

Siurala, Lasse

A European framework for youth policy. What is necessary and what has already been done?

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“A European framework for youth policy: What is necessary and what has already been done?”

Lasse Siurala



Lasse Siurala

Abstract:

A strength in European youth policy is the existence of common objectives and instruments of implementation. Council of Europe and European Union have established objectives for their youth policies through a discussion with the member countries and the young people. In addition there are procedures and networks of policymakers, practitioners and researchers to implement them. The article goes on to identify areas for improvement, like enhancing the role of youth policy in the current reshaping of a complex Europe, reducing the implementation gap, strengthening the evidence-base of policymaking and promoting youth policy programmes as a learning processes. Finally the article focuses on the challenge of linking actors and competences in the youth field.

Keywords: youth, policy, Europe, networks

1. Strengths of *european* youth policies

Any international policy wishing to be successful has to share common objectives, it needs international and national structures for implementation and it has to have a good network of key partners. These elements certainly exist in the European youth policy field. Since the beginning of the 1980s' Council of Europe¹ (CoE) has been building a common framework for European youth policies (see for example *Siurala* 2006). The launching of the European Union² (EU) White Paper “A New Impetus for European Youth” (2001) has contributed to increased sharing of youth policy goals across the member countries. European heads of states have further emphasized the importance of labour market and social integration of young people through their “European Youth Pact” (2005). Today most national youth policies in Europe share objectives like promoting youth participation, understanding youth as a resource, improving conditions for independent life, enhancing social inclusion of all young people and supporting cultural diversity, tolerance and integration of ethnic youth. Another priority is “integrated youth policy” – a conscious and structured policy to coordinate services for youth.

European Youth
Pact

integrated youth
policy

European Youth
Forum

General objectives need efficient organisational structures to cascade them down. On European level the youth sector of the CoE links 46 countries, youth NGOs and researchers and has profiled itself as an expert on youth affairs, as an educational actor in human rights and youth participation and as a focal point for research co-operation. EU youth structures have linked 27 member countries through the method of open co-ordination and the youth programmes. Youth organisations are important vectors in European youth policy-making. On a national *level* they act through national organisations and national youth councils and on an international level through European Youth Forum, the Brussels-based umbrella organisation advocating the interests of international youth organisations and national youth councils. Youth researchers representing a wide range of disciplines have also established networks and even research institutions on national level and are active through their international organisations and recently through joint structures created by CoE and EU.

Specific to Europe is that national ministries often have a special department and legislative basis for youth work and youth policy. On the regional and municipal level youth policies are implemented and carried out through a variety of actors; youth organisations, municipal youth work, the churches or voluntary workers – and often through various combinations between them. Recently, also private companies have taken some responsibility of supporting local youth work.

Neither the Council of Europe nor the Commission have a mandate to direct national youth policies. The central guidance takes rather the form of “information management”: both provide guidelines to develop youth policy and youth work.

Revised European
Charter on the
Participation of
Young People in
Local and Regional
Life

The CoE does this through its standard setting documents like the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life” (2004), recommendations of the Committee of Ministers and through its process of National Youth Policy Reviews. The Policy review is an educational process which starts with a national report on youth policy objectives, structures, activities and future plans, followed by a study and reflection carried out by an independent expert group and an open and public discussion of both of the reports at the CoE meeting of the representatives of national youth ministries and youth organisations. In addition there are synthesizing reports on these policy reviews (*Williamson* 2002). The Commission runs information management through Open Method of Coordination. It sends the member countries questionnaires on Commission’s key youth policy themes, puts them together and integrates the results into its youth policy processes. The Commission also runs ‘structured dialogues’ with its key partners and aims at integrating the input from the bi-annual Youth Events held by presidential countries. Further elements of the Commission’s youth policy include youth programmes and the Youth Portal.

2. Areas of improvement

Despite the strengths and potentialities for European youth policies, there also exist weaknesses and threats. The following list is far from complete, but it covers many of the challenges felt pertinent across the different administrative levels of youth policy and youth work.

