Youth Knowledge # 18

The history of youth work in Europe

Volume 4

Relevance for today's youth work policy

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth

EUROPEAN UNION

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Relevance for today's youth work policy

Volume 4

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Introduction: looking around and moving forward

by Edgar Schlümmer

The fourth seminar on the history of youth work in Europe and its relevance for today's youth work policy took place in the autumn of 2011 in Tallinn, Estonia. The seminar was hosted by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and the Estonian Youth Work Centre (the national youth work agency of the ministry). It was prepared in co-operation with the youth partnership between the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe. The event followed a series of seminars held first in Blankenberge, Belgium (in 2008 and 2009) and then in Ghent (in 2010) during the Belgian presidency of the EU.

The continuity of this work, bringing together at a European-level policy makers, researchers and practitioners in the youth field, is crucial. There is no doubt that effective youth policy and youth work have to be based on better knowledge of young people and historical experiences of policy and practice directed towards them. Grasping the unfolding of events within broader political contexts, and understanding the different situations, perspectives and challenges faced by young people provide a platform and an anchor for contemporary development in the youth field. Bringing the actors together

and learning from the different trends and realities all over Europe is a good basis for engaging in this kind of exercise.

Estonia is a meaningful place to speak about history, because it has been in the middle of socio-cultural and political changes in both relatively recent times and across a broader sweep of time (the past 100 years and well before). Its different histories are equally relevant for the discussion of youth work and policy development in general. Estonia is at the crossroads between East and West. It shows, almost in miniature, developments in society and the youth field from the Middle Ages, starting from parish schools and the first university, continuing with independence, democracy and youth participation, then totalitarianism under the Soviet Union and, most recently, "re-independence" and re-integration with Europe. Since then, development in the youth field in Estonia has been continuous and rapid. Estonia is also, therefore, a meaningful place to consider contemporary developments – to introduce knowledge about the roots of youth work and youth work policy and to discuss the meaning and purpose of youth work in the 21st century. Knowledge and quality are top priorities in current developments in Estonian youth work and youth policy. Examples of relevant recent work include implementing the youth monitoring and youth work quality assurance system; training and professionalisation of youth workers (for example implementing occupational standards); recognition of youth work's role in supporting youth employability; combating exclusion and poverty; and the development of youth parliaments in all municipalities to empower young people's voice on their situation.

During the seminar Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Romania, Greece, Portugal and Armenia introduced their accounts of the history of youth work and policy. The commonalities across the countries represented were apparent in many historical aspects:

- the professionalism of youth workers and youth movements, and organisations as a starting point for professional youth work;
- the strategic importance of young people as a major target group for ideological renewal to guarantee the stability of regimes, though they have often been the first to strike back and call for democratic reforms;
- the demolition not only of ideology but also of youth work structures, and, in those countries that had totalitarian regimes, the rebuilding of the youth field, sometimes almost from scratch;
- the important influence of international organisations on national developments in the youth field;
- the transitions from leisure to social welfare, and indeed wider contexts and considerations, as legitimate territory for "youth work".

There follows, then, in the chapters of this book, a broad mosaic of new histories of youth work and youth policy. They are sometimes identified explicitly, but it is also important for the reader to search for the links between the past and the youth policies we are formulating today. Though this is the fourth volume that has sought to capture these often forgotten, and certainly frequently overlooked, histories, the hope is that these seminars will continue with historical analyses of particular topics in the lives of young people and that this will provide a good basis to increase and ensure the further development of youth work at both European and national, and indeed municipal, levels. Each level of policy should thereby strengthen its commitment to the practice of youth work, using

prevailing knowledge and evidence – past and present – as a mechanism and methodology for promoting both young people's voice and autonomy, and their integration and involvement in the different communities and societies to which they belong.

by Kristina Mänd

Third sector trends

The broader framework of service delivery

One aspect that affects our work is trends in civil society and how they are related to youth work. First we must recognise that voluntary organisations in general have experienced significant change in their role and influence in society and policy. They are major providers of essential services, influential advocates for marginalised groups and knowledgeable advisors on public policy. That, in turn, has led to greater scrutiny of their activities. This chapter will examine some trends that will influence youth work in the years to come, drawing on the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' Third Sector Foresight (http://ncvoforesight.org/).

➔ Blurring boundaries between sectors

The boundaries between the not-for-profit sector, public sector and the business sector have become increasingly blurred. As government plans for a "deep and serious" reform of public services evolve, many not-for-profit organisations

are delivering public services traditionally undertaken by the state. At the same time, many not-for-profit organisations are involved in social entrepreneurship or business activities conventionally limited to businesses. This has all led to the evolution of hybrid organisations at the boundaries between sectors.

➔ Collaborative working

This trend is driven both by increased pressure to achieve value for money and efficiency, and by the belief that shared working can achieve more effective or joined-up services. Collaborative working may take many forms, including mutual support of campaigns and events, jointly bidding for contracts or sharing of back office functions. There is also an increasing interest in mergers, which may be appropriate where organisations are sufficiently compatible in their aims and ethos. Although much of the literature focuses on collaborations between not-for-profit organisations, they may also be developed with public or private sector organisations.

➔ The number of general not-for-profit organisations

It seems that the recession has had an impact on the number of not-for-profit organisations. While new ones may form, existing organisations are being encouraged to collaborate or merge in order to bid for contracts to deliver public services.

➔ The commodification of membership

Some membership organisations increasingly treat membership as a commodity or product to be bought, not a value-based contribution to be given, and their marketing emphasises tangible benefits over "softer" intangible benefits for members. The two approaches may also be combined in a "free economy" model.

➔ Trends in volunteering

The role and importance of community, social solidarity and citizenship are being recognised and the definition and value of volunteering varies from country to country. Time is an issue and it affects people's availability, as they want volunteering opportunities that do not mean time away from friends and family, but allow them to mix and match with the reality of life pressures. Not-for-profit organisations are under pressure to use pluralistic approaches to recruit, engage and manage volunteers