Introduction
In search of the sources of youth work and youth policy in Europe

Hanjo Schild and Jan Vanhee

Those responsible today for giving form and content to youth work and a policy in support of youth work can hardly avoid the questions: What is youth work? and What is a policy in support of youth work? Another question is: Which policies were pursued yesterday and are they being pursued concretely today with regard to young people in the member states and – increasingly – at supranational level, that is at the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe? What do we know about these issues today and how can we use our relevant knowledge and insight to further develop youth work and youth work policy?

The Blankenberge exercises – two workshops with approximately 40 participants each – invited experts to reflect on the history of youth work policy in their country and to look for its origins and roots. The point of these exercises was to exchange findings and experiences, and then confront and compare them with each other.

The first workshop on youth work history took place from 26 to 29 May 2008 and brought together a number of experts who gave their views on youth work evolution in their country. They represented a wide range of European countries. In line with the logic that we need to situate youth work histories in their socio-economical and political context, the workshop aimed to highlight youth work evolutions linked to different "welfare systems", ranging from so-called social-democratic systems (Finland) through to countries typified as liberal (United Kingdom) to more conservative welfare regimes (Germany, France and Flanders). Poland gave us input from a post-communist country (as did Germany) and Malta exemplified a more southern-European welfare type, although one strongly influenced by the United Kingdom.

In the second workshop on youth work history, held from 25 to 28 May 2009, there was a need to complement this landscape and pay explicit attention to eastern Europe. After the introductory session on the role of historical research in youth work policy, research and practice, a more general presentation from outside Europe (South Africa) and on the history of youth work policy at European level opened the scope of reflections. The following sessions focused on seven different presentations on the history of youth work in the Flemish-, French- and German-speaking communities of Belgium; the Netherlands; Hungary; Wales (United Kingdom); and Ireland. These mainly dealt with the relationship between youth work and youth policy. In a last session, special attention was paid to a preliminary summary of the most important findings and conclusions. Key questions such as:

- What is youth work?
- What does youth work mean for young people?
- What does youth work mean for society?
- What is youth policy?
- What does youth policy mean for young people and society?

came up regularly for discussion. Searching for the answers to these questions by exploring the origins and traditions of youth work also challenges us to acquire historically relevant knowledge and, if desirable and necessary, integrate it into the policies we are formulating today. It also invites us to give heritage and cultural policy a historical dimension in so far as they are focused on youth work and related issues such as the development of civil society.

Each policy level should raise awareness of these issues, first of all at national and European level. Consequently, more and better resources and tools should be made available in order to provide relevant knowledge on the historical dimension of youth work, thus contributing to our efforts to develop policies and practice that are based on knowledge and evidence.

In non-formal learning and training activities in the youth field, particularly in relation to management skills, sufficient space and emphasis should be systematically allocated to this issue. It will help us to reflect more clearly on our work today and it will produce innovative ideas on how to tackle today's challenges, primarily related to the identity of youth work, the problem of access, professionalism and the quality of our work, methodologies and strategies used, the types of youth (work) research and so forth.

As organisers of the workshops we are well aware that the search for the origins has only just been launched – at least at European level. The two Blankenberge workshops marked the start of this search.

The partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth has built up a tradition in international exchange, and knowledge production and provision. The Flemish Community of Belgium has a longstanding tradition of youth work and voluntary engagement in Flemish youth movements, and it will exploit the results of the two workshops as a starting point to organise a bigger conference on this theme under its European presidency in the second half of 2010.

The time has also come to entrust our existing knowledge and understanding to a larger forum and share it with as many relevant youth actors as possible in Europe. The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy is the ideal platform to collect our insights in a more systematic way and put them at the disposal of each and everyone who wants to look for the origins of youth work and youth policy in Europe. Publishing the results of the two workshops in print versions will also contribute to this exercise.

We invite you to join in our search and further activities.

Hanjo Schild and Jan Vanhee

Ulrich Bunjes,
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Key points of the opening address

I share these thoughts with you not only as an "institutional representative", but also as an ex-youth worker, active in various functions and contexts since the 1960s – including some of the historically perhaps most interesting and challenging periods such as that of the "All-European Youth and Student Co-operation" in the 1980s.