(1) Facing the diversity of youth and youth policy conditions in Europe. Research and statistics clearly indicate that the living conditions of young people in Europe are very different and that the gap is widening (Chisholm et al. 2002). At the same time as many Northern and West European countries provide good standard of living and fair opportunities for social, cultural and labour market integration, as well as a rich offer of youth work services, many Central and Eastern European countries struggle in developing the quality of their educational systems, their links to labour markets, the disparity between rural and urban areas, brain drain, substance misuse, condition of ethnic youth, human trafficking and other human rights concerns. To achieve a balanced youth policy development across Europe, it will be important for the youth sectors of international organisations to situate themselves in this framework: What can the EU youth structures do to promote integrated youth policies and a basic level of services in all countries? What can be done to this effect through the youth programmes, the open method of co-ordination and through the links to other policy fields of the EU relevant to youth integration; that is the labour markets, education, social affairs and health policies? How will the CoE profile itself in this context to avoid overlapping action and to make optimum use of its wider European networks of governments, NGOs, researchers and other experts? How should both organisations develop their already promising co-operation in the youth field?

(2) Exploring the potentiality of linking child and youth policies. Many European countries, like Norway, The Netherlands, UK and Finland, have broadened their youth policies into children and youth policies. The aim is to guarantee a 'seamless transition' from childhood to youth and eventually to adulthood. The Dutch authorities use the term 'life phase integration'. Often children and young people fall between the services of the different sectors. Young people at the age of 9-13 years may find themselves too old for the day-care services of the social sector and too young for the youth services or young people dropping out of school may still be too young to enter the employment and further education services and fall on nobody's land. The services directed at children and young people should join hands to facilitate the transitions.

(3) Reducing the 'implementation gap'. The process and the adoption of the White Paper guidelines have contributed to a convergence of national policy objectives. Still, national legislation, guidance and support are far from systematic in implementing them to the regional and local level. Regional and local policies and youth work practices are sometimes simply ignorant of some of the key European youth policy aims. Terms like "non-formal learning" or "inte-

grated youth policy” are not well known on the grass-root. Many municipalities fund and run their own youth policies and activities irrespective of national guidelines. Often municipalities feel that due to their constitutional autonomy, they do not approve to be managed by the state. EU and national youth policy objectives do not seamlessly trickle-down to the local level.

To reduce the ‘implementation gap’, measures to be discussed include: Clarifying international youth policy concepts to the practitioners of youth work and establishing coherent national youth policy programmes with measurable sub-objectives and involving the regional and local level actors in their design as well as integrating research in the measurement and evaluation of the programmes. And, how to make youth policy programmes and activities transparent and easier to assess for the young people?

(4) *Bridging vision and practice.* General objectives do not easily translate into action and practices in local youth work. One example is the “integrated youth policy”. The White Paper and the European Youth Pact call for an integrated approach where the youth sector co-operates over other sectors to see to it that interests and needs of young people are met. However, in practice there are very few national level examples of successful youth policy structures and on local level integrated approaches are often limited to project-based co-operation of the youth field with the school, the social and health sector and the cultural sector. The Austrian Presidency Youth Declaration 2006 criticise the European Youth Pact because “it does not seem to materialise into concrete measures”.

To ensure the credibility of EU youth policy objectives, the gaps between the vision and the reality should be identified and evaluated: Using research and self-evaluation to identify the incongruence between principles and practice in youth policies, finding ways to adjust objectives to the realities of youth work practice on the local level and to develop well-documented good practices of integrated youth policies and youth participation.

