices of the national youth agency Alliansi, funded by the Finnish national lottery.

It is some paradox that as levels of leisure-time participation in formal youth organisations are declining in northern and western Europe, central and eastern European countries are seeking to support and promote the work of youth organisations. The question of participation is considered in more detail below, but it is worth noting here that, despite these efforts, in Romania for example, there is considerable indifference to these structures. Young people value their free time as precisely that – a sense of freedom. But often they are unable to access the leisure-time preferences they have (going to the cinema, theatre, museums and art galleries) because of a lack of personal resources. The Romania international report argues that:

"In view of this situation, measures should be taken (travel discounts, free travel for a given number of kilometres/hours) in order to allow young people to enjoy the forms of cultural consumption which most appeal to them." (Romania IR, p. 50)

This is perceived to be especially critical if young people are not to be "dragged" back into an impoverished pre-modern existence. Meanwhile, many young people in Romania fill their leisure time watching television, roller skating and playing snooker. They also enjoy computer games and have a "feverish adoration of the Internet". The international report maintains that here is a foundation for youth policy development which is under-developed: "youth policies do not exploit this cyberculture in an intelligent manner in order to facilitate the life of young people" (Romania IR, p. 51). But unless advantage is taken of such opportunities, there is a major risk (given the wider contexts of young people's lives) of them "coming off the rails", especially in terms of being attracted to the drugs culture. Indeed, "drug taking needs careful attention from the makers of youth policy" (Romania IR, p. 50). A similar point was made in the international report on the Netherlands:

"Attention must be paid to the yearning for social and personal ideals, typical of young people at a young age, in order to counteract their substitutes, such as consumerism, alcohol and drugs." (Netherlands IR, p. 26)

The Netherlands international report maintained that leisure was assuming a growing importance in young people's life while youth policy was paying declining attention to it. Young people in the Netherlands spend their free time associating with friends, and visiting bars and discos in small groups.

They enjoyed computer games and the new media. But because of this, they were subjected to the pressures of commercialism. The international report asserted that:

“Non-formal educational initiatives could be used to counteract this development of passive consumerism, which could become a danger to civil society... [And] we note a trend to youth de-ideologisation and de-politicisation...” (Netherlands IR, p. 34)

These are observations which also surface elsewhere in this report. They are commonplace across Europe. The Netherlands also reinforced the evidence that young people have turned to single issues and more spontaneous activities. But these points are made here as well because, critically, the Netherlands international report engages in a deeper analysis of trends and practices in young people's leisure time than many of the other international reports. Its firm and forthright conclusion is that:

“In this diversified and anarchic milieu of highly individualised youth leisure pursuits, the traditional preventive youth policy, with its patronising and enlightening approach, is *definitely out of place*.” (Netherlands IR, p. 35, my emphasis)

Rarely in any of the international reports is such an assertive statement made. And if its analysis of youth leisure is considered to be persuasive, then the assertion repays serious attention. For it may require a radical re-think of youth policy approaches to young people's leisure time – whether this is concerned strategically with education, participation or something else. For faith has largely remained attached to the work of youth organisations and the promotion of organised leisure.

Leisure time provision in Estonia also remains, as was argued in the case of Sweden, “heavily pedagogical”, designed to train other talents but in a complementary way to school activities. This reflects the strong educational ideology which informs youth policy in Estonia. But as elsewhere there is limited participation in youth associations, estimated to be only around 5%.

Leisure is a relatively autonomous space, which is exploited by young people in a variety of ways. The Spanish international report adopted the classic definition of “free time” as the structuring of time into four dimensions:

- for personality development;
- for rest;
- for entertainment;
- for socialising.

(source: Spain IR, p. 29)

Of course, much leisure time is dedicated to private pursuits, which should not be a matter for public scrutiny or intervention. But the Spanish international review team felt that “two aspects of young people's free time,

youth associations and youth cultures/subcultures, can be encouraged through specific legislation" (Spain IR, p. 31). Leisure is the classic sphere where public (youth) policy should not regulate, but facilitate. The question is always whether the leisure-time activities of young people lend themselves to youth policy support and this consideration is in turn related to the extent to which "constructive leisure" supports the overall objectives of wider youth policy.

Youth justice

However much it may be argued that youth policy should be constructive and "opportunity focused", there will always be a need to "deal with" those young people who transgress the law. As with the question of appropriate responses to the use of illegal drugs (which is itself a criminal offence) where it can be argued that it should be a health rather than a criminal justice issue, it is possible to argue that youth crime is essentially a welfare, not a delinquent, issue: the depraved are also the deprived. Although this perspective carried some persuasion during the 1960s and 1970s (in some countries), it no longer holds sway. Young offenders have to take some responsibility for their actions. There are, as a result, three central youth policy questions to be resolved. The first is that the vast majority of young offenders are relatively petty but also relatively persistent offenders, for a while at least. While it is clear that one-off offenders should be treated leniently and serious offenders have to be subjected to some level of punishment, it is this broad band in the middle who create significant policy dilemmas. This is the second point: what balance needs to be struck between reform and retribution? The third point is the extent to which prevention policies can be put effectively into place to vitiate the need for punitive responses at all. There are few easy answers to these dilemmas and, historically, the pendulum has swung constantly between extremes. What needs to be clarified is that, within the context of taking responsibility (and paying the price) for offending behaviour, young offenders should not become further disadvantaged by missing out on educational opportunities or failing to address drug dependency or mental health problems. Yet positioning "treatment" programmes inside a framework of punishment and accountability can itself be problematic.

Illustration

The countries in question had very different approaches to youth justice questions, starting of course with different ages of criminal responsibility. Beyond this, the personal positions of different international review teams were often somewhat transparent. The Luxembourg international report gave the distinct impression that it disapproved of the fact that "Youth Court decisions are currently based on one judge's individual decisions and not on

expert recommendations based on the child's welfare" (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 47). Currently, a special parliamentary commission is working on this issue, but this comment takes no account of the fact that the administration of justice by expert witnesses and professional recommendations was itself pilloried when it was ascendant in some countries at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s (see Kittrie 1971). The "justice" lobby, a combination of those supporting retribution and those advocating proportionality (punishment commensurate with the offence committed), displaced the "welfare" lobby which had, too often, supported disproportionate state intervention purportedly "in the interests of the child".

There was so little in the international reports that it was easy to overlook the fact that, in many parts of Europe, there are moral panics about the rising tide of juvenile crime. Some of this, for many reasons, may be illusory, but it is not a complete illusion. Perhaps it says more about the international review teams, where to debate youth crime and youth justice necessarily brings to the table critical questions about authority, imposed state intervention and involuntary "participation". It does not rest comfortably with ideas about autonomy and empowerment, though it is invariably part of the same equation. Some countries may, of course, have little to say. Finland's national report dedicates just one page to the matter, on the grounds that youth crime is not considered a big problem. There is a strong policy emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation, delivered through effective co-operation between police, schools, social welfare authorities, parents, businesses and voluntary workers (see Finland IR, p. 82). One might surmise that opportunity structures for young people in Finland (in the economy and in leisure) continue to be sufficiently attractive to rule out the need for either instrumental or expressive offending, assuming that one subscribes to theories of crime around "delinquency and opportunity" (Cloward and Ohlin 1961). In the Netherlands, it is acknowledged that there is an increasing youth crime rate, which includes growing levels of violence. The situation is made more complex by questions about the relationship between ethnic minorities and crime, both in relation to the prevalence of offending and to their disproportionate encounters with the police (the two may or may not themselves be related). Policy is pulled in two directions, a punitive one seeking to curtail crime, punish offenders and secure public safety and a more rehabilitative one which is less repressive and does not risk driving young people (who are young offenders) further to the margins. The international report suggests that the Netherlands has a well-funded and elaborate approach to addressing youth crime, which concentrates on three issues:

- prevention and prospects;
- early detection and intervention;
- stricter enforcement.

While commending much of what is done as exemplary of an integrated and constructive approach, the international report nevertheless fires a somewhat antithetical parting shot: "The basic characteristics of this policy are still its authoritarian or even repressive attitude" (Netherlands IR, p. 38).

The international reports on Sweden, Spain, Romania and Estonia say very little or nothing about youth crime. This is perhaps understandable in the context of Sweden (which may well be similar to Finland) and even to Spain (where moral controls still exercise some force), but it is quite unbelievable that nothing should be said in relation to Romania. The national report itself talks about "numerous delinquency acts". It suggests that the Ministry of Youth and Sports should take on a "more rigorous intervention" with this issue, given that "juvenile delinquency refers to a social category of which the Ministry of Youth and Sports is responsible at great extent" (see Romania NR, p. 375). It proposes greater co-operation between government and NGOs, and more effective intervention programmes and diversion initiatives. Some commentary by the international review team might have been worthwhile. Similarly, the Estonian national report provides a basis for discussion of this issue in its chapter on children as both offenders and victims of crime (see Estonia NR, pp. 150-161). Unlike Romania, youth crime in Estonia has levelled out after a dramatic rise during the mid-1990s, suggesting perhaps greater social and economic stability. There was limited implementation of the plan (1997-2000) for the prevention of juvenile delinquency through social, educational and legal measures – but at least it makes the connections between this triangle of policy, inside which lie both the incidence of youth crime and the prospective efficacy of youth justice responses.

National defence and military service

More and more countries are relinquishing the idea of national military service (conscription) in favour of volunteer armies for state and European defence. But (for men at least) national military service did more than simply serve the defence needs of nations. Arguably, it also provided a rite of passage, a key transition pathway, and the social benefits of early independence. There is therefore the question of how to replace the social benefits of such experience. Germany has, for example, attempted to introduce the concept of the "social year", during which young people give time to service in the community. (Community service has, for a long while, sometimes been accepted as an alternative to military service for those with acceptable "conscientious objection" to the latter.) The big question, however, is whether or not there should be some element of compulsion, or whether such options should remain entirely voluntary.