Looking at the history of youth work is useful and can be a rich source of inspiration when conceiving future approaches. It should be said, however, that the youth policy of the Council of Europe in the 1960s and 1970s was hardly based on a historical analysis. These initiatives responded to an immediate need: they were functionalistic. On the other hand, only historical reflection can alert us to the pitfalls and possibilities of the future, to challenges and options for change.

The history of European youth work is part of the history of Europe. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe's history changed fundamentally. However, our approach to youth work – the institutional set-up, the target groups, the objectives – changed only marginally if at all. Historical analysis should advise us whether this approach – this "non-change" – was justified or not. After all, in many European countries there was a need for abrupt and traumatic change. Were the “western” models adequate to meet this challenge?

Our blueprint for the future of youth work and youth policy development in Europe is “Agenda 2020”. I am convinced that historical reflection can help us to meet these new challenges, described in “Agenda 2020”. Let me point out three areas where youth work can surely provide inspiration:

- *Cultural diversity*: how has youth work dealt with comparable situations in the past, for example in post-conflict situations where new majority/minority relations appeared?
- *Child and youth policy*: how has youth work historically viewed the relationship between the two? Which historical roots are at the basis of the separation between the two that mark parts of the current youth work landscape?
- *Intergenerational dialogue*: from a historical perspective, is this not a very serious challenge, since youth work has often been seen as the path towards emancipation from the older generation, if not a total counter model to mainstream society? Has youth work, in the past, developed models for intergenerational dialogue that could be made fruitful today?

The Council of Europe attaches great importance to this workshop, and to the workshops and initiatives to follow. We thank Jan Vanhee and the Flemish Community Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Youth and Adults for organising this event with us as part of the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth. We will study the results of this workshop with immense interest, and look forward to future initiatives to analyse our historical heritage in this important, albeit not very well documented field.

2

The history of youth work – Re-socialising the youth question?

Filip Coussée

So that we may learn from our past, the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, together with the Flemish Community of Belgium, organised a second workshop on youth work history in Europe. As the first workshop (see Verschelden et al., 2009), this second one did not aim at purifying an essential youth work concept irrespective of a historical and cultural context. Rather it endeavoured to identify the close links between youth work developments and broader social and cultural trends. Tracing back the roots of youth work and identifying different evolutions within and between countries must help us to feed a fundamental discussion on youth work's multifaceted and multilayered identity, and to cope in a constructive way with recurrent youth work dilemmas.

Historical consciousness enables us to go beyond restrictive discussions swayed by the issues of the day. In that sense the Blankenberge history sessions aimed to clarify what youth work is, without confining youth work's identity to a description in terms of current methods. Youth work is a "social" animal (Williamson, 2009). The current discussion, however, is mainly coloured by rather technical discussions on excluding some methods and including others, on defining boundaries between youth work and school or social work, or on (supposed) new methods to contribute to the social integration of vulnerable young people. This restriction of the discussion to rather methodical questions with a direct relevance for today's policies makes youth work a vulnerable practice to those "who would foist on it warmed-over policies that have been tried and found wanting in the past" (Gilchrist, Jeffs and Spence, 2001).

➔ The social nature of youth work

Although the organisers did not explicitly ask to do so, all contributors started their presentation with the questions: What was/is youth work? and Why did/do we need youth work? Throughout the presentations, youth work was shown as a social practice varied in shape and form. The flashback position obliged all contributors to sketch the broader social, cultural and political ideas and evolutions that determined the birth and growth of youth work. It soon became very clear that two societal features are of tremendous importance for the position and function of youth work in a given society: the social construction of youth as a specific section of the population and the type of welfare regime of a society. They both refer to questions concerning social integration and inclusion. The first has to do with integrating a younger age group in adult society. The latter refers to the question of how to foster social cohesion in a society that in the same time is based on exclusionary mechanisms inherent to capitalist market societies. The mandate and profile of youth work is not and cannot be the same in social democratic welfare regimes as in liberal or totalitarian regimes. Many speakers emphasised the close links between the conception of youth work and the making of democracy. This is an observation that will be repeated in this second workshop.

