PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTH
HEALTHY EUROPE: CONFIDENCE AND UNCERTAINTY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

Volume 3

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Perspectives on youth

Healthy Europe: confidence and uncertainty for young people in contemporary Europe

Volume 3

Contents

Confidence and uncertainty for young people in contemporary Europe

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When we embarked upon *Perspectives on youth Volume 3* our working framework was "Healthy Europe". We were interested not only in the "narrow track" of the health and well-being of young people, but also in the broader canvas of what it is like to be young in a Europe faced with conflict and austerity and what it feels like to be young as transitions become ever more challenging. Reference points are shifting: How do young people feel when embarking on yet another precarious and underpaid internship, despite their impressive educational attainment? Are they just accepting of their lot, or do they wish they had taken another (possibly, ultimately, equally precarious) path? How do they relate to and deal with the fact that there was a time when qualifications meant much more in terms of labour market destinations? How do they feel about having to plan a life when the resources to support any planning are so unpredictable? Do they still plan for the future or just live for the present? In what ways can these questions be understood or conceptualised in terms of health?

Our assumption was that health remains a controversial area within youth policy, where the points of departure of policy makers on the one hand, and young people themselves on the other often are dramatically different; in fact, young people tend to interpret the dominating discourse on health as limiting, patronising – maybe even offensive. A healthy lifestyle tends to be conceptualised in normative and prescriptive ways, often asserting norms that may be impossible to live up to in a so-called knowledge-based economy.

The question of health, of course, brings the old tensions between protection and participation as well as agency and structure to the forefront. Some would argue that it is unfair to apply a framework of healthy versus unhealthy to young people as the dichotomy is far from neutral and implies that there is a choice, and that they can choose better. Others would say that a focus on health is synonymous with a focus on the individual, and consequently any health-related failures are interpreted as individual failures rather than consequences of a broader societal ill-being.

Alternatively, could the scope of health within youth policy be broadened to go beyond traditional indicators such as body mass index, and alcohol and exercise habits? What constitutes healthy participation, citizenship, or consumption patterns? What are healthy coping mechanisms for a generation that has seen the role of the state change and shrink? Can a health framework help us to explore issues from a new perspective?

As our thinking about framing this book unfolded we started to contemplate the ideas of love and hate, in an attempt to capture the often deeply embedded and emotional positions that may be held by young people. It was something of an unsuccessful attempt, as we sought to attract contributions of a contrarian, controversial, comparative and transnational character from those linked to the youth field in policy, research and practice. Perhaps we had moved so far away from more concrete conceptualisations of health that prospective contributors had no idea what we were seeking!

In a parallel vein, we really have no idea what is going through young people's minds (and bodies) as they traverse their multiple transitions in the context of their own aspirations and the expectations of others. What we know projects a rather mixed and muddled picture. Survey data relay one perspective, but qualitative material often paints another picture. The view from research can be very different from that from practice. And policy makers may persist with attempts to "put old wine in new bottles" or make connections with new realities, not least the fragilities surrounding social inclusion and increasing psychosocial disorders in a significant proportion of young people. These factors affect perhaps all young people except for those from the most privileged backgrounds. Mental health issues in young people derive less from social disadvantage and more from social dislocation, according to global analyses of scientific literature. Where do young people fit in contemporary Europe? What do young people expect of and from Europe? What does Europe expect of them?

Not all of these questions are addressed in any detail in the contents of this edition of *Perspectives on youth*, but many are touched upon. We have gone, intentionally, for an eclectic mix of contributions – to provide a diversity of argumentation and to promote reflection and debate. As has been the intention of *Perspectives on youth* throughout, we have sought to solicit and elicit the views of academics, policy makers and practitioners, presenting theoretical, empirical and hypothetical assertions and analysis.