Young people have responded to the continuation of compulsory military service where it still exists in very different ways. In Finland, virtually no-one refuses, while in Estonia more than half fail to present themselves when they are called up. It is difficult to explain these differences and the international reports did not provide a great deal of illumination. Certainly in Finland, young people remain very positive about national defence, which reflects their more general integration with the norms and values of Finnish society. Military service is considered (by the authorities and young people alike) to contribute to the maturation and responsibility of young men. And of course it serves to take a proportion of young people out of a competitive labour market for a while.

Given the pressures on the youth labour market throughout Europe, and concerns about the increasing juvenilisation of young adulthood (Spain's "Peter Pan" syndrome), alternative, or parallel, tracks might potentially be developed to fulfil the same functions.

Key issues for youth policy

Participation and citizenship

There is a massive groundswell of interest in the idea of youth participation and the promotion of more active citizenship. This is, indeed, a key plank of the recent European Union White Paper on youth policy. It is in fact a package of ideas drawn from an authentic desire to involve young people more in decisions which affect their lives (see Cutler and Frost 2001), the political urgency to combat a democratic deficit and to develop processes of democratic renewal, and to re-establish a "sense of belonging" amongst young people who feel excluded and disengaged. And while there is a keen interest in advancing a sense of European citizenship, such processes have to start at the local level. The idea of "citizenship" and "community" are integrally connected:

"Citizenship and community are words that relate to the fundamentally human business of living with others. The two words depend on each other. Citizenship has no meaning on its own; you have to be a citizen of something, namely a community. And there are no communities worth the name, which do not afford members a sense of something shared and a common status of belonging (a status which one can call "citizenship"). Understood broadly, these concepts are as old as human civilisation itself." (Hall and Williamson 1999, p. 1)

The importance of the idea of participation and citizenship is reflected in the fact that, through the partnership agreement between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, new initiatives have been established for

long-term training courses and training-the-trainers courses in European citizenship (see Curriculum and Quality Development Group 2001).

Illustration

The problem for both "citizenship" and "community" today is that there are many of them. The concept of "participation" can easily become little more than a rhetorical device based on a feel-good factor. Indeed, a major criticism by young people is that participative structures, where they exist, are tokenistic, a rubber-stamping exercise for decisions which have already been made. This may be one of the reasons why they have "switched off". Another reason, advanced by a number of the international reports, is that youth policy has been developed and operates within an ideological vacuum. From Romania and Estonia, to Finland and the Netherlands, it is not clear what "youth policy" is really trying to do, what kinds of structures such policy is seeking to attach young people to, and why. Young people may be eager to take part (participation was cited as the priority for youth policy in Sweden and often does not come far behind jobs and education elsewhere), but they do not do so because of a lack of effective structures. There is a critical void to be filled here. It is an issue which goes well beyond the role and place of youth organisations per se. As the international review team for the Netherlands argued:

"Another important aim of a general youth policy might be to take up the challenge from the new generation and try to answer their open or implicit questions about the value systems upon which our democratic welfare society has been built. This should not be a matter of indoctrination or mere "teaching", but rather an invitation to an open dialogue between equal partners about common values, common responsibilities, etc." (Netherlands IR, p. 29)

There are major concerns as to whether youth organisations, national youth councils (and, indeed, the European Youth Forum) are in fact the sole appropriate vehicles for youth participation and representation. During the preparation of the European White Paper, a select eighteen young people were subject to scathing attacks for not having any democratic base from which to speak. The White Paper itself recognises the role of the European Youth Forum but also suggests that the voice of young people may need to come from other sources, if the "full" voice of young people from across the social spectrum is to be heard. (In its response to the White Paper, the EYF has taken umbrage with this. It maintains that it is the only recognised democratic voice of young people in Europe and that more resources should be made available to its constituent national youth councils to work harder on involving young people who, historically, have not been involved in youth organisations.) There is, undoubtedly, an issue about "representative" or "categorical" representation. At a national level, this same issue was taken

up by the international review team for the Netherlands. It strongly condemned the fact that, because youth organisations were not considered to represent all sectors of the youth population, the Netherlands government had asked researchers to draw a representative sample of young people to take part in a national youth debate:

“But it is hardly a solution to replace an elected representative body by a socio-logically representative group or panel, selected by researchers, that is to say to replace the “voice of the people/youth” by the voice of the researcher.” (Netherlands IR, p. 24)

The international report is being somewhat mischievous here: it was hardly the voice of the researcher. But it does reinforce the need for reflection on whether youth policy strategies to engage with young people need to move beyond traditional reliance upon youth NGOs. (In the UK, it has been recognised that different mechanisms may be required for different purposes: the guiding policy framework is that all publicly funded organisations working with young people must have “demonstrable mechanisms” for involving and consulting with young people.)

Throughout the international reports, comment was made on the fact that many young people felt that their participation was “tokenistic”, not “real”. This has been said and heard many times before. Participation has been used so casually and widely as a concept that it has virtually lost its meaning. What it means within different structures and in different contexts needs to be discussed and rendered more explicit. Only then will there be clear signals about how it might be achieved – perhaps through more robust and financially supported structures from “above”, perhaps through building on the volition and aspirations within cultures from “below”.

In the two eastern European countries which were reviewed, there appeared to be a trend – in terms of “top down” state youth policy – to support or maintain formal youth organisations. But both Romania and Estonia were suffering from low, and even declining, rates of participation, in the same way as other countries which were reviewed, but probably for different reasons. In the case of Estonia (where, as noted above, participation rates were only around 5% of young people), it was argued by the international team that “the new freedom and emerging individualism are not compatible with associations for young people” (Estonia IR, pp. 24-25). In Romania, similarly, it was asserted that most young Romanians said they did not know of any youth/governmental organisation capable of helping them to solve some of their personal problems. There were low rates of membership and political indifference:

“Romanians, like other citizens of the post-communist countries, exercise their new right for individual choice, by refusing association (because before 1989 association was compulsory for them).” (Romania IR, p. 49)

There were also other reasons, such as the bureaucratic procedures attached to establishing and sustaining youth organisations and material constraints (as in Estonia, where funding is only made available to organisations with over 500 members), and a lack of facilities, which hardly makes membership worthwhile. (It is desirable facilities and activities which usually attract young people to such organisations in the first place, and may in fact be their sole *raison d'être* for their involvement. The Maisons des Jeunes (youth houses) in Luxembourg, which play a central part in Luxembourg youth policy, provide a good example of such provision, even if they are attended mainly by young men. They provide a “sanctuary” for young people, a meeting place and a locus for a range of activities (see draft Luxembourg IR, p. 50).

This is not to say that there is no participation. Indeed, in Estonia, there are two large (gendered) para-military youth associations (despite the fact that more than half of conscripts do not show up for the required military service, a very different scenario from that which prevails in neighbouring Finland – see below).

Youth organisations are often concerned, on the ground, with contributing to the provision of activities for young people in their leisure-time (see above). But from a strategic youth policy perspective, their function is twofold. Certainly there is a belief that they support constructive leisure-time pursuits and thereby assist in diverting young people away from less constructive, and potentially, antisocial behaviour in their free time. But their potential for engendering participation, and indeed “political” participation, is probably of greater strategic significance. It is about enabling young people to find their place in civil society. Luxembourg youth policy, according to its international report, epitomises this objective, even though it may recently have broadened its perspective to accommodate more structural problems facing an older age group of young people. According to the international report:

“The central feature of youth policy and provision in Luxembourg is in the field of youth work and structures to enable and facilitate political participation... The principal aim of current youth policies in Luxembourg is “active participation by young people in their community life” (National Report p.103), and this is addressed through a range of youth work services.” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 49)

New structures have recently been put in place, relating to the implementation of the three action plans. The intention of establishing effective co-operation between national and local government, and between statutory and non-statutory bodies, is viewed as an appropriate one. But the aspirations

behind these new approaches are, according to the international report, not being achieved through current structures. The report highlights a by now all too familiar problem:

“While the government may be committed to this, young people themselves are more interested in leisure and sports activities.” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 49)

It becomes all too evident that policy endeavours to promote (political) participation through formally constituted youth organisations is running against the tide of changing priorities amongst young people. Those who still participate in such structures (and fewer and fewer do so) remain involved for the leisure and sporting facilities on offer, not for the opportunity to play a more active part in civic and community life. For that to be achieved, alternative mechanisms will need to be found.

Youth organisations are not, of course, the only avenue through which young people have opportunities for participation, even if, historically, they have been a central one. Another vehicle is through youth councils, and much faith has been placed in some countries in the establishment of school councils. But these beg questions both about representativeness (as, indeed, do youth organisations, even if they may be “democratic” – see above) and about the authenticity of “participation”. There are invariably allegations of “tokenism” from young people themselves. Every secondary school in Luxembourg has a school council, which send representatives to the *Conference Nationale des Eleves* (National Youth Council). This can advise on education policy, but not on broader youth policy:

“The feeling was that the government was only interested in listening when young people ratified policies, rather than criticised them. They feel that they cannot put pressure on government on issues which concern them, that they do not get sufficient access to information, and that they are being manipulated.” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 59)

In Luxembourg, there are also local youth forums (and there have also been National Youth Forums). This promotes communication between young people, local authorities and the ministry. This structure for participation can, if it wishes to, by-pass youth organisations, and the *Conference Generale de la Jeunesse Luxembourgeoise* (CGJL), the umbrella organisation for youth organisations in Luxembourg.

The Luxembourg context throws up some very real dilemmas concerning “participation”. On the one hand, it clearly acknowledges the need for a variety of avenues for participation. On the other, it fails to address the potential confusion that this creates in terms of who should have the ear of policy-makers at different levels in the policy-making process. (This is

a similar problem to that observed by the international team in the Netherlands and may also potentially be a problem at the level of the European Union, given the recent White Paper's emphasis that the European Youth Forum may not be the only voice of young people, even if it is likely to remain the most significant one.)