(5) *Strengthening evidence-based policy.* Transition to adulthood has become increasingly complex, contingent and individualised at the same time as young peoples’ lifestyles are characterised by diversity, ambiguity and change. Intergenerational relations, globalisation, religious tensions and information and communication technologies, the net in particular, constantly re-shape young peoples’ opportunities and risks. In a CoE study on young people in Europe the researchers *Chisholm/Kovacheva* (see 2002) titled their report “Exploring the European Youth Mosaic”. Indeed, European youth constitute a mosaic-like picture, where all colours appear and where differences between the various shades are difficult to set. A recent study on young people and youth cultures in Helsinki metropolitan area describes them as an “atomised generation” (*Salasuo* 2006). The author says that the atomised generation “forms a particle-like mosaic, constantly moving in the shivering field of cultural phenomena. It is characterised by the freedom and the demand of choice. It does not have a linear direction, in a way it has stopped in constant change.” The youth scene has become very differentiated and difficult to grasp. To react to this complexity European youth policy is more than ever dependent on better understanding. We need a good knowledge-base on the diversity and dynamics of the youth scene.

(6) *Understanding complexities.* The main concern of European Youth Pact and other youth policy documents is the social inclusion of young people through education to employment. Implementation of any measures in these fields is facing the complexity of factors affecting educational and labour market careers of young people, the unexpected ways that these policy measures hit vulnerable youth and the difficulties to handle the interrelations and interdependencies between leisure, education, employment, housing etc. To successfully implement broad youth policy programmes we need analysis on the complex social processes involved.

To improve measures of social inclusion of young people, there is again the need for more intense co-operation with research for a better understanding of the complexity of social processes related to youth policies. A particular challenge is to break out from isolated research where labour market researchers, educationalists, psychologists and sociologists all focus on their own problem areas and, instead, enhance a broader look across all these fields. It has also been suggested that establishment of a policy advisory body recruited from relevant researchers would help policy makers acquire knowledge on the complex social processes affecting young people.

(7) *Youth policy programmes as learning processes.* Youth policies on all levels of public administration should both *guide* youth policies in their field of action and *learn* from the implementation of their policies. On international level the Open Method of Coordination is a promising effort to gather information on the implementation of the White Paper and to evaluate its success. Due to tight time schedules and the lacking capacity of the governments to gather information and process it, the feedback evaluation remains incomplete. Another international measure is the CoE National Youth Policy Reviews as a way to learn about the implementation of the Organisation's youth policy objectives. On a national level there are only a few examples of governments which systematically elaborate their general objectives into measurable sub-objectives, evaluate the implementation through statistical data and research and feed this information back to redrafting the original objectives (see Siurala 2006, Williamson 2002).

Public youth policies become innovative learning processes when governments (or other levels of public administration) involve themselves in ongoing analysis of their youth policy programmes based on sufficient statistical data and independent research. It is equally important to involve the various actors of the policies in this process.

(8) *Linking competences.* An important issue is the co-operation between policy makers, youth workers (of municipalities and organisations) and youth research, all with their own complementary competences? The final chapter to follow will argue that this is not simply a question of proper administrative and networking structures, common platforms and programmes, but a deeper issue of differing institutional practices, languages, rhetoric, vested interests, power and ideologies.

3. Linking actors and doctrines – an impossible mission?

The European youth field should make optimum use of its own networks; the youth workers, the policy makers and the youth researchers. Unfortunately reality does not always meet this objective. As an example, the Finnish EU Youth Meeting in Hyvinkää July 2006 was to link the competences and actors of the youth field. A particular emphasis was co-operation with youth research. However, the discussions in the meeting made it obvious that advocacy and use of internal rhetoric was more visible than genuine pursuit for mutual understanding and co-operation. Clearly the establishment of “a network form of organisation” was hindered by differences of thinking, even by a polarized way of thinking, on some of the key concepts and practices in the youth field.