There are some fairly incontrovertible arguments about factors that promote good health and a sense of well-being or contribute to poor health. A key determinant is invariably social class – patterns of inequality and poverty. As Richard Wilkinson (1996) has argued impeccably, the healthiest societies are those that are more equal. His later work with Kate Pickett *The spirit level: why more equal societies almost always do better* (2009) has achieved international recognition (see also Atkinson 2015). Their book was published just six months after the start of the current crisis in Europe, following the banking meltdown in 2008. It makes for salutary reading as we experience growing inequalities across Europe, within its member states, and between the generations. And we should perhaps think of the idea of spirit not just

in terms of levelling opportunities and conditions, but also in relation to zeitgeist – conceptualised as the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time. How should we consider the mood of early 21st century Europe in the context of opportunity and experience for young people? It is certainly very different from the often quite relaxed optimism and positive expectation that prevailed only a few years ago following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of communism, the expansion and extension of human rights, democracy and the rule of law throughout an enlarging European Union (EU) and increasing membership of the Council of Europe.

Of course, policy can make a difference. The elusive concept of youth policy – all of those policies which, in some way or another, shape and affect the position and prospects of young people – can help or hinder young people's capacity to move forward in their lives, to move geographically and physically to other spaces and places, and to move psychologically in terms of their aspirations and identity. Today, such movement is facilitated or obstructed in both virtual and actual realities. But the objectives and implementation of active youth policy or, by contrast, inaction when youth policy is absent can either nurture or paralyse a sense of well-being among the young. European frameworks can set the tone, though usually it is the more specific actions of national, regional and local governments that really make a difference.

We start with an interview with Harald Hartung, the relatively new head of the Youth Policy and Programme Unit within the European Commission, to get his take on young people and health in contemporary Europe. This is followed by a strongly critical perspective from Fred Powell and Margaret Scanlon concerning the precarious state of many young people in modern Europe and the need for a more radical policy agenda. There is little doubt that policy is important, not just in the field of health per se but across many other policy domains that affect young people. Constructive, opportunity-focused education, employment, housing and training policies contribute to improved health for young people now and in the future. But the rhetoric of transversal or cross-sectoral youth policy is confusing, poorly understood and weakly implemented, as Magda Nico's analysis of the documentation from key institutions clearly demonstrates.

Prospects for the health of young people, however conceived and defined, rest significantly outside of their own control. There is broad consensus that there is a need for urgent, immediate action on environmental and ecological questions, yet the questions themselves continue to be debated and debatable, according to Beata Sochacka. Yet while the short view is critical within the environmental debate, it is the long view that is required when it comes to demography. Dragana Avramov explores and presents what she calls the "demographic dynamic" in relation to young people in Europe, considering the risks they face and how these risks may be more equitably distributed.

The book then turns to some more specific analysis of young people's health, albeit in relation to international youth work and later in the context of what might be called, in turn, "youth for youth" and "youth from youth". Haridhan Goswami and Gary Pollock look at health and well-being in the changing context of and for young people in Europe. They confirm many things that those in the youth field would consider quite

predictable in relation to the psychological well-being of young people. But there are some surprises. A range of policy implications are advanced.

But one could place a reasonable bet that one particular group of young people are not featured in the European Quality of Life Survey. They are the young people who are desperately trying to secure what, in their terms, they perceive to be a "better life" in Europe. The increasing population of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers seeking entry to Europe as they escape from the poverty, uncertainty, conflict and oppression of the Middle East and Africa is composed of significant numbers of children and young people. Maria Pisani considers the issues that surround their plight, taking an unapologetically political perspective anchored by a commitment to social justice. She also engages in a discussion of the theoretical deficiencies in (western European-dominated) youth studies, which, from her perspective, can appear out of touch with global realities.

Our attention then turns away from the specific social and physical condition of young people in Europe (and their theoretical implications) to broader issues around international youth work and how these may contribute to their health and well-being. Ansgar Drücker forges links between the statutory annual report prepared by the German federal government on the health of children and young people in Germany, and the potential of voluntary and international youth work to engage in practices of "implicit health promotion", particularly as concerns the self-effectiveness (or "self-efficacy") of young people that can be dreadfully under-mined by experiences of discrimination and hate speech. Drücker notes that the subject of sexual orientation (and trans- and intersexuality) is a "blind spot" in the 13th report on children and young people. This issue is taken up by Michael Barron, who points out that despite the fact that human rights violations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people have been in the public eye for close to two decades, bringing about a plethora of international and European resolutions, conventions and initiatives to protect and promote their rights, especially with regard to establishing safe educational environments, there is now a resurgence of homophobic laws and sentiment, particularly in eastern Europe and Africa. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon may argue that human rights must "carry the day" over cultural attitudes but, as we have also learned from Pisani's discussion of migration, principled statements from on high may often resonate weakly and ineffectually in the everyday lives of young people. Homophobic bullying and vio-lence – as one form of identity-based bullying – severely jeopardises the positive and prospective health of those young people who experience it.