Very similar issues concerning participation emerged in Sweden. Its "good practice" around participation was evidenced by its youth councils and local school boards. But there were still "big issues" about the level and impact of participation, not least the alienation which often existed between student representatives and the rest of the student population. Furthermore, despite commending much of Sweden's approach to encouraging youth participation, the international report suggested that:

"... the notion of participation pertains more to the "soft" than to the "hard" sectors of society. In the hard sectors (education, vocational qualifications, economic sector, insurance and housing), participation tends to be theoretical rather than real. Nevertheless, the wide variety of activities, experiments and objectives set in this field is gratifying and it is recognised that Swedish youth policy plays a vanguard role at the moment." (Sweden IR, p. 26)

Indeed, the Swedish government was already aware of this potential weakness:

"The government feels strongly that it has to counteract the imbalance of the lack of influence of young people and that it should demand more evidence that young people are included in all representative organs of political and cultural life." (Sweden IR, p. 25)

This is a similar policy objective to that which has recently been established in some of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom. But it will not necessarily assuage allegations of tokenism. And like Sweden, Finland has a strong tradition of seeking to foster youth participation, with (until recently) its youth boards and its youth councils. But the international report suggested that the role and function of these youth councils was unclear, which led to disillusionment amongst young people and diminished their desire to join them:

"Youth participation is an important element in any democratic society and it provides important experiential learning for citizenship, but only if it has support, direction and purpose." (Finland IR, p. 98)

The "glory days" of such structures for youth participation, according to one youth worker in Finland, may now be over!

The debate around youth participation in the Netherlands also emphasised the close relationships with youth organisations, youth work and non-formal

education (the latter being discussed elsewhere in this report). The international report notes that the restructuring of Netherlands youth policy gives a strong priority to youth involvement through, it argues, youth information, communication with young people, young administrators and “structured implementation” (see Netherlands IR, p. 21):

“Youth participation is a new approach in a general preventative youth policy which is directed toward increasing the opportunities of young people to develop and manifest their positive abilities. It represents a break with the negative image of youth which focuses on social problems encountered and caused by young people. The opportunities-oriented approach is directed towards developing young people’s ‘social capital’ – to enhance young people’s social ties with society and challenge them to make use of their own strengths.” (Netherlands IR, p. 23)

Yet the international report detected three concerns about the approach which has been adopted to achieve this goal, despite the broad political consensus about its importance, which has always characterised the shaping of youth policy in the Netherlands. First, there is the trend, common across Europe, of declining membership of youth organisations, despite (or perhaps because of) their transformation into “autonomous, effective professional agencies” (see Netherlands IR, p. 12). Secondly, youth policy in the Netherlands remains, paradoxically, very much a “top-down” approach. Thirdly, although youth participation is seen as “active” when and where it takes place in youth organisations, it tends to be viewed as “passive” in the context of leisure consumption. This exposes the political rhetoric that young people should be held to be active agents in their own lives:

“Passive participation means consuming youth services, mostly in leisure time. This seems a very “adult” view – a view from above – as young people are no less creative in leisure than in other spheres.” (Netherlands IR, p. 24)

The Netherlands international report, which generally commended the dynamism of Netherlands youth policy both for its extensive and intensive dimensions (see Netherlands IR, p. 17), appeared to be deeply concerned about this “paternalistic” view (see above). It noted that the national report said very little about local youth organisations and it drew attention to the fact that one third of local authorities apparently took no account of youth participation. Only 10% did so systematically. Structures for participation were often tokenistic, with local authorities reluctant to allow “too much power” to young people. As in Finland, the consequence was that young people often saw no purpose in participating. The fact that young people were seen as consumers, not creators meant that particularly “problem”

young people are perceived as clients and not as prospective partners. This was indeed conceded by the national report, which is recorded by the international review team:

“The National Report itself suggests that if youth is taken seriously into account, other issues will be included in the youth policy debate such as environmental health, combating racism, etc... The opportunity-led approach to youth participation is still underrated.” (Netherlands IR, p. 25)

Virtually all the international reports point out that more disadvantaged groups of young people are even less likely to be involved in youth organisations. They also note that traditional association has been predominantly to sports organisations, but draw attention to the emergence of single issue movements, concerned with “human rights, environment, feminist, pacifist, civic, charitable” issues (Spain IR, p. 32). Spain is no exception. The Spanish international report, albeit in a slightly contradictory way, also tied together the relationship between youth organisations, informal learning and young people’s autonomous free time, and challenged the efforts of government to change the role which the international report felt was central to the existence of youth organisations. Its perspective is instructive, and worth quoting in full:

“The suggestion of the Spanish National Report authors that there should be a more frequent involvement of youth associations in solving practical problems is also questionable.

The current expert group agrees with the opinions of the other two groups of international experts (Finland and the Netherlands) relating to NGOs: the main function of an NGO regarding youth participation is the development of informal education that should encourage solidarity, activism in humanitarian issues, responsibility, empathy and sympathy for other people’s problems. In certain contexts, these qualities cannot always develop, such as in Spain where young people regard the future with uncertainty. NGOs must be stimulated to such a development: they are a place where young people discover themselves. It must not be forgotten that Swiss youth requested the state not to become involved at all with their free time. Their report indicates that social reality should remain an individual undertaking and be independent of state projects.

In conclusion, the international group of experts believes that Spanish legislation on associations would be useful to attract disadvantaged youth into associations together with the current members, and to develop the opportunity for informal education of young people which in Spain is totally absent.” (Spain IR, pp. 32-33)

It is not quite clear how legislation would produce this outcome. But the independent, autonomous and self-managing nature of youth NGOs is

certainly an important issue: the overlooked, but critical question is how they sustain and broaden their membership base and thereby retain their credibility in the eyes of “government” at national and other levels which often financially support them.

What we witness in recurrent international reports is a criticism of too much “top-down” decision-making and direction in the interests of promoting “participation” – a striking paradox, if ever there was one. We can also detect a thread which indicates a relative disinterest on the part of governments in informal (or non-formal) learning, and the contribution to be made on this front by youth organisations (as well as “youth work” – see above). There are, of course, exceptions, but by and large, the “quite ambiguous impression about views on youth participation”, which the international review team detected in Estonia, was replicated in many of the international reports (see Estonia IR, p. 27). In Estonia, participation was clearly “not in the first rank”, although it was conceded that the Ministry of Education was aware that it was missing a “youth voice”. But, the international team asserted, the national report “leaves a main impression of adult policies from above” (ibid.), despite the existence of a Youth Forum, a Youth Work Council, and a representative council of young users of the new Youth Work Centre. The Estonian international report suggested that this situation was perhaps a “post-colonial” legacy (though this would not explain similar deficits in other parts of Europe), or alternatively a consequence of the heavy (formal) educational ideology which informs Estonian youth policy. There were, according to the international report, certainly very weak traditions of participation in education. In formal schooling there was nothing on “education for democratic citizenship” (a big European agenda and therefore surprising, given Estonia’s aspirations for membership of the European Union), which has clear implications for participation and influence. The international report concluded that the challenges and demands of this agenda are largely absent in the Estonian national report.

Participation and citizenship obviously connect to wider issues, such as political engagement, human rights and the information society. Some of these issues are dealt with elsewhere. But the Romanian international report makes the telling observation that political participation demands a combination of objective possibility and the subjective will. Participation depends not only on integration (political mobilisation) but also on information (political interest). Young Romanians, however, give political parties low scores of trust. They express disinterest, mistrust and dissatisfaction – the problems that they experience as young people are not being satisfactorily resolved within political processes (see Romania IR, pp. 51-52). Such disquiet with “traditional” politics is not, however, solely the preserve of young people in

Romania. Youth policy structures in Finland have had to address the disengagement of young Finns from the political process and young organisation and have become concerned about an emergent “wanton individualism” and new forms of political action. The national report records that:

“From their margin, some young people observe, disparage and cynically mock the players of the political field... They disregard the political arena, seeing that it has failed to keep its promises... The political field is left to “them”, the old traitors and gamblers. At most, young people communicate their own political views aggressively, with insults and cynical shrugs.” (Finland NR, p. 118-119)

This may be an extreme depiction of young people in Finland. Elsewhere in the national report, there is a view that young Finns remain well integrated within social and political structures, a view which the international report largely concurred. None the less, this observation does capture a growing trend, and not just in Finland. The international report suggests that it would be unwise to suppress these “new found enthusiasms”, however unpalatable they might be to the establishment, or even try to co-opt them, but “to enlist them in the broader debate about young people’s futures and how best to maximise their possibilities” (Finland NR, p. 119).

That is the essence of “participation”. If youth policy is to be serious about it, then it cannot attempt to govern what young people express, nor how and where they choose to express it. It may, of course, wish to support young people in learning and understanding how and where their views may secure the greatest impact, and why. But participation is indeed tokenistic if it simply appears only to rubber-stamp decisions that have already been made. Furthermore, there need to be a variety of structures for participation. Youth organisations have, historically, led the field, but they do not hold a monopoly on “how it should be done”. They may (or may not) reflect the best “democratic” approach, but increasingly a space and place must also be made for, for example, “categorical” representation and participation through the use of new information technologies. Meanwhile, the changing nature of youth organisations and the contexts in which they operate may require them to reflect upon whether they wish to be, in the famous words of two Australian youth researchers, “heads of a movement” or “arms of the state”.

Combating social exclusion and promoting inclusion

Research evidence about the social condition of young people points graphically to the challenge of social exclusion. “Social exclusion” is clearly the mirror-image of “citizenship”: they are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin. Citizenship and exclusion, I have argued, encapsulate societies’ (and

individuals') hopes and fears for the future. Public policy, through supporting opportunity and possibility and minimising risk and vulnerability, aspires to promote the former and prevent the latter.

A significant minority of young people in many countries are "losing out" in multiple ways. Youth policy invariably places a key emphasis on maintaining and promoting inclusion, but this is most explicit when it is "problem oriented" rather than "opportunity oriented". Yet, when we look at young adults who have navigated youth transitions most successfully, it is relatively easy to discover that they have benefited from what might be called a "package of entitlement" – within which a good education remains paramount, but not exclusively so. The package also includes strong parental and family support, access to information and new information technologies (and the ability to make use of them constructively), away from home experiences (including foreign travel), and other opportunities and experiences. Much of this has been acquired almost organically, without much need for public support. Yet some young people, significantly those who are anyway most "at risk", struggle to access such opportunities. They have simply not been available.