3.1 Responsibility – divergent expectations and convergent opportunities

There are big differences as to how the responsibility to organise youth work is shared. As an example, in Finland, Germany and Austria the public sector, the municipalities in particular, take a strong role in providing premises for young people, youth workers, street work, youth information and support to youth organisations. The Finnish Youth Act (72/2006) stipulates this very clearly: “Youth work and youth policy are part of the local authority's responsibilities”. In Malta and many southern European countries the church and the 3rd sector are the main actors in youth work. Elsewhere in Europe the social, cultural, education and youth sectors run services for young people in close co-operation with organisations and voluntaries, even if there might not be a clear legislative mandate to do so. Private and semi-private organisations, foundations and ad hoc projects and programmes are typically responsible for leisure activities and youth at risk programmes in North America. And finally there are countries and municipalities totally without even the basic services for young people.

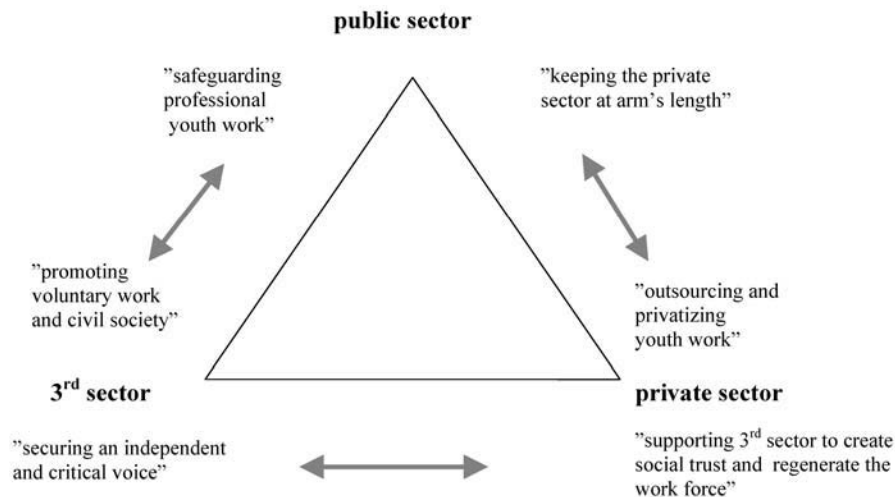
Thus the responsibility of organising services for young people is shared very differently. As a result “youth work” and “youth policy” are conceptualised in a diverse manner with dissimilar interests in promoting and developing them. This may lead to oppositional thinking perhaps hindering open networking and joint policies.

As an example of polarised thinking between the public sector and the 3rd sector is the former's “concern for professional youth work” and the latter's interest in “promoting voluntary work and a vivid civil society” (see figure 1). Sometimes municipal youth workers, due to their vocational training, full-time jobs, youth centres and links to other experts, are considered as the real professionals of youth work competent for high quality work. They tend to criticise volunteers and NGO people for their (assumed) lack of professional expertise and lack of long-term commitment. Thus, according to the professional youth workers, the priority in youth work should be on developing municipal youth work. Youth organisations, on the other hand, remind us of the large work car-

Youth organisations remind us of the large work carried out by voluntaries and the importance of an independent vivid civil society to democracy.

ried out by voluntaries and the importance of an independent vivid civil society to democracy. They expect more support from the public sector to be able to use their energy to work with young people and not to raising funds.

Figure 1: divergent expectations on the role of youth work



In relation to the private sector the NGOs feel th at their objective is to “secure an independent and critical voice”, like being able to raise their concern on polluting companies, working conditions and contracts of the global enterprises in the developing countries, producti on of environm ental hostile products, negative effects of globalisation etc. The private sector could see things differently. The business world might appreciate the competence of the NGOs to create social trust – a prerequisite for economic growth, or the com panies might welcome the role of NGOs to organise leisure activities which regenerate the work force and provide them with various social skills.