The evolution of the international youth work that might support Drücker's contention that it can support implicit health promotion and wider contributions to the well-be-ing of young people's lives is then reflected on through an autobiographical note by Gordon Blakely, who has spent a lifetime in that sphere. There are some important caveats in his celebration of the life-enhancing outcomes of international youth work, but he argues forcefully in favour of a healthy infrastructure for a healthy Europe.

It is not, however, just structured policy and practice that may make a difference to the health and well-being of children and young people. There has been a growing interest in peer education and learning. This manifests itself in many different forms with different objectives – notably prevention, education, promotion – and is subjected

to a measured critical discussion by Yaëlle Amsellem-Mainguy. Young people are increasingly likely to take their lead on what it means to be healthy and, arguably more importantly for them, to look fit (in terms of bodily shape and image) from the Internet and through social media. This is relatively new territory – a new form of public space for self-presentation – and carries, inevitably, both positive potential for health as well as risks. This subject is explored by way of a more experiential and polemical approach by Manfred Zentner.

Inevitably, these contributions encapsulate a range of overlapping, as well as sometimes contradictory, positions. As we drew together and absorbed the various contributions outlined above, we concluded that the overarching issue was not "health and well-being", or "love and hate", but a dialogue about "confidence and uncertainty", from which – of course – health and well-being or its opposite, flow. It may be something of a truism but the perspective must always be holistic – young people who are living in better conditions are likely to have better opportunities and experiences, providing them with greater confidence and a greater sense of possibility, which in turn are likely to produce a better approach to healthy lifestyles and, indeed, a more healthy physiology. Conversely, those in more adverse predicaments, denied pathways for progress, may succumb (through some spurious choice or economic necessity) to less healthy lifestyles and the resultant physical and mental ill health. These are certainly not linear relationships. They work in multiple directions.

The authors touch on confidence and uncertainty in many different ways. There are questions about responsibility, the balance between individual and collective action, the global, the personal, and – the all-pervasive challenge – reaching and rallying the engagement of the most vulnerable and those in most difficulty, both those who are "dying inside" (through anxiety, depression, fatalism, social disloca-tion, a sense of isolation and a loss of hope in the future) and those who are really dying (following illnesses, suicide and on the shores of Europe). It is not all bad or sad news. In some respects, young people are looking after themselves better than ever before and we are looking after them. Their confidence in different sexualities is palpably stronger, even if it remains a blind spot in the German health report. The digital age may herald new possibilities for raising self-awareness, understanding and confidence in young people. But urgent attention needs to be given to inter-generational justice, the challenges for social cohesion on account of mobility and migration, commitments to human rights and, ultimately, equalities. We may never produce, nor even aspire to produce, equal outcomes, but we need to ensure equal opportunities. Health and healthy opportunities underpin the making of a confident generation of young people, rather than one imbued with uncertainty.

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Chapter 1

Interview
with Harald Hartung
on youth and health

Head of Youth Policy and Programme Unit, European Commission

Q1: Taking into consideration the economic, social and political developments on our continent, how "healthy" (in terms of living conditions, well-being, opportunities, etc.) do you think is the present and near future for young people in contemporary Europe?

The crisis has hit many aspects of the lives of this generation of young people – education, work, social and civic participation or health. Yet, the roughly 90 million young people in the EU are a diverse group. There are young people with relatively easy access to opportunities, but the gap between them and less advantaged groups is widening. Often disadvantages are not evenly spread: some groups of young people appear to end up with most of the disadvantages. Too often, education reproduces existing socio-economic patterns and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are at greater risk of becoming "NEET" (not in education, employment or training). Unemployment, impoverishment or inadequate housing can also lead to mental health problems such as depression, substance abuse or suicide.