This is, indeed, the philosophical position which is informing new youth policy in Wales, under the banner of "extending entitlement". Put simply, it is about seeking to ensure that young people who cannot access this "package of entitlement" in any other way have it extended to them through public services. It is a simple enough concept, though complex in its delivery, given the cynicism which often prevails amongst the young people who are its targets. But it is one which is worth some attention.

Illustration

Finland makes much use of the idea of social exclusion, but its national report maintains that effective youth policy has largely made such concerns unfounded:

"The impact of the services (described above) is difficult to measure objectively and unambiguously. One thing is clear, partly thanks to them young Finns manifest surprisingly few symptoms of social exclusion, despite the worst youth unemployment in Europe." (Finland NR, pp. 53-54)

Indeed, the international review team suggested that although there was a lot of speculation about emergent social exclusion of (at least some) young people, there was very little evidence of this. That is, in terms of the type of exclusion identified elsewhere in Europe (such as non-participation in learning and training, homelessness, drug dependency and mental health problems). But the concept of social exclusion is as much relational as distributional: it is a relative concept to be considered against the general standards and

practices which prevail. Therefore, the international report felt that the issue had not been sufficiently explored and that Finnish youth research should redirect some of its attention away from more articulate, "post-modern" youth and give more focus to more "ordinary kids":

"...in order to provide a more grounded analysis of the patterns and nature of social exclusion amongst young people. Youth policy would then have a firmer basis for developing re-integrative initiatives in their direction." (Finland IR, p. 120)

Of course, uncovering and somehow "measuring" social exclusion is problematic, highly dependent on the criteria invoked. Social exclusion has become something of a catch-all term, one which has often replaced ideas such as poverty and social disadvantage. It is perhaps usefully reflected on as the extreme manifestation of inequalities (see below), involving the clustering of disadvantage. The depth and breadth of such disadvantage demands an integrated and sustained policy response.

The international report on the Netherlands depicted the Netherlands youth policy as incorporating both a "curative" and a "general" youth policy, within which the former still predominated. Innovations in youth "care" had adapted the "curative" approach to one which was more preventive, but youth policy was still significantly focused on youth problems: "saving society from youth and youth from its own problems" (Netherlands IR, p. 22). In this respect, it could be considered as being concerned primarily with reducing the risk of social exclusion. The international report observed that local preventative youth care services take on an impressive array of tasks, including:

- reducing the number of school drop-outs;
- preventative youth health and mental health services;
- employment services;
- crime prevention.

There has been a radical re-organisation of services in order to produce more coherence, co-ordination and co-operation, and to encourage more effective regional networking. Two aspects arising from these developments are particularly worthy of note here. On the positive side, has been the development of a "Youth Centre Front Office" – "a single point of access through which youth care is channelled per region and to which all young people in need can turn" (Netherlands IR, p. 23). This was an idea once mooted in the UK in the early 1980s (Norman 1982). Then, as in the Netherlands, it was considered to be a mechanism for addressing the fragmentation of youth provision, where young people experiencing problems in their lives often did not know where to turn. On a more critical note, the Netherlands has sought to improve the standardisation of the costs of youth care, but this development is described by the international report as rather "dubious": "if the

objective is to address the individual needs of the client, this move towards standardisation is a contradiction of that philosophy" (Netherlands IR, p. 23). This raises in a different context the general challenge for youth policy – how to establish common frameworks for support and intervention while at the same time ensuring sufficient flexibility to accommodate the diversity of individual need. The challenge is pervasive, but is considered to be especially pronounced in the Netherlands where, despite sustaining general social prosperity, there has been a corresponding growth in "individual stability". The social condition of youth is felt to be precarious: hence the strong youth policy focus on promoting social inclusion. The international review team felt, however, that prevention as a basis for general youth policy was problematic. It suggested that a different approach would repay consideration:

"Previous experiments in several European countries have shown that quite often young people are categorised as "youth at risk" because they do not feel that they belong to society; society does not seem to need them; they are not valued and not given any opportunity to commit themselves and take responsibility. If on the other hand these young people respond to an appeal to their positive potential – and an honest wish to make use of it – they may very well develop into an active resource, both in their group and in their neighbourhood. The positive approach re-establishes their self-esteem and self-reliance." (Netherlands IR, pp. 28-29, see also Council of Europe 1990, 1993)

This perspective may be held by policy makers to be somewhat naïve and romantic, the luxury of academics who do not have to deal with concerns about young people "at the sharp end" (in local communities). Youth policy has to think carefully about the balance to be struck between responding to concerns expressed about young people, and responding to the concerns expressed by young people.

At least the authorities in the Netherlands are explicit about their concerns about young people "at risk". In Sweden, the international review team felt that it "did not get a clear picture concerning youth at risk and concepts of youth work related to the associated problems (drugs, alcohol, criminality and racism)" (Sweden IR, p. 30). This was attributed to the fact that although Swedish youth policy was not yet based on a post-modern theory of youth "it contains many valuable elements of this theory, especially the notion of youth as a resource for society" (ibid.). This point makes the important connection between theoretical conceptualisations of youth and social change, and the more practical policy development which needs to flow from that. Further, it implicitly reinforces the urgency of a robust debate about the relationship between youth research, policy and practice (see below). In relation to Sweden, the international review team (unsurprisingly, and despite having been critical of its over-organised approach to youth

policy and its oversight of the issue of minorities) were optimistic that effective links in this relationship were being established. The concerns raised could be reconsidered:

“... within a framework of new youth policy whose main aim is to prevent social exclusion. The youth policy as laid down in the National Report as well as the new bill is a sound basis to deal with those problems.” (Sweden IR, p. 32)

It is interesting that the international report here describes the “main aim” of Sweden’s youth policy as prevention of social exclusion. Elsewhere, it outlines three “main objectives” which appear to be quite different and are about developing opportunity structures. But there is in fact no contradiction, just as there need not be a tension between curative/preventive youth policies and “general” youth policy, of which much was made in the Netherlands international report. They are two sides of the same coin. They may be seen to rest upon a continuum of necessary policy measures, starting with the re-inclusion of those who have already become excluded, through the prevention of exclusion in the first place and the cementing of inclusion, to the active participation of young people in social, civil and political life (citizenship). Theoretical distinctions between these issues in fact blur into each other when it comes to policy and practice, and indeed can sometimes be unhelpful, although they do assist in establishing where different policy priorities may – or should – lie in different countries.

Despite their difficulties in relation to housing, employment, education and material independence (see Spain IR, p. 13), which are arguably major catalysts towards “social exclusion”, young people in Spain do not appear to experience a sense of exclusion, despite the international report’s preoccupation with the issue of “anomie”. They remain included and retain a sense of inclusion perhaps because the individualisation thesis of post-modernist theory applies less to Spanish youth and they are still able to draw support through social traditions and “frameworks [which are] deeply rooted in their daily life” (Spain IR, p. 12). The family continues to be “a true national resource of today’s Spain” (Spain IR, p. 23). “Social exclusion” did not appear to be an issue. Nor was it in Luxembourg, although – as in Finland – the international review team felt that the issue might not have been adequately researched. The Luxembourg international report does conclude that there is a need within youth policy for more preventive work and to redress disadvantage, and expressed concern about the lack of early intervention. But, with some exceptions (around, for example, young people with disabilities and the broader situation of minorities), the international review team may have been “chasing phantoms”. Despite the concerns expressed about some aspects of Luxembourg youth policy (not least its persisting focus on activity-based provision for a younger age group), a buoyant labour market and general prosperity supports the effective transitions to adulthood. This

notwithstanding, the Luxembourg national report itself accepts that some 10% of young people aged 16 to 24 are living in poverty (based on 40% of average income) and argues that “additional arrangements” for support and integration are required. These are currently the subject of discussion and development. Note may therefore be taken of the observation of the international report:

“There are many young people with needs in Luxembourg, ranging from the needs of potential students for a local university, to the probable but unrecognised wide ranging needs for affordable housing. There are also the needs of young people with disabilities or learning difficulties not only not to be discriminated against but also to be able to maximise their abilities and gain access to a good education, good jobs and quality housing. It appears that while the structures of youth policy in Luxembourg could be shifted without much difficulty to allow these needs to be met, currently they are not being met. Some of them are not even being recognised.” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 7)

And what followed immediately in the Luxembourg international report, although referring specifically to Luxembourg, incorporates an argument which is worth more general consideration, especially by countries which seek to develop youth policy on generalist rather than problem-oriented lines:

“The concentration on the mainstream, and the stated aim of integrating all into the mainstream, appears to be detrimental to those who cannot fit in, and who have particular needs of their own. Any state, however wealthy, will contain people who are failed by the system, and since the causes and consequences of social disadvantage change over time, it is therefore essential that social policies should be constantly under review. There are inequalities among young people, and these should be addressed. A focus on integration should contain a recognition of varying need. It appears though that some childhood disadvantage is allowed to continue through into adulthood without intervention until it is too late.” (draft Luxembourg IR, pp. 7-8)

The lack of insight into the potential for, and consequences of “social exclusion” was also commented on by the international review team in Estonian. Little mention was made in the national report on the heterogeneity of young people, except for the overarching differentiation between Estonia and non-Estonian youth. (To some extent reference was also made to differences between urban and rural youth, where the authorities acknowledged serious shortcomings about what could be achieved outside of the more central areas of the country). The international team remained unclear “what kind of youth life young Estonians are living” (Estonia IR, p. 35). The limited evidence available was ambiguous, though it points in a favourable direction (see Helve 2000). The international report suggested, drawing from

what was available in the national report, that the lives of young people were a "hard, competitive, meritocratic everyday life, with a rather tough treatment for those who fail (delinquency, orphans)" (Estonia IR, p. 35). But little further is said about the experience and consequences of this exclusion.