The neo-liberalist wave has increased the private sector driven criticism that the public sector should function more efficiently and cut costs through apply -ing private sector management methods, outsourcing and privatisation. The public sector has already started to implement private sector management methods like Total Quality Management, EFQM, CAF, Balanced Score Cards, quality assurance measures and Pay -for-Performance schemes. Still, the thinking that the private sector should be kept at arm's length is strong. Universalistic services with a strong public sector remains at the heart of, particularly the Nordic, welfare societies and this thinking also has a strong public legitimation. Some areas of public adm inistration are particularly sensitive and reserved to private sector interests, like the health sector to tobacco and alcohol industries. Public youth services often tend to position them selves as a necessary alternative to commercial youth cultures.

The public, private and 3rd sectors have all certain divergent basic assum p-tions concerning their interrelationships. Due to the differences co-operation

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between the sectors does not come naturally. Probably the most fanatic spokesmen for ‘dialogue’, ‘networking’ and ‘partnerships’ should be better aware of the internal conflicts in the youth field. However, there are also examples of sharing the responsibility. A search for balanced support structure to both organisations and municipality-based youth work, and provision of services for young people as a joint venture between the municipality and the organisations are examples of linking actors and interests. Public-private-partnerships have shown to have potentiality and under the umbrella of ‘the entrepreneur-citizen’ companies have helped 3rd sector organisations run their activities.

3.2 Prevention – is it possible to cross the boundaries of discourses and paradigms?

The focus on youth policy may be on general early prevention, targeted intervention or reintegration. The Nordic welfare model believes in universalistic public services as the main measure to combat social exclusion, deviancy and criminality. A social, cultural and educational policy based on equality, vocational guidance for all and inclusive labour markets serve as examples. In the youth field this means providing good leisure activities, youth information and support for youth organisations available for all young people. In this case youth work focuses at early prevention and is often characterised “opportunity focused”.

early prevention

Sometimes youth policies appear “problem oriented”. This is the case when the focus is on media created issues (often called “youth problems”) or when youth policies become dominated by work with young people with clearly identifiable risk symptoms (“problem youth”). These may refer to young people in gangs, racist youth groups, those experimenting with drugs, binge-drinking youngsters, those with difficulties at school, school-leavers, unemployed youth, those with behavioural disorders etc. Street work, social work, employment workshops, multi-agency projects and programmes on youth problems etc are examples of this type of youth work (targeted intervention). Public perception of youth as a problem is known to all societies, but perhaps it is most prevalent in neo-liberalist countries with ‘selective social policies’ (as opposite to ‘universalistic social policies’), which tend to create moral panics on youth and launch restrictive and project based measures at them.

targeted
intervention

Care and reintegration, the third type of prevention, is focused on multi-problem youth. Youth workers may work, often in cooperation with social workers and psychologists, to help young offenders, drug addicts, ex-drug addicts, long-term unemployed youngsters, school drop-outs, etc to reintegrate into the society. There exists a variety of policy argumentation in favour of measures of efficient integration and care; there may be well resourced and developed services for drug addicts because it is pragmatic to do so, because it is economically the most sensible solution or because it is the moral duty of the society to care for its sick citizens.

Care and
reintegration

Within a country and between the countries there are discernible differences of approach to youth deviance according to their, almost paradigmatic, priorities on either early prevention, targeted intervention or care. For example in UK and

Wales the imprisonment rate of young offenders is about 5 times higher than in Finland and it is explained to reflect the difference between the Anglo-American “justice model” and the Nordic “welfare model” (Kuula et al. 2006). The former emphasizes the deeds and responsibility of the offenders and promotes quick and strict intervention which then led to massive increase of imprisonment rates of young people. The Nordic model is based on the social and psychological problems and needs of the offenders and on a strong belief in early prevention through general social welfare services and emphasis in psychologically and psychiatrically-oriented intervention, and has kept imprisonment and crime renewal rates low.