The situation of young people on the wrong side of the divide is alarming. Not investing in the human and social potential of all young people will hamper future economic growth. Jobs are important, but not the sole answer to guaranteeing the inclusion of young people and ensuring their sense of belonging to the communities in which they live. Young people who feel left out, excluded or marginalised for any reason can develop antisocial lifestyles, and negative sentiments can turn to hostility. We have witnessed a growing attraction to radical or anti-democratic ideas. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen have shown what can happen if these ideas are taken to extremes.

Q2: What constitutes a "healthy" response from a youth policy perspective that could contribute to young people's empowerment, social inclusion, participation and well-being?

Young people are Europe's main asset for the future, and they deserve our support. Employment, social inclusion, participation, health and well-being behave as communicating vessels, so we need to address the situation of young people in a rounded way. Based on our understanding of the interaction between these factors, we need to trigger a process of turning vicious circles into virtuous ones. This calls for coherent policy responses across sectors, and for pooling our available resources.

"Healthy" responses should focus on making young people skilled and resilient, so that they can cope with adverse experiences and challenges. We should also make sure that their concerns are heard by decision makers and that young people are given the chance to develop their own contributions to civil society.

This is a task for all those who work with, support and take decisions about young people, schools, youth workers, health professionals, cultural institutions, sports clubs and so on. These organisations should work together so that their efforts are coherent and serve the full range of interests of young people. The underlying thread, which is to consider the interests of young people as a whole, cuts through the EU Youth Strategy that governs the co-operation between the European Commission and member states in the youth field.

Cross-sectoral co-operation should be pursued from local level all the way up to international forums. At local level this can, for instance, be through single access points for young people to get advice from a multidisciplinary team, as in France and Belgium, in Houses for Teens in Denmark and in Headspace centres in Ireland. At EU level, we can bring together expertise and knowledge to support national, regional and local approaches.

Q3: What are, in concrete terms, the priorities and actions of your institution in this regard?

Given that youth policy is first and foremost a national competence, the European Commission co-ordinates and complements efforts in member states through gathering comparative evidence and examples of good practice. In the spirit of mainstreaming youth issues, EU youth policy also facilitates young people's concerns being taken up in EU policy fields such as employment or health.

For example, the [2013] Council recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee calls upon member states to offer young people a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed.

The EU's health policy gives specific attention to young people as regards nutrition and physical activity, alcohol, smoking, sexual health or drug use. For example, within the EU's Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related Health Issues, an action plan addresses childhood obesity. Within the EU's strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm, an action plan on youth drinking and heavy episodic drinking is being developed.

Q4: How do you think that youth work could contribute to providing more "healthy" prospects for young people? How do you see the role of youth work and its limits?

An EU study on the value of youth work confirmed its role in supporting young people's personal and social development. It confirmed that youth work assists in youth empowerment, emancipation, tolerance and responsibility, leading in turn to participation in democratic societies, prevention of high risk behaviour and social inclusion and cohesion.

Given the effects of the crisis, in recent years the demand for youth work has increased, as have pressures on youth work. The challenges for young people have of course changed, but at the same time, the nature of challenges is changing. For example,

the omnipresence of the Internet and social media in young people's lives raises the need for media and digital literacy and has effects on the delivery of youth work. Also, given the growing complexity and interrelations between young people's challenges, youth workers increasingly need to be open to partnerships and co-operation with other support providers. For example, the increasing demand for transversal skills, or 21st-century skills, makes the recognition of youth work outcomes more relevant. Such co-operation should ideally be shaped in a way that allows youth work to preserve its identity and unique contribution to young people and this might sometimes be challenging. Last but not least, since the crisis, budgets have been cut in many cases and sustainable funding remains a concern.

Adapting to new realities in this context is challenging, but not impossible. Reflections and recommendations about how to handle such challenges and about the future for youth work were summarised in the declaration made at the 2nd Youth Work Convention organised under the Belgian chairmanship of the Council of Europe in April 2015.

In May 2015, the Council of Youth Ministers adopted conclusions on reinforcing youth work, highlighting its contribution to personal development, social inclusion, cultural diversity and active citizenship, announcing the development of a reference and guidance tool on quality youth work to support national youth work services and facilities, ensuring transparency and quality for young people.