The most manifest illustration of "social exclusion" in Romania, according to its international report, was the phenomenon of the "return to the country". (This is not to deny the position of the Roma, but this is addressed under considerations of multiculturalism and minorities: ethnic minority groups, too often, are subject to active, rather than "accidental" exclusion and demand a different policy analysis and response.) After decades of migration to the cities, the pattern was now in reverse, as young people were disproportionately vulnerable to emergent inequalities and were forced back into dependency on their extended families. Significant numbers of young people were returning to a "pre-modern" condition, a far cry from the "post-modern" youth of Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands, or the "modern" youth of Spain:

"This 'return to the country' may accentuate the renewed vigour of the pre-traditionalist model... with serious consequences for the independence of young people. This scenario calls for effective policies to promote the emancipation of the rural young: education, vocational training, employment, housing." (Romania IR, p. 29).

It was this question of policy to support independence which exercised the minds of the international review team. For young people unable (or unwilling) even to fall back into dependency on their families, their only recourse was to engage in prostitution or drug dealing. Young people in the worst situation are those in pre-modern contexts, and the very worst are those in positions of disintegration. The international report, while recognising the challenge for Romania in seeking to dispense with a past which is no longer relevant but struggling to establish stability for the future, does not mince its words:

"Despite the relative (normative) integration of young people living in this situation [pre-modernity], it is urgent that youth policies treat them as a priority target. Why? Because if this normative integration exists it is merely to counterbalance manifest economic penury. It is the lack of housing, inaccessible schools and unemployment which lead these young people to seek refuge within their families. But these same young people – through the media, for instance – will become increasingly aware of the miserable conditions in which they live, as they gradually understand that there is another world, from which they feel distant. They will foster dreams of consumption, and adopt strategies of mobility. They may want to try their luck in the cities, and they may not have the luck to find it.

They will soon be on the road to normative disintegration, to add to the misfortune of being left out by the modern economy." (Romania IR, p. 67)

Romanian "street children" are the most stark illustration of these processes. Their living conditions, according to the international report, are deplorable. Permanent institutionalisation was not an answer, and the problem of street children was firmly connected to the "miserable conditions in which many Romanian families live" (Romania IR, p. 56):

"And if this is the root of the problem, it cannot be resolved merely by a policy of providing support. The important thing is to give these families work, decent housing, conditions under which their children can study. (Romania IR, p. 56)

But many more young people in Romania are deeply pessimistic and they are sceptical about whether anything can make a difference. (They are not, of course, the only ones: young people in Finland are also anxious about the future. But there is a big difference between pessimism and anxiety.) The international report maintains that "the tension between a painful past and an unpromising future has to be faced politically" (Romania IR, p. 70), especially in the context of the most excluded young people. Youth policies must be developed which help young people towards independence – through credit, transport, enterprise, housing and education (see Romania IR, p. 66). There are also opportunities through Romania being a European Union associated country.

It is in Romania that the issue of "social exclusion" is most pronounced. Indeed, at the "Bridges for Training" international conference in Brugge in September 2001, during a debate about participation and non-formal learning, a colleague from Romania raised the question of why young people should be interested in participation when their most pressing priority was to get something to eat. It was a poignant remark, and pertinent not solely to Romania. The challenge for youth policy across Europe is to address social exclusion in all its relative forms – for where young people experience, or feel, social exclusion, the chances of securing their commitment to constructive participative practice are invariably significantly diminished. Policy responses to their immediate needs are an essential pre-requisite to restoring some confidence in their minds that public institutions and services may possibly make some difference to their lives. In Romania, young people define the priorities for youth policy intervention as follows:

- social housing;
- sponsorship;
- unemployment;
- youth promotion in managerial positions;
- establishment of a youth worker profession.

Somewhat predictably, but it is a case of reinforcement rather than repetition, the international report asserted, "it is important that youth policies should deal with the expectations and aspirations expressed by young people" (Romania IR, p. 62). Effective youth policy can only be developed through a two-way process.

Information

Youth information first assumed some prominence within youth policy during International Youth Year in 1985. It was thought that it could serve as the basis for a modern approach to young people, one which both enhanced youth participation and served to have preventive effects. It offers young people new possibilities to make independent decisions and the right of choice; at the same time, they have to assume greater responsibility for their own choices (see Netherlands IR, pp. 35-36).

Information proliferates by the day. It is both a key issue for youth policy in and of itself, and an increasingly important mechanism for the delivery of other aspirations for youth policy. It is not just about new information technologies, although these are central to it. The overarching questions are threefold. First, young people need to develop a capacity to distinguish between what is useful and what is rubbish, between what may potentially be educational and what is commercial. As the Netherlands international team noted:

"But it is a challenge for the educational system in view of the new computer and media-age to make sure that young people are given sufficient opportunities to learn to analyse, evaluate, select and reflect on vast quantities of information. In short, they must learn to distinguish between good and bad." (Netherlands IR, p. 32)

This is a remarkably similar observation to the outcome of the deliberations of the "education" working group during Students Forum 2000 (which took place in Prague in 1999). Its conclusions were that the information challenge for the twenty-first century rested on a concept of "FREUD in a human envelope". FREUD stood for:

- Find;
- Retrieve;
- Evaluate;
- Use;
- Defend.

The "human envelope" expressed the need for young people to be supported in developing these skills for managing and making use of the raft of information to which they would have access throughout their lifetime.

The second question is whether or not discrete information services should be provided to young people or whether they should be located within the existing infrastructure of youth services. There are arguments to be made here either way. As the Netherlands international report notes, dedicated (independent) information services have the potential to become a new instrument of youth policy in its own right, but the risk is that it could also be construed as further fragmentation, hindering development in an all-encompassing way (see Netherlands IR, p. 36). Moreover, information provision should not be restricted to new information technologies, however (increasingly) significant these may be. Within youth policy and youth work in particular, "information" is often umbilically attached to "advice" and "counselling".

Third, therefore, there is a policy question about the balance between the proactive and reactive use of information, as well as the strength and direction of any advice or "counselling" provided. To what extent should information and advice be directed at young people presumed or judged to require it (to enable them to make "informed choices", and to what extent should it be available should young people request it, as and when they believe they need it. The "top-down" youth policy model, often heavily criticised in the international reports, would attach itself more closely to the former position; "post-modern" theories of youth would argue the need for greater emphasis on the latter.

Illustration

The Romanian international report, however, maintained that there was a pressing need for information services to young people about addictive drugs, "so that they can take conscious decisions" (Romania IR, p. 69). Few information services of any kind are currently provided. In contrast, youth information in the Netherlands is an integral part of wider youth policy approaches, established within the infrastructure of existing youth services, which have established a network of Youth Information Points through libraries, schools and social centres. Thus, in the Netherlands, "youth information is developed in close relationship with the other strands of youth policy such as preventive youth policy and youth participation" (Netherlands IR, p. 36).

Youth information is also equally valued in Finland, developed both in conjunction with wider youth services and innovatively (via the Internet) through a specific policy initiative within the national youth agency Alliansi, sponsored by the Finnish national lottery. The international report makes a telling observation about youth information services, which has a general application:

"For young people to shape and manage their futures, they require access to comprehensive and reliable information. Alliansi is pioneering computer-based

youth information, not just for Finland but for the whole of (English-understanding) Europe. Any information database, however, needs underpinning in four ways. First, young people have to know how to access it, something that needs to be taught in schools. Secondly, it needs a multiplicity of outlets, so that young people can access it in a variety of ways and a variety of settings (there has been talk elsewhere in Europe of data-points in shops used by young people, post offices, and even "holes in the wall" in the street). Thirdly, it needs the resources to keep it updated on a very regular basis. Fourthly, information is not objective or absolute; it may often need clarification, development and discussion. Finland is at the forefront of progress in the new information and communication technologies. A key challenge for the future is how these can be harnessed to support youth policy objectives. Youth work would appear to have a pivotal place within any such initiative." (Finland IR, p. 98)

Access to new information technologies, notwithstanding the ability to make constructive use of them, varies considerably amongst young people, both within and between countries. Technological inequality is a key concern for the future (see Council of Europe 1997). The Nordic countries tend to be in pole position: almost 90% of young people in Sweden have access to a computer, and just under 80% have access to the Internet, at school or at work (Sweden IR, p. 24). But, as noted in relation to leisure, Spanish young people are no fans of the Internet, and there were no further comments about information in the international report. Romanian young people, in contrast, have a "feverish adoration" of the Internet (see above), and the international report suggested that this was not sufficiently exploited to facilitate the lives of young people. Presumably, this would include thinking around youth information. Indeed, the international report did recommend the development of youth information as a basic human right, including re-engaging with the Youth Card and establishing a system of publicly available information bases and youth information points (see Romania IR, pp. 74-75). Given the enormous pressure on resources for youth policy in Romania, the international review group felt that such development was probably the most practical way to implement non-formal education.

The provision of information is mentioned cursorily in the Estonian national report, but does not merit consideration in the international report, except in the context of future planned developments of policy concerning young people's leisure and youth associations. These intentions have been formed within the framework of the 1999 Youth Work Act, which is the "more central instrument of youth policy... and [it] covers a wide range of activities and purposes" (Estonia IR, p. 19):

"The ministry has some clear ideas about what kinds of new or alternative forms of youth work they want to see developed during the coming three to four years,

as an implementation of the Youth Work Act: special projects for unemployed youth, youth information centres, open youth work, street work, projects for young drug users, etc. There seems also to be a discussion on how to develop the associative sector, perhaps with wider concepts of 'associative life', youth movements, etc." (Estonia IR, p. 25, my emphasis)

Youth information is a central plank of Luxembourg's Action Plan 2 (Communicating with Young People, 1998). It considers information as a basic human right, and the national report sets out in some detail the strategic and practical framework for providing youth information services (including youth information points, a central resource centre, an information bus, and the Youth Card – see Luxembourg NR, pp. 112-114). However, this attracts very limited attention from the international report.