The conceptions of "youth" and the conceptions of welfare and social cohesion are closely interconnected and both reflect a desirable relationship between individual and society. Nevertheless, various contributors pointed at the fact that youth work practice and policy have been increasingly underpinned by ideas on the desired development and behaviour of youth and less by ideas referring to the democratic shaping of a society. As we concluded after the first Blankenberge workshop: the social question has been framed into the youth question (Verschelden et al., 2009). Developments in youth work were increasingly inspired by the ideas that live in the minds of policy makers and youth workers (and often in the minds of young people themselves) on the potential, desired, imagined meaning and significance of youth work for the positive development of young people. The individual, harmonious transformation of young people into creative and autonomous adult citizens finding their place in society became of utmost importance. These ideas were increasingly underpinned by academic research, mainly in developmental psychology (focusing on youth as a life stage) and youth sociology (focusing on youth as a social category). Policy makers, youth workers and researchers found each other in the construction of ideal developmental trajectories and transitions for the young. And so, as other forms of social work (in a broad sense), youth work has increasingly been constructed as a tool to integrate young people in the prevailing adult society. It is striking how in many European countries "social inclusion" (or exclusion) was constructed as an individual asset, not as part of the social quality of society.

➜ Managing "the social"

A collection of harmonious and healthy people does not necessarily and in itself result in a just and social cohesive society. This implies that the social nature of youth work encompasses much more than a "holistic" view on the individual development of children and young people. Moreover, the emphasis on youth work as a tool for individual development and inclusion of young people obscures two fundamental discussions: first, it obscures the question of how youth work functions or can function as a part of our "democratic infrastructure" as a forum to give a voice to young people in the making of our society; second, it leads to the obsession that young people must be given "access to youth work" and therefore no longer questions the underpinning idealised conceptions of "youth", which are exactly at the basis of the inaccessibility of youth work.

In that sense, the historical insights from the first Blankenberge workshop reminded us very strongly that young people are not a homogeneous group and also that they are social beings and not merely social becomings. Therefore youth work policy and practice should be guided as much by (forgotten) "social questions" as by "youth questions". These insights are highly relevant for all European countries. Youth work is a part of the social infrastructure of a society. In most eastern European countries this social infrastructure has to be renewed after a period of state socialism in which the "social" was reduced to the state. In most western European countries neoliberalism has eroded the "social" by stressing the force of "the individual, autonomous, creative, independent citizen" investing in his or her own life. The social power of the different "pillars" (such as Catholic, socialist, liberal, nationalist) and all their associations organising social life (sports, schools, health care funds, trade unions, youth organisations, adult associations and so forth) have been questioned very critically. These criticisms were to a large extent legitimate, because the pillars divided people in social categories and avoided contact between them. Moreover, the enormous influence of the pillars on social life was not very transparent and was insufficiently subjected to democratic control.

It seems, in the West as in the East, that the "social" in society is currently more open-ended than ever, but this also means that it is more uncertain and vulnerable. Some (young) people are increasingly left to their own devices. The reorganisation of the social is increasingly being taken over by a-pedagogical and seemingly apolitical structures, subdivided in manageable sectors and controlled by social engineers. Just as the former pillarisation, this compartmentalisation has a dividing effect, although it is less problematised. "Problematic" people are divided from "normal" people. Whilst in the "pillarised" period "social and cultural work" was unified in one pillar, social work is distinguished from "regular" cultural work, which also means that deviant young people are increasingly separated from "regular" young people.

In the concluding reflections and discussions all participants agreed that these insights on the "management of the social" should feed the youth work discussion much more than they do nowadays. In our conclusions (Verschelden et al., 2009), we tried to grasp the gained insights by framing the discussion in a social pedagogical perspective.

➜ The social and pedagogical identity of youth work

Various speakers shed light on some of the core principles of youth work identity. Bernard Davies (United Kingdom) was the most explicit on this point (see also

Davies and Merton, 2009). He referred to key principles as voluntariness, group work, building relationships with young people and with their communities, participation, starting where young people are and going beyond, strong emphasis on recreation and association and so forth.

These features were confirmed in other contributions. At the same time it was recognised that a characterisation of youth work in these terms remains on a rather methodical level. It does refer to the pedagogical nature of youth work, but it does not explicitly connect these principles to the social question and the significance for society. Even if youth work meets all these core features, it can be underpinned by very diverging assumptions and aims. Throughout history we have identified conservative forms of youth work, but also youth work that was developed starting from progressive, restorative and radical ideas on the relationship between individual and society.