One may try to go beyond these paradigmatic controversies, and try to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the “opportunity focused” and “problem oriented” approaches. Problem oriented youth work is often project- and programme based. In addition to the flexibility to react to youth issues, further benefits are that work is clearly targeted, measures to reach the objectives are carefully outlined and there are measurable evaluation criteria with strong investment in evaluation processes. As a result the developmental drive is strong, results are transparent and it is easier to pool in partners and funding. The weaknesses of the problem oriented approach are that youth questions and young people risk of becoming negatively labelled, youth policy tends to be sporadic and “politicised” – easily affected by daily political and media concerns. The strengths of the opportunity focused early prevention youth work include continuity, long-term planning, permanent staff of professional youth workers, broader clientele and creation of positive perception of young people with resistance to sensation seeking media and political concerns and panics. The weaknesses consist of inability to quickly and flexibly react to emerging youth questions, compartmentalisation and lacking concern on developing new measures and methods in youth work.

The two approaches described are not mutually exclusive. Ideally, it could be possible to develop an approach, which takes into account the strengths and weaknesses. This would mean establishing minimum standards for youth work and care provision (like youth premises with youth workers and attractive programme offer, youth information, social youth work and funds for youth organisations and youth action groups) *and* readiness to establish projects and programmes (like launching multi-agency projects on any emergent youth problems or new expectations from the young people). In this manner it is possible to step outside one’s one paradigm of youth prevention, compare the disadvantages and advantages and modify one’s original approach.

3.3 Management – are the private sector management tools applicable to the youth field?

During the past 25 years there has been a wave of public management reforms. A vanguard of the changes “New Public Management” argues for reduction of public expenditure, increasing responsiveness to citizens, building networks and partnerships and, most importantly, improving performance and accountability

through private sector management measures. It is understandable that the youth field feels hostile towards many of these ideas. Youth workers in particular do not like taking their time from work with young people to filling activity sheets, statistical questionnaires, managerial documents, describing quality processes, measuring outputs, implementing Balanced Score Cards, applying results-based budgeting, managing the endless administrative tasks of contract projects, being surrounded by auditors, evaluators, researchers, consultants and quality assurance observers. As a result, there are a lot of oppositional thinking and polarized argumentation; some fiercely attacking management reforms and maintaining that “they are not for the youth field” and others defending them and arguing that “the youth field is not essentially different from any other field”.

Why wouldn't the youth sector apply modern change management techniques?

On closer look, some of the methods of the public management reform may be turned into the advantage of youth work and some others, like “user participation”, “partnerships with civil society” and “cross-sector cooperation”, are examples of activities where the youth field is already well ahead others and may thus benefit from its vanguard position. Why wouldn't the youth sector apply modern change management (strategic management) techniques? We should not blind our eyes from the fact that keeping the youth centre properly running, looking after projects, securing the financing of the organisation and so on sometimes absorbs all our attention and too little time is left to follow youth trends, to reflect youth issues and new youth cultures, to develop ways of working with new youth groups and to learn working in new contexts. One example is the resistance and even hostility that professional youth workers often feel against developing ways to work with young people in the net – as if to deny that young people were not there, did not meet other young people there, did not establish communities there, did not create meanings there, did not express and develop their identity and citizenship there, did not want to meet a youth worker there, or did not face a huge amount of problems and insecurity there. Change management is also needed in the youth field. Properly used many of the quality management methods are useful for youth administration (for more details, see *Siurala 2006*).

Properly used many of the quality management methods are useful for youth administration

Perhaps the management reforms put a too high emphasis on change management and thus *strategic management*. Perhaps there are also other objectives than ‘constant change’. We also must keep the current activities running and thus emphasize *operational management* – a word much lower on the list of top buzzwords of management consultants. Why not look for a compromise: finding a balance between properly running the daily activities and services of youth work (operational management) and pushing changes forward (strategic management)?

3.4 Horizontal co-ordination – searching for feasible administrative models

“Integrated youth policy” is one of the most fashionable word in today's youth policy. It refers to the need to link and co-ordinate services for young people, because they are said to easily drop between them and because of their lacking status as fully fledged citizens their concerns are neglected. However, there is

no agreement on how broadly should youth policies cover the different policy areas, nor on what are the administrative structures, methods and instruments of efficient cross-sector cooperation?

International youth policies (EU, CoE) tend to think that all, or at least ‘all relevant’, fields of public administration should be covered – thus the term “comprehensive youth policy”. In practice there are not many examples on how this actually works in international, national or local policies. In reality the youth sector is focused at leisure services and cooperate with only carefully selected partners from other sectors, mostly the social, health, education and employment sectors. As an example the youth service of the City of Helsinki is not aiming at comprehensive youth plans but prefers to talk about ‘strategic alliances’ with the social and the education sectors and focuses there on selected activities (work with youth at risk and education to democracy).

There is no universal solution to the problem of coordination of youth affairs. The UK is famous for its ‘linked-up services’, like the Connexions programme (youth information and guidance) which brings together services needed for successful integration of young people. In The Netherlands, where a large spectrum of organisations and public administration run services for young people, the challenge of coordination and quality control has been met through a government level “team of integrated inspectors” covering the key fields of youth affairs. Another Dutch measure is establishment of a database to link the client information of all the organisations and public actors dealing with youth at risk. The Canadian response to emergent youth issues is the practice and capacity to create multi-agency programmes with clear objectives, comprehensive measures, evaluation, research and sufficient funding. The Swedish approach is coordination through centrally designed youth policy plans to be implemented by the municipalities. In Finland the new government (2007) has established 3 integrated policy programmes to boost better cooperation between the ministries.

Again, the variety of social and political contexts and practices across Europe makes direct transfer of good practices difficult, but there clearly exists room for more research, evaluation and learning. How successful are the efforts of comprehensive youth policies? Which partners or combinations of partners produce best results? Which measures are feasible in international, national and local level?

the variety of social and political contexts and practices across Europe makes direct transfer of good practices difficult

3.5 Youth representation – How should youth policies listen to the voice of youth?

There exists much oppositional thinking on how policy-makers should listen to the voice of youth. Is it the sole mandate of the youth organisations? How to listen to the voice of non-organised youth or young people who mobilise themselves differently from the traditional youth organisations? What is the role of youth research? How to make use of the knowledge of other experts of the youth field; municipal youth workers, organisations working for young people, experts on youth affairs in other fields relevant to young people (education, social and health field, sports, culture etc.)?

In today's practices the governments and youth organisations have nearly a monopoly in representing young people.

In today's practices the governments and youth organisations (the European Youth Forum and National Youth Councils, in particular) have nearly a monopoly in representing young people. Occasional mass youth hearings do not essentially change this. True, the Council of Europe practice of 'co-management' in the Youth Sector, through which representatives of governments and youth organisations decide together on the budget and activities, is an inspirational model of youth participation. At the same time, many voices are not heard, a lot of expertise is left outside and a good part of what is actually happening in the youth scene is simply not captured.

Young people in Europe deserve a good representation of their concerns. We need to establish a better link between young people, their organisations, groups and actions, and the different actors working with young people: How could the policy makers have an up-to-date picture of what is going on in the lives of young people? How to improve the dialogue between researchers and policy makers? How to integrate the expertise of those working with young people into youth policy debates? How to develop methods of true participation of young people – methods with power, continuity and pedagogical quality involved, and which are experienced by all young people as their instrument of influence?

3.6 Knowledge – practice and actor based knowledge wanted!

German Youth Institute is a prime example of research on youth which serves a multiplicity of interests in the youth field. Smaller institutes exist in some countries. In Finland youth researchers have established an active multidisciplinary network in close cooperation with the youth ministry. Still, there is a need for applied research and R&D –type of research where the research agenda is set by those working in the youth field.