The arguments and illustrations provided by the Luxembourg national report are readily transferable to a more European context. Information services for young people must be viewed not as some static search and retrieve system, but as a dynamic process through which broader skills are engendered beyond the knowledge provided by the information itself. The framework to ensure that such a process takes place is the critical challenge for youth policy. As the Luxembourg national report usefully asserts:

"Information for young people is not only worthwhile in itself, but has traditionally enjoyed high status in Luxembourg's youth policy, because ultimately actively obtaining information nurtures the capacity for participation which is expressed in living citizenship (citoyenneté)." (Luxembourg NR, pp. 113-114)

Multiculturalism and minorities

The ethnic composition of most European countries has been transformed dramatically in recent years, as a result of mobility and migration. (I often inform younger participants at Council of Europe events that I grew up in an exclusively white (and British) environment and did not travel on a plane until I was 27, having been "abroad" (to France) only once before that; they often find this difficult to believe.) There are significant populations of "ethnic minorities" in many countries, some of which are relative newcomers, others of longer standing. The latter – the "old", indigenous minorities – have often, historically, been subject to discrimination and intolerance. New minorities often experience it too. Respect for diversity through intercultural learning and understanding has become a major concern with many governments, and measures are introduced at an early age. (The Anne Frank Foundation, for example, has produced an excellent video for use in junior schools in the Netherlands, entitled "People of Many Colours".)

The countries under review invariably prided themselves on the management and development of their “multicultural” societies, proclaiming their tolerance and their promotion of equal opportunities, or at least mutual co-existence. There are persisting issues, of course, about how to “accommodate” ethnic minorities – through assimilation, tolerant co-existence, or cultural pluralism? Such issues have been present since the 1960s (see Banton 1972), but they have not been alleviated by time. The aspiration is that the key to harmony in the future lies with the young people of today and therefore the “multicultural” agenda needs to be firmly located within the frameworks of youth policy. Most countries asserted that it was, though immediately the international review teams drew attention to the fact that the government ministries responsible for minorities were often not included in the cross-departmental “youth policy” deliberations at the highest level.

Illustration

The Finnish national report has a chapter (albeit only two pages) on “multicultural Finland”. It draws attention to the new waves of immigration to Finland and points out that traditionally tolerant young Finns have become less tolerant. A high level political strategy had been established to address racism and promote tolerance. The international report notes that the Helsinki Youth Department had recently established a new focus on ethnic minorities and multicultural youth work. But, despite these well-publicised aspirations, the international review team was unable to “interrogate” the issues in any profound way (see Finland IR, p. 105-108). The position of ethnic minorities remained largely invisible to the international review. It did discover that young people from immigrant communities were often very despondent about their futures. There were high levels of alcohol use. There appeared to be greater potential for (instrumental) crime, on account of a lack of labour market opportunities. But ethnic minorities were not in any way ghettoised; their problems were just accentuated versions of the difficulties facing other disadvantaged groups. The international review team concluded that levels of racial intolerance appeared to derive more from a lack of experience, understanding and sensitivity than any direct and overt racism.

In stark contrast, the Roma in Romania are a well-established ethnic minority, comprising more than one-tenth of the population. They have, historically, been subjected to discrimination and victimisation. They now have new social and legal rights, but are often unaware of them. The Romanian national report asserts that “the regulations relating to the protection of national minorities have become effective” (Romania NR, p. 55), but the international report alleges that “this belief becomes unsustainable when it is suggested that if there are instances of inequality they are due to people

being unaware of their (formal) rights under the law" (Romania IR, p. 55). The international report argued sensitively that there needed to be a sharp "youth policy" focus in attempts to reduce prejudice against the Roma and promote greater inclusion. An inclusive solution had to start with younger generations:

"There must be a strong policy commitment to the integration of young Gypsies: with support for education, in training and vocational integration programmes.

But measures are also needed in order to safeguard the cultural distinctiveness of different ethnic groups, remembering that the right to be different is one thing – it is quite another to take a difference as the basis for devaluing that which is different. Hence the need for programmes which promote tolerance and greater understanding between young people from different cultural backgrounds, in order to eliminate more or less subtle forms of racism." (Romania IR, p. 54)

Here there is the "typical" argument for both inclusion programmes and programmes which respect cultural difference. There is an uneasy tension between the two, and finding a path between the two is fraught with dilemmas and difficulties. One in three young people in Luxembourg do not have Luxembourg nationality. The distinction between resident nationals and resident non-nationals was, according to the international report, identified to the international review team as one of the main features affecting Luxembourg's youth policy (see draft Luxembourg IR, p. 25). Amongst young people aged 12 to 24, 57% are Luxembourg nationals and 43% are foreign nationals, with Portuguese as the largest single group. In addition, there are 5 000 refugees, a significant "minority" in an overall population of considerably less than half a million. Language is an important issue (which the international report suggested could constitute a means of differentiation and inequality). The Luxembourg education system requires children from immigrant families to become proficient in Luxembourgish, German and French. Dual nationality is not permitted: the international report indicated the need for Luxembourg to reflect on its perspectives on citizenship and nationality. But multiculturalism is an important part of government policy: the challenge is to create an environment for integration and political participation. The question is whether this constitutes an aspiration towards assimilation or cultural pluralism. The international report suggests that "multiculturalism" in fact still mainly takes the form of separate co-existence:

"True multiculturalism has still some way to go in Luxembourg. The presence of ethnic minority groups in Luxembourg potentially adds to the richness of the country and cultural diversity should be celebrated, not repressed." (draft Luxembourg IR, pp. 29-30, emphasis original)

(The draft international report on Luxembourg received a somewhat frosty reception at its hearing by the CDEJ, and this was one of the more controversial assertions. Various formal and informal responses to the report suggested that this was a very negative reading of ethnic relations in Luxembourg, which should have been commended more and criticised less for its approach to multiculturalism).

Even more profound concerns were expressed in relation to Estonia and its treatment of "non-Estonian" young people, notably ethnic Russians. The concern resided in the fact that this group is dealt with by the Minister of Ethnic Affairs, who remains outside of the orbit of "youth work" and "youth policy". Estonia, according to the international report, had a "serious problem" if approximately one third of their youth population are second-rank citizens (see Estonia IR, p. 37). This allegation met with severe rebuke and denial by the Estonian authorities. It may well be an indefensible allegation, but it was argued in the context of some overarching principles of youth policy:

"Concepts like participation, development, peace and their actual elaborations [are] backbones of youth policy. If there are some serious problems concerning Estonian and "non-Estonian" youth, it is not understandable that the issue is left to a ministry based on prejudices and fixed opinions, instead of being handled within a youth policy dialogue, through hearings, or by setting up a special "Russian youth council" or other ways to develop the issues as part of a civic society approach." (Estonia IR, pp. 36-37)

The Swedish international report criticised the fact that the Sweden national report did not adequately take the diversity of youth into account – including the position of minority youth. Unlike other youth policies, which focused at least in part on specific groups and potential social problems, Sweden's youth policy is based on general measures which do not place particular priority on any specific sub-categories of young people – including young people from ethnic minorities. The international report comments that:

"Swedish society defines itself as being "tolerant" and "multiculturally oriented". Yet it seems that immigrant young people are under-represented in (white middle-class) youth organisations and have fewer chances on the labour market and in other societal arenas. The life-situation of immigrant youths as such is not a theme in the National Report even though about 25% of Swedish people have some "immigrant background". It is somewhat strange that in the National Report a paragraph on "Young people in Sweden from a foreign background" is hidden away in a chapter on International Contacts." (Sweden IR, p. 28)

Perhaps the international team was in fact “chasing phantoms” but its report may equally have raised some “hidden concerns” which bear on the debate about multiculturalism across Europe. Each country has its own interpretation of what this means. It may be necessary to renew the debate in an open and forthright way, outside of the straitjacket of political correctness and “saying the right things”. These have become almost detrimental to a frank and open discussion of what is clearly a central issue within and beyond deliberations on youth policy.

The Netherlands national report dedicated a whole chapter to a consideration of ethnic minorities within its overall youth policy (see Netherlands NR, pp. 186-195). About 17% of the Netherlands population are “minorities”, and “the proportion of young people in ethnic minorities is much higher than that in the Dutch originated population” (Netherlands NR, p. 186). The national report reflects on questions of identity, social mobility, historical ethnic minority policy from central government and at the local level. It recognises that the position of ethnic minorities is still “unfavourable”, with lower achievement in education and greater problems in the labour market. Despite policy efforts which have shifted from a separate minorities policy towards an integration policy, “the preponderance of many ethnic minorities in areas of great accumulating problems remains an alarming fact” (Netherlands NR, p. 195). It is noted that “active policy on improvement of the position of these groups, hence, remains high on the agenda” (ibid.). The approach towards minorities within its youth policy was commended and considered to be a “positive innovation” by the Netherlands international report:

“Inspired by the principle that “everyone should be an Amsterdammer and should respect each other’s culture”, youth policy in the Netherlands reflects the multicultural nature of Netherlands society.” (Netherlands IR, p. 46)

In contrast, the Spanish national report cites a number of plans, committees and recommendations to support policies against racism and in favour of tolerance, but the international report notes that it received no evidence of their practical impact: “the tolerance/intolerance and racism/non-racism issues are not sufficiently known at the moment” (Spain IR, p. 40). The Spanish international report also observed that:

“... there are no special programmes for integrating the Roma/Gypsies into the community... because no difference is made between the problems of the Spanish and the problems of other ethnic groups.” (Spain IR, p. 40)

Two potential concerns in relation to youth policy should be mentioned here. First, once more, there is the question of whether the delivery structures exist to convert expressed political intentions (even those which have been converted into laws and decrees) into practical action which “makes a difference”. Secondly, there is a fine line between arguing the need to respect (in this case, cultural) difference and failing to respond to blatant inequalities and discrimination produced precisely because of that difference.

Mobility and internationalism

Mobility takes many different forms. Physical mobility may include both intranational and transnational mobility. There is also the issue of psychological mobility (the sense of possibility for movement) and, with the Internet, the idea of virtual mobility, where young people can be connected to other places and spaces without ever leaving home. Mobility is often considered to be an essentially good thing, but it is in fact contingent on personal and social circumstances. For the “pre-modern” youth of Romania, there is certainly a case for promoting their possibilities for mobility. For Finland, however, the mobility of young people has led to dramatic out-migration from rural communities and produced serious demographic imbalance in those areas. This highlights the need, at times, to link youth policy approaches to broader questions concerning economic and community development and social revitalisation. The most striking example of mobility from the Council of Europe review process relates to Luxembourg, where one third of its young people leave the country to study in higher education abroad (Luxembourg has no university), while approaching half of all school students are now “of foreign origin”.