Chapter 2

The youth precariat, "generationism" and the austerity city

Fred Powell and Margaret Scanlon

> It seemed to me that what they wanted was to be inside the games, within the notional space of the machine. The real world had disappeared for them – it had completely lost its importance. They were in that notional space, and the machine in front of them was the brave new world.
>
> William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

William Gibson invented an apparently nonsensical word "cyberspace" in his futuristic 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, to describe a hallucinogenic world of computers and a post-punk generation of young people, living in a world of urban decay. His vision was prompted by an experience of watching kids playing video games in Vancouver. The hallucination turned into reality; thirty years later science fiction has been transformed into a mass digital culture, where many young people teeter on the edge of virtual reality. It is psychological escape from the reality of the austerity city, where legions of anonymous young people find themselves consigned to living marginalised lives. They are called the "precariat" (Standing 2011). The word precariat conveys the precarious status of vulnerable young people in the austerity city, as a denizen class with few rights. David Harvey (2013) comments in reference to the austerity city and one of the places to start would be to focus on the rapidly degrading qualities of urban life, through foreclosures, the persistence of predatory practices in urban housing markets, reductions in services, and above all, lack of viable employment.

Young people in the austerity city face profoundly existential challenges that affect their health. At a recent EU/Council of Europe Youth Partnership conference, Beyond Barriers, held in Malta in November 2014, on the role of youth work in supporting young people in vulnerable situations, one youth participant observed that there is "no difference between dying inside and really dying". These anguished words capture the mindset of vulnerable young people in the postmodern world. Many of these young people arguably face similar challenges to displaced young people after the Second World War (Lowe 2012). While the European urban landscape has been transformed from cities reduced to rubble into prosperous centres of culture and relaxation, the psychogeography of the austerity city presents vulnerable young people with a profound sense of displacement and social exclusion.

One of the most defining features of this denizen youth class in the austerity city is their use of cyberspace to convey their anger to the world. The troll has emerged in this cultural landscape as the modern trickster, playing pranks on the adult world. Some of these trolling activities have attracted public condemnation, such as the alleged misogyny of "Gamergate" (trolls are predominantly male) (Gleick 2014). Trolls simply say "I do it for the lulz", broadly meaning "I do it for the laughs". Derived from the Internet acronym LOL (laugh out loud), it expresses the mocking humour of the precariat on the margins of urban civilisation (Gleick 2014). In this article we explore: (i) the position of youth in postmodern society in terms of lifestyle change and transition; (ii) the emergence of the youth precariat and "generationism" as a new force in politics and society; and (iii) the implications for youth policy and youth work. We adopt the concept of the austerity city as a metaphor for the growing social inequality young people are experiencing.

YOUTH IN POSTMODERNITY: A HEALTHY OR UNHEALTHY LIFESTYLE?

There are deep questions that inform and shape the definition and foundational meaning of youth, youth policy and childhood in a postmodern world where society is fragmenting and identities are destabilised. Philippe Aries (1962) advanced his thesis of the discovery of childhood as the product of modernity. Norbert Elias (1994) viewed the emergence of childhood as part of a civilisation process, which he called "civility". Talcot Parsons (1963) conceptualised youth as a product of capitalism that had created a rupture in society, resulting in an extended transition to adulthood. In modern society, a cultural space was created outside the traditional family that aimed at the socialisation of youth for more complex occupational roles and social responsibilities. Formal education became the chief mechanism by which, increasingly, the socialising functions of the family were displaced on to the state in urban industrial society. Youth work found a space in this new order to offer informal education and personal development through recreational and leisure pursuits in the community. This modernist process led to the deconstruction of pre-modern youth, as an invisible organic part of traditional extended family life within a rural agriculturally-based economy without age stages, into the structured urban industrial world of education and employment.

Postmodernity has thrown up new socio-historical cultural configurations of fragmentation, individualisation and consumerism in the risk society (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). This is the social and cultural space that youth in Europe finds itself in as a social group, adrift in a world without clear co-ordinates or an easily identifiable purpose (Crook et al. 1992; Putnam 2000). A shrinking state and weakening civil society are being challenged to address this social vacuum in the lives of postmodern youth (Powell et al. 2012). Whither youth in postmodern society?