'other knowledge' and 'silent knowledge'

Another important source of knowledge on youth is linked to the recent debate on 'other knowledge' and 'silent knowledge'. These refer to youth phenomena as seen by young people themselves ('other knowledge') and knowledge on youth cumulated to youth workers through their every-day face-to-face work with young people ('silent knowledge'). Recently cultural criminology has suggested that we should listen to the narratives of young people (criminal offenders or those at risk) to better understand the relationship between their actions and the society. Finnish researchers *Hänninen/Karjalainen/Lahti* (see 2006) have argued that in dealing with social disadvantage there are two types of knowledge: 'official knowledge' – the knowledge of the authorities which may consist of information from statistics, studies, registers, experts, committees, political documents etc., and what they call 'other knowledge' – knowledge from the disadvantaged people themselves or from people working directly with them. This may refer to tacit and experiential knowledge of young people and those working with young people, narrative knowledge, observation, dialogue, a documentary film or other types of artistic expression, etc. It is the knowledge which challenges and complements 'official knowledge', knowledge which is sensitive to youth at risk, young offenders, marginalised youth etc.

4. Towards a network form of organisation?

European youth policy actors comprise of a large number of organisations of governments, ministries, regional and local youth work structures, national and international youth organisations, youth researchers, etc. Some are huge bureaucracies (EU) while others call themselves networks (research networks), still hierarchically organised. As was indicated in this paper, they all have their own assumptions, interests, knowledge, competences and practices. Finnish philosopher Pekka Himanen argues that many organisations lack the capacity to interact and communicate with each other, and as a result miss learning and developmental opportunities. He speaks for a network form of organisation, which adds communication links inside and between hierarchical organisations, which creates opportunities for learning across bureaucracies, which generates new constellations of groupings to work towards a common goal and which has the ability to utilize modern information technology for these purposes. How open are European youth policy actors to engage themselves in a new type of open interaction?

Areas were found where open interaction is gaining ground. The search for new forms of co-operation of youth work between public, private and the 3rd sector probably contribute to a more open atmosphere. Youth policies which try to balance early intervention measures with targeted intervention and care service create curiosity between those who traditionally have focused within one or two of the approaches. Even if New Public Management raises strong emotional reactions for and against it, there still is something useful for those who are first able to count to ten. Horizontal co-operation in public administration is a global challenge: as we improve systematic evaluation and research on the various efforts to link actors to co-ordinate services for young people, we learn.

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However, the overall impression remains that the youth field also consists of social closures which focus in unconvincing advocacy and lobbying, concentrate in defending their professional interests and criteria, or are unable to look beyond their existing practices or disciplinary clichés. Instead of involving oneself in open interaction and co-operation, international youth organisations and their lobby groups are criticised to only repeat old mantras and claim mandates of being the main representative and knowledge producer of youth, which they do not have. Some disapprove of the way the researchers define research problems, gather data and interpret them without really communicating with practitioners or taking them on board, and claim sole authority over knowledge production, which they cannot either do. The ministry level youth policy makers can have very distant links to the grass-root youth work and impose, often without sufficient dialogue, objectives and tasks which the local level feel unrealistic and off the point. The local youth workers who are focused on traditional methods of face-to-face encounter with the young people are sometimes resistant towards other forms of learning (like reading research and applying modern management techniques) and new types of working (like moving to the network where the young people have already gone).

The social closures of the youth field tend to take strong sides on questions like: How should we share the responsibility to provide services and activities for young people? Should youth policy focus on early prevention or work with youth at risk? Are management techniques introduced from the private sector applicable to youth work? What kind of role should the youth field have in coordinating services for youth, how broad should that co-operation be and what would the efficient administrative structures look like? How should we listen to the voice of young people? What are the proper ways to produce knowledge from young people and for youth work? These are the questions which need critical self-reflection among those working in the youth field, before transition to the information society and its network form of working is possible.

Notes

- 1 Council of Europe (founded in 1949) is a pan-European intergovernmental organisation with 47 member countries. It aims to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law and to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity.
- 2 The European Union (EU) is a political and economic community with 27 member states (originally founded in 1957). It is based on the idea of a single market with freedom of movement of people, goods, services and capital. The Maastricht Treaty from 1993 establishes the base of the current legal framework.

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