Youth mobility has, of course, been powerfully assisted by a range of European youth programmes, at least for some individuals and for some groups of young people. Opportunities to study in another country, to establish youth initiatives on Europe-related matters, to become involved in youth exchanges, and to engage in volunteering in other countries – all have been encouraged through programmes supported by the European Union. In different ways, the activities of the Council of Europe European Youth Centre in Strasbourg (and latterly also in Budapest) and, indeed, elsewhere have equally supported youth mobility, though in different ways. They have brought young people together from all over a wider Europe to contribute and learn about its priority concerns, such as intercultural understanding, the combating of racism and xenophobia and, more recently, the question of “citizenship”. But some countries take more advantage of these pan-European opportunities than others. The extent to which these are actively promoted to young people who would not otherwise have the chance to travel also varies considerably. The international reports often commented

on the place of "Europe" in the imagination and behaviour of young people: access, knowledge and experience of it amongst different groups of young people within different countries, and between different countries, varies considerably.

Illustration

Young Finns, apart from having to concentrate in the major conurbations if they wish to pursue their studies, are the most ardent Inter-Railers in Europe and also take full advantage of the opportunities available under various European Union initiatives. No fewer than half of all young Finns travel abroad at least once a year. They are made aware of what is available to them, and they take full advantage of it. Neighbouring Sweden does not appear so effective in disseminating knowledge about Europe and international possibilities (or young people are less interested in them, which seems unlikely). The government attaches great importance to Swedish youth in Europe, despite the fact that it has chosen not to enter into bilateral agreements on youth exchanges. However, it is enthusiastic to establish more contact with the Baltic states. The international report was concerned that, although Swedish youth are described as very "adventurous" and eager to spend time abroad for study and work, European exchange programmes are not part of the regular school curriculum (any more than anywhere else in Europe). Access to such programmes appears to be given as a reward for school achievement – which risks polarising learning inequalities, since more successful young people will benefit even further, while more disadvantaged and less able young people will be denied the opportunity (see Sweden IR, pp. 26-27).

"Europe" carries very different meanings for young people in Spain. The international review team discovered that there was a lack of interest in foreign languages and an ethnocentrist attitude. Spanish young people are less interested than most young people in Europe in changing their residence (temporarily or permanently) to another country. There is a strong sense of localism and resistance to Europeanisation (see Spain IR, pp. 28-39). The reluctance to make use of the Internet compounds a virtual, as well as a spatial separation from the rest of Europe.

In contrast, as already noted, young people in eastern Europe are avid users of the Internet, and Romania is no exception. Geographical limitations are, in some kind of way, compensated by virtual mobility. Both Romania and Estonia are candidate countries to join the European Union. They are already, therefore, eligible to participate in some elements of European Union programmes, including the "Youth" programme. Such opportunities are maximised as far as possible, though finances still restrict maximum participation

in the programmes available (such as the European Youth Card). The Romanian international report clearly felt that this should continue: "from a European point of view, participation by Romanian young people in transnational community programmes has to be increased" (Romania IR, p. 70). But it also argued the case for the promotion of more local mobility through new youth policy initiatives. It recommended that this might include the encouragement of private business (using tax incentives, for example) to sponsor youth cultural activities, the setting up of youth hostels and recreation centres, and a voucher system to enable young people living in isolated villages to travel to the cities and other communities (see Romania IR, pp.74-75).

According to its international report, "one of the highest priorities in Estonian politics at the moment is their application and preparations for membership of the European Union" (Estonia IR, p. 21). Estonia is "quite well prepared", despite persisting, and still often quite serious problems. But "the general impression, however, is that the average young person in Estonia is closer to modern, European youth than most of their contemporaries in other transitional countries" (Estonia IR, p. 22). And, in this respect at least, the international review team detected no significant difference between Estonian and "non-Estonian" youth living in Estonia. These characteristics are probably explained in part by Estonia's close ties with Finland, and they are strikingly in contrast with the impoverished and marginal situation of young people in Romania.

This "European" orientation in Estonia has had a strong influence on some of the leading principles and practices of youth policy, including the development of youth associations, international youth work and the training of youth workers to a western standard, although there clearly needs to be further modernisation of youth work (see Estonia IR, p. 23). There appears to be, at the level of both the authorities and young people, "a climate of mutual understanding and trust between Estonia and Europe, without any observable friction" (Estonia IR, p. 33):

"At state and all local levels various bilateral and multilateral channels have been used for study visits and exchange of staff and youth groups, with clear purposes of gaining experience and forming opinions on wise solutions for youth work and policies." (Estonia IR, p. 32)

It has been noted already that the international review team was concerned about the lack of co-ordination and strategic direction of Estonian youth policy. Inevitably, this applies also to its European dimension, where responsibility lies with a national "Youth for Europe" agency. The international report makes a case for greater decentralisation of youth policy implementation, including its international work:

“If Estonia continues to learn from its close colleagues in Finland, it will discover that more and more of the practical “Europeanisation” is going on at regional and local level of the youth field... This is once more an argument for a better integration of international dimensions and measures of Estonian youth policy within a comprehensive ideology and strategy, and not only leaving these matters to an executive or technical agency.” (Estonia IR, p. 39)

Given their geographical location at the heart of Europe, perhaps mobility and internationalism were taken for granted in relation to young people in Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Young people in both nations are usually multilingual, and travel to neighbouring countries is relatively easy (and relatively cheap). As the Luxembourg national report observes:

“Given the standard of living in the Grand Duchy and the language skills of its young people, it is not surprising that they enjoy travelling.” (Luxembourg NR, p. 83)

Approximately 80% of young people from Luxembourg undertake tourist travel each year, and we have seen that around one-third leave Luxembourg to study in another country. The international report does not elaborate on any issues attached to this behaviour. Nor does the Netherlands national report say much about mobility or Europe. But the international report raises an important general issue:

“Greater attention must be paid to increasing European co-operation. What are the expected consequences of this process for youth education, employment, and leisure? How can European co-operation expand the opportunities for ethnic minorities and young people with low qualifications to participate fully in society?” (Netherlands IR, p. 48)

Clearly, mobility and a “sense of Europe” and “being European” is an overarching concern for the makers of youth policy throughout the countries of Europe. The challenge is to ensure that all young people are given the opportunity for experiences which will contribute to this end. The European “Youth” programme provides a framework for such experiences. The particular challenge, which resonates with my “extending entitlement” thesis advanced earlier, is to establish structures and processes to enable more disadvantaged young people to have a slice of this cake. And this applies most significantly to those who are unlikely to engage with the European dimension in any other way through, for example, travel with friendship groups or on family holidays.

Safety and protection

Young people may be the largest group of perpetrators of crime in many countries, but they are also its most likely victims. Many young people feel a sense of insecurity in public spaces. Very little was said about this in either the national or international reports and, to date, it is only a “youth policy” concern at a local level, with specific initiatives being established between youth services and municipal planning departments. Whether it merits more strategic consideration at national levels is worthy of debate. It was hardly the subject of comment in the international reviews, although it did have some prominence in some of the national reports.

Equal opportunities

Within youth policy, equal opportunities appear to be assumed rather than explicit. Many of the national reports did not dwell on the issue, though some specific comment was made around, for example, gender, ethnicity and disability. Gender equality was only given a full airing in the Swedish national report. It was left to the international reports to pick up on, and elaborate, the well-versed research evidence of the sustaining inequalities (in both opportunity and outcomes) between different social groups and categories of young people, despite the espoused efforts of youth policy to address them. But even then the detail was somewhat sketchy. Gender inequalities were reflected upon most frequently, sometimes in favour of young women, but usually not. Ethnicity was mentioned usually in the context of the disadvantaged position of minorities and occasionally in terms of explicitly discriminatory treatment. Disability was considered either in terms of its oversight in the context of “mainstream” youth policies, or occasionally in terms of special support measures adopted or recommended. Concern was also expressed about geographical inequality, notably the lack of “reach” of youth policies to more isolated communities. Most often, however, the international reports drew attention to the inequalities of outcome arising from different structures of education and training – usually leaving the already disadvantaged even further behind.

Illustration

In relation to Romania and Estonia, in particular, there was some concern that youth policies themselves, far from redressing some such inequalities, might in fact be contributing to them. The Estonia youth policy focus on education which, the international report argued, was “exceptionally well functioning compared to any other transitional country, and will also survive well in comparison with most western countries” (Estonia IR, p. 31), but it was “still a culture for winners”. Around a quarter of young people were

not passing the basic compulsory education, and there was a lack of vocational pathways for less academic young people to follow. The international review team observed that there appeared to be too little concern in Estonia about economic and social inequality, with little reference to problems of entry to the labour market, household and family life, and housing. One of its clearest impressions from the national report was that the demographic prospects of Estonia (and the polarisation of life-chances within that) should become one of the more essential issues for future youth policy (see Estonia IR, p. 36). Similar observations were made in relation to Romania which, for broader socio-economic reasons, “has produced losers and winners” (Romania IR, p. 24). Paradoxically, it is young people with high school education (upper secondary) who have the biggest unemployment rate, and approaching half of unemployed young people are long-term unemployed (having been unemployed for one year or more). We should not necessarily be surprised by these findings. They are simply more extreme versions of what is happening throughout Europe. The capacity of even the most robust, integrated and well-organised youth policy to promote equal opportunities when stronger forces are generating greater inequalities must be called into question.

For analytical purposes it may be important to distinguish between prevailing inequalities within the wider society and those which are sustained within the parameters of what is considered to be “youth policy”. Of course, there is much blurring and overlap between the two in reality. However, in Finland, for example, with its established culture of equal opportunities, the most striking area of inequality was between the indigenous youth population and new ethnic minority young people – but this was felt to be an accentuated version of structural disadvantage rather than a specific consequence of racism per se. In contrast, and “despite the greatest possible efforts of the government and society” (Sweden IR, p. 22), participation in formal youth associations is not equally distributed: middle-class youth predominate, and immigrant youth is under-represented.