These are not mere arbitrary choices. Of course, if we accept that there is no best way to organise society, then we have to accept that there is no "best" way to organise youth work. Nevertheless, we have to make the underlying assumptions to youth work practice and policy much more explicit. If they are not made explicit (or even not consciously known any more), then it is impossible to discuss youth work in its broader social functions. Perhaps that is why discussions on youth work so often stick to methodical questions focusing on how to do things in a better way. We tend to forget to ask if we are doing the good things.

The social pedagogical framework shifts our attention from the organisation of youth work as a pedagogical practice to the tight relationship between pedagogical practices and views on the desired social order. History made this relationship very concrete. All histories identified a kind of social pedagogical "embarrassment" (Mennicke, 1937), although most contributors did not explicitly call it that. The key question thrown up by this social pedagogical embarrassment is: How can we prevent social disintegration and preserve social cohesion without eliminating diversity? This question was answered in the creation of social practices bridging the gap between individual and society. As argued above these social practices increasingly transformed social questions into educational questions.

Youth work, being such a social practice, facilitates the negotiation between individual aspirations and societal expectations. That is why the rapporteurs of the first Blankenberge workshop explicitly chose to describe youth work as "social" work". So youth work respects diversity and difference and at the same time has to strive for equality and cohesion.

This kind of tension – open, but not without engagement – is inherent to all practices in the "social". Because this is the sphere where the relationship between individual and society or between lifeworld and system (Lorenz, 2009) is constantly questioned and constructed. The intensive discussions we had in May 2008 on youth work as a practice full of tensions taught us that youth work has to be open-ended, but not asocial. Youth work initiatives that are externally shaped and where activities and purposes are defined from above, fail to appreciate that it is not possible in a democracy to define in advance the final destination of individual and societal processes. These kind of "closed" practices could be defined as asocial work, they leave out the social and emphasise the work (Bradt, 2009).

On the other hand, youth work initiatives that fail to connect their activities to the broader society may be very open, but they could also be asocial. They tend to restrict participation to participation in youth work and not participation through youth work. The first Blankenberge workshop showed that many youth work forms throughout history disconnected themselves from their social context and more specifically from the construction of a democratic welfare state. Those initiatives are youth-centred, but fail to question their significance for society.

The dialectical relations between openness and engagement are grasped in the inextricability of the pedagogical and the social nature of youth work. Through the pedagogical, youth workers foster individual learning processes and deliberately aim to go beyond young people's lifeworlds. Through the social, youth workers are mediating between lifeworld and system and aiming at societal learning processes.

➔ A sustainable practice and a supportive policy

These inextricability and dialectical tensions make it very hard to build up a clear identity and therefore also to develop a sustainable, supportive youth work policy. Throughout many histories it was shown how policy makers (and also youth workers) often neglected these tensions. Dialectics seem to tempt to choose between two poles. We were given different examples of youth work policies and practices overemphasising one aspect of the work and neglecting the other:

- either cutting off the social aspects of youth work: pedagogical action is then reduced to a set of methods or techniques which may well be fed by holistic, caring assumptions on children and young people, but disconnect pedagogy from society (Coussée et al., 2008). This implies that the societal function of youth work (negotiating between lifeworld and system) is obscured and therefore unquestionable;
- or cutting off the pedagogical aspects of youth work: social action then is disconnected from pedagogical questions. In these views on youth work we sense a strong plea for democratisation of society and radicalisation of youth work, but youth workers themselves get no pedagogical perspectives to bring these principles in practice in their work with concrete young people.

It was the aim of the second Blankenberge workshop to make the picture of youth work histories in Europe more complete. In addition to this we hoped to elaborate further on the social identity of youth work. We tried to develop the above described social pedagogical framework as a productive frame to fertilise the identity debate rather than to sterilise it, convinced that it had the potential to accommodate the existing diversity of youth work methods, strategies and definitions and to make it manageable without trying to eliminate it. It must help us to discuss youth work identity:

- starting from a shared mission and position for all youth work forms;
- with respect to the dialectical tension between diversity and universality;
- grounded in youth work practice and not externally defined;
- based on what youth work does, not on what youth work pretends to do;
- without drawing dividing lines between youth work with young people and youth work for young people;
- in a flexible and open way;
- without neglecting the need to develop practical perspectives for practitioners and policy makers.

We elaborated further on these insights and frameworks in this second workshop on the history of youth work in Europe (and its relevance for youth work and youth policy today). We hope that these insights might further add to a fruitful discussion on youth work and its significance for young people and for society.

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