The Irish *National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007* (NYWDP) addresses the impact of postmodern change on youth in terms of a series of socio-cultural factors: demography; diversity; blurring of boundaries; complex transitions; choices and pressures; individualism and consumerism (Department of Education and Science

2003: 2-4). In the wake of the 2008 financial crash, unemployment and poverty need to be added to this list. The NYWDP notes that young people are declining as a proportion of the population but "the make-up of the youth population is much more culturally diverse than heretofore, increasing the need for intercultural/multicultural aptitudes and awareness among young people and those who work with them" (Department of Education and Science 2003: 2-3). It convincingly seeks to grapple with the foundational meaning of youth in the postmodern world, arguing that the boundaries between childhood and adulthood have become more fluid, leading to a blurring of previous distinctions. This has impacted on the transition from childhood to adulthood: "The transition that has for so long been associated with youth is being significantly extended. In addition, the transition – in fact the transitions – are becoming more complex" (Department of Education and Science 2003: 3). The NYWDP discusses the critical issues of consumerism and individualism in terms of the lifestyle choices and pressures that drive young people earlier in their lives to embrace sexuality and relationships in a world where the solidity of the traditional family and community is under strain (Department of Education and Science 2003: 3-4). The tension between group consciousness and atomistic individualism, and the interweaving of ethics and aesthetics define modern youth culture (Gilroy 2010).

Are these profound changes in postmodern society undermining the foundations of youth as a social and cultural construct? Is there a loss of meaning in a decentred world? Can we any longer address "youth" as a coherent whole? Does this present youth policy with a crisis of obsolescence? Or does it present us with an opportunity to reimagine its mission? The NYWDP (Department of Education and Science 2003: 4) concludes that young people are more alienated, sceptical and questioning of established meanings contained in traditional religious verities and the authenticity of social institutions. This might be interpreted as a Baudrillardian version of postmodernity in which youth culture can simply be dismissed as stylised and ritualised forms of activity in a world that has become lost in a black hole of meaninglessness (Barker 2008: 428). The NYWDP (2003: 4) rejects this "death of meaning" thesis, optimistically concluding that "there is nothing to suggest that young people are any less interested than before in the spiritual dimension of their lives, in developing a belief system which makes sense of their experience and informs their relationships with others and with society". But it issues a warning that youth policy must adapt to "the changing nature of youth" and see it as an "opportunity" and a "challenge" (Department of Education and Science 2003: 11-12).

YOUTH AND THE AUSTERITY CITY: THE MAKING OF "THE PRECARIAT"

In the postmodern world, young people are experiencing a serious crisis epitomised by life in the austerity city. In his influential book, *The Precariat*, Standing (2011) made four key observations on youth in the austerity city.

▶ The city is the object of utopian desire (e.g. Paris, Berlin, London, Amsterdam and Shanghai) – a shifting spatio-temporal order that is associated with both the realisation of dreams and the act of rebellion.

- ► The reality is that the austerity city of the 21st Century has produced a new class, called "the precariat", which are denizens (especially young migrants) rather than citizens – a dangerous cultural contradiction in the age of globalisation.
- ► Citizenship for the precariat is truncated by "the precariousness of residency, of labour and work and of social protection" (Standing 2011: 5).
- ► For the precariat, labour is instrumental (for living), opportunistic (taking what comes) and precarious (insecure) (Standing 2011: 22-23).

David Harvey (2013: xi), in his study *Rebel cities*, observes that alienated urban youth are being transformed into "idle youth lost in the sheer boredom of increasing unemployment and neglect in the soulless suburbs that eventually become sites of boiling unrest". The youth riots in both the French banlieues in 2005 and the English cities during 2011 arguably represent the negative and destructive consequences of austerity policies. These riots need to be set within the wider context of youth protest, including the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, Los Indignados and Pussy Riot (Powell 2013).

Unsurprisingly, anti-politics is part of young people's world view. This has led to a radicalisation of discourse about which Howard Williamson (2013: 1) has advanced "a scenario in which historically socially disadvantaged youth may connect with newly intellectually disaffected young people to produce either more toxic or more creative alliances amongst the young". Adults frequently dismiss the radicalism of youth as simply the product of adolescent idealism. But is it?