These are mentioned simply to illustrate the limitations and possibilities of “equal opportunities” within a youth policy framework. Of course, the broader the framework of youth policy, the more robust will be the equality of opportunity, provided it is underpinned by that philosophy. But presupposing that externally-driven inequalities will persist outside of the orbit of “youth policy”, there is clearly an imperative for youth policy itself to avoid compounding inequalities by facing up to them “internally”. Young people, in their new individualised conditions of risk and uncertainty, and beyond the old “grand narratives” of inequality which still bear heavily on life-chances (such as gender, ethnicity, social “class”, and geography), have a good chance of falling to the margins by themselves – through unwise decisions

or simple bad luck. If the structures and procedures of youth policy also disadvantage them, they are vulnerable to a process of “double jeopardy”. The consequences for both those individuals and for the wider societies in which they live, if that takes place, are bleak, as polarisation increases between the “haves” and the “have-nots”. If youth policy is effective, there is a possibility of it contributing to a more level playing field for young people, promoting opportunity through general measures and sometimes positive action, but also combating exclusion and disadvantage through targeted measures on key issues and towards specific groups in need of it. Both are required, and the often made distinction in the international reviews between them are not particularly helpful when they are presented almost as an “either/or”. Both can be delivered – targeted work within a universality of provision – if strategy is integrated and the political will exists.

Supporting “youth policy”

This is a question which relates to a number of themes referred to above within the five “C”s. It includes issues of capacity, competence and co-operation, and in the context of research, comparability. This paper has already considered the intranational structures which have been established in different ways to support youth policy. But there are three critical transnational dimensions for the support and development of youth policy.

Youth research

Youth research has often made a useful contribution to both theoretical formulations of the changing conditions and transitions of young people and the signposting of appropriate practical initiatives. But often it has not. This is not the place to debate at length the relationship between research, policy and practice (though it is a debate that needs to be had). Nor is it the place to discuss the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative research in informing youth policy. Both have a potential contribution to make. In short, the former provides summative data, delineating the current “state of play”. In contrast, the latter offers illumination of prospective issues for the future.

The sweeping issues here are twofold. First, there is the question of the focus of youth research in relation to prevailing policy priorities. For example, youth research made a significant contribution to the Finland national report and had its seat at the table, but it was not clear to the international review team how much Finnish youth research supported by the government dovetailed with the new priorities for youth policy in Finland. This is not to argue that youth research must necessarily follow direction and prescription by government: its independence and integrity must, to some extent, be

protected and preserved. But without a robust and relevant research base, youth policy is likely to be forged on the anvil of alternative, and almost certainly, less reliable sources.

Secondly, from a Europe-wide perspective, there is a question about the consistency (and thus comparability) of data from youth research across Europe. The recent IARD report on youth policies in Europe highlighted this problem (IARD 2001). It is one which demands resolution, but it represents a significant challenge. Even within many individual countries, "making sense" of the diversity of research knowledge for the purpose of shaping youth policy has proved to be very difficult.

It was noted above that youth research in Finland should pay more attention to the social conditions of "ordinary" young people and consider their risk of exclusion. This is an issue across Europe but, within the questions about consistency and comparability lie additional questions about the conceptualisations of terms such as "social exclusion". For example, the "street kids" of Romania are very different from those described as "street kids" in Denmark (and themselves very different from "street kids" in Brazil). Whether it is in fact possible to arrive at a shared understanding of key terms – not just issues, but also ideas such as "participation" – is itself a matter for debate, but one which is contingent upon the youth research community to address.

Training

This is, again, an issue that cannot be explored in depth. But there is a pressing question around the capacity and competence of the professional infrastructure available to support the objectives and aspirations of youth policy. This is not restricted to the matter of "youth worker" training although, in many contexts, this may be a key dimension. It also relates to professional formation in formal education, social work, health services, youth justice provision, and so on. One of the central recommendations of the "PAT 12" report in the UK, a seminal publication on the situation of young people in deprived neighbourhoods, was that, at the earliest opportunity, the government should undertake a root and branch review of the professional training of all those who worked with young people (see Social Exclusion Unit 2000). There may fundamentally be an insufficient number of professional staff, but there is also the challenge of ensuring that their knowledge and skills keep apace with the rapidly changing circumstances of young people. It is a case of both quantity and quality, if adequate support is to be made available.

To take the specific area of youth work, there is a massive unevenness across Europe. And if "youth work" is considered to be a key mechanism for effective intervention around, inter alia, non-formal learning, the promotion of

sexual health, the provision of information and the possibility of building international links, as well as acting as a broker with “harder” policy domains such as schooling, employment and crime, then this situation requires urgent attention. The Romanian international report recommended “the establishment of a qualification of youth worker which would comply with European standards of occupational qualifications” (Romania IR, p. 72). Currently, it does not exist. This stands in stark contrast to the well established professional practice of youth work in Finland. In a very different way, Luxembourg has also sought to develop its youth work profession, through discrete short training courses on particular topics. But, like youth work elsewhere, it remains heavily dependent on the contribution of volunteers. This, the international report contends, is “asking too much”. The international report questions “whether the balance in staffing between volunteers and professional (paid) workers in different organisational structures is appropriate” (draft Luxembourg IR, p. 61). The reasons given there are that “the state is demanding more accountability and more professionalism, but without providing additional funding for this aspect of the work” (ibid, emphasis original). It is important to advance a further argument: that the increasingly complex needs of young people require highly skilled intervention and support, which can only be delivered effectively by those who have been professionally trained for the purpose, however commendable the idea of voluntary effort may be.

The dissemination of “good practice”

The Sweden international report described the Swedish youth policy approach to “good practice” dissemination as “a very special Swedish tradition” (Sweden IR, p. 25). This is perhaps overstating the case, for there is a more widespread determination in most countries to ensure that models for good practice are communicated across particular policy domains. Whether or not this is done, and there are mechanisms in place to do it, is obviously quite another matter.

As noted at the beginning of this report, the needs of young people and the youth policy responses to those needs remain highly differentiated and often culturally specific. This means that “good practice” does not necessarily travel well, even within its country of origin. Central and eastern European countries have been at the sharp end of this discovery, as they have often gratefully received “good practice” approaches from the USA and western Europe, only to find that they need some serious adaptation if they are to be effective in a very different context.

But this is not to rule out the importance of disseminating and sharing ideas about good practice, even if they are rebutted at a later stage. As Europe becomes “smaller” and given the common issues facing young people across Europe (despite the differences), awareness of “what works” elsewhere is increasingly important. Two things need to happen for this to take place. At a pan-European level, there needs to be a comprehensive resource and information database capable of storing and making available the likely myriad of “good practice” from all corners of Europe. (Judging what may be considered “good practice” is an integral challenge to this process.) At more local levels, practitioners need the time and space to produce accounts of their work, possibly in conjunction with youth researchers. (This again highlights the need for more robust relationships not only between research and policy (see above) but also between research and practice.)

Developing “youth policy” within a European context – principles, policy and practice?

Taking account of the multiple potential domains and issues which bear on the idea of youth policy, it is perhaps useful to propose a framework for development. Some countries clearly conceive of the elements of youth policy more narrowly than others. Indeed, some arenas for policy development in relation to young people were clearly at the margins of a youth policy concept. These included criminal justice, military and voluntary service, family policy, child welfare and protection, and dealing with minority groups. This should not, however, preclude some consideration of a prospectively effective youth policy making process, notwithstanding the specific elements within it. But clearly, the national and international reports emerging from the first seven Council of Europe reviews are indicative of the elements which should be contained within a “youth policy” framework.

These cannot be left to local discretion and determination. They can and should be developed and given direction by dialogue between politicians, professionals and young people, but they need to be driven by a political strategy, before there is a process of diffusion and decentralisation in anticipation of delivery. Delivery is necessarily in the hands of professionals and young people. But most policy faces difficulties and often has unexpected deficiencies, which demand attention through subsequent debate. Not all will agree about the reasons, but to move forward there have to be grounds for development prior to further decision-making and political drive. Such a dynamic for the strategy and implementation of youth policy may be depicted as follows (Table 6):

Table 6: A dynamic for youth policy development

Decision and drive	
	(political)
<i>Direction</i>	<i>Decentralisation</i>
Development	Delivery
(political, professional, young people)	(professionals, young people)
<i>Dissent</i>	<i>Difficulties</i>
Debate	
(political, professional, young people)	

Two constant considerations are whether or not policy in fact reaches the young people at whom it is directed, and whether or not it carries meaning and credibility (relevance) to those young people. Reach is part of "Coverage" (in the 5 "C"s – see above). Relevance is the connectedness to young people and to specific contexts of their lives. Youth policy implementation in rural areas may need a different strategic framework from that in the conurbations.

Conclusion

This report has endeavoured to draw out both the strategic issues and the operational challenges for effective youth policy. Based on both the national and international reports arising from the Council of Europe's international reviews of national youth policy, in seven very different countries across Europe, it has sought to highlight both common themes and significant differences in thinking and approach. Such differences may at times benefit from becoming more consistent but at other times simply reflect the historical, cultural, social and political specificities of the countries concerned. There is no intent to argue for youth policy whereby "one size fits all" but, as has been the case for a number of years, there is an intention to establish the idea of youth policy on the policy map and to provide an indicative framework for its content, structure and process.

The report is intended to take that idea of youth policy one step further. Through this synthesis of the Council of Europe's youth policy work to date, it identifies the considerable range of elements which may properly inform the idea of youth policy and debates the processes by which policy objectives may convert into delivery and practice. It does not pull punches when tensions within these concepts and processes are readily apparent, but criticism and concern is not expressly focused on any of the countries mentioned. They simply serve as illustrations of the dilemmas and challenges which youth policy formation in the future is likely to face. The circumstances and social conditions of young people across Europe are constantly changing. Youth policy will continue to need to be developed and adapted accordingly.

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The report is intended to take the idea of youth policy one step further. Through this synthesis of the Council of Europe's youth policy work to date, it identifies the considerable range of elements which may properly inform the idea of youth policy and debates the processes by which policy objectives may convert into delivery and practice.



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