Historian Roy Foster (2014) has recently taken up the issue of youth revolt in his book *Vivid faces*, which studies the Irish revolutionary generation of the early 20th century. Foster (2014: 6) asserts "the concept of *generation* is both fertile and trouble-some, especially when linked to a change in political consciousness". He further observes "we may now be coming to see the notion of *generationism* challenging or even replacing class as an organising principle of analysis: conceiving of age groups as carriers of intellectual and organisational alternatives to the status quo, acting under the constellation of factors prevalent at the time of their birth" (our italics). In Europe we talk of the "generation of 1914", the "post-war generation", "the 1960s generation", etc., suggesting particular characteristics are associated with particular historic generations. However, Foster (2014: 7) warns that "the danger of generalisation across a generation must be guarded against; even a self-conceived generation can contain within it so-called generation units which are in apparent disagreement in some ways but linked by affinities of response to their historical and social circumstances". This comment reminds us that the recognition of generations in the social memory largely happens in retrospect. As Foster (2014: 7) puts it: "a generation is made not only of conscious processes of identification and rejection in the lives of the protagonists, but also retrospectively, in their memories, and in their control of the larger territory of official and social memory". He concludes that "the changes that convulse society do not appear from nowhere; they happen first in people's minds and through the construction of a shared culture, which can be a culture of a minority, rather than a majority" (Foster 2014: 8).

Matthew Collin (2007), in his book *The time of the rebels*, examined the role of 21st century "generationism". Youth resistance movements in former communist states

(such as Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine) played a key role in the delivery of democratic change. Collin identifies the power of popular culture (the voice of youth) as a catalytic force in bringing about change. Popular cultures create shared dialogue between young people that enables them to form bonds and become agents of social and political change. Often the impact of this change is on imaginative politics (dreaming of a better future) rather than on the world of practical politics.

In the West, the network known as Anonymous is associated with a variety of protest movements, including Occupy Wall Street, Los Indignados and the advent of hacktivism on the Internet. It represents a progression from trolling to political activism (Gleick 2014: 36). Anonymous was created on the Internet forum 4chan in 2003, as an essentially prankish and juvenile activity. The title of Anonymous reflects its organisational character as a leaderless phenomenon that defies categorisation as a movement, organisation, party, etc. It is simply an invitation to participate in protest under the mask of anonymity and reimagine politics through an idealisation of the future. In this way Anonymous rejects, mocks and satirises the world of adult politics. But it also identifies the power of generationism to challenge the existing order in the interests of promoting change. Popular culture is in itself a platform for the youth population to express its view through music, theatre and comedy that focuses on the imaginative politics of social justice and political change.

It is not often clear whether generationism represents the politics of enchantment or disenchantment or the social reality or both. The conventional view of the adult world is that the individual relates to external reality as an engaged citizen. Childhood and youth are represented as a progression to adulthood during which the young person is socially constructed as a "learner". The problem with this picture of youth is that, in an era of extended transitions and blurred boundaries, it becomes highly problematic: when do youth and adulthood begin? In terms of social reality, the world splits youth and adulthood and allows cultural representation to carry out the function of bridging the barriers. The anonymity, embraced by some young people in the Anonymous phenomenon and symbolised by the wearing of masks, suggests that many young people are alienated from the public realm. Furthermore, vulnerability results in socially deprived young people falling through the safety net traditionally provided by the welfare state. That constitutes a serious challenge for youth work and youth policy.

A new youth policy initiative is needed in our view to address the austerity city. Key challenges and issues include the following.

▶ Homelessness and residual marginalisation in the banlieues (suburbs) – what Michel Foucault called the "interior of the exterior" – needs to be addressed by reimagining the city as a common space with common rights of access and easement.

▶ Social housing needs to be provided for young people in city centres at subsidised rents in partnership with civil society/youth organisations.

▶ Public spaces need to be developed, as opposed to privatised, for young people to meet, play sport, make and listen to music, engage in community art and enjoy free Wi-Fi access in the process of becoming – young people – and the narrative of sustainable futures need to be accommodated as a central goal of youth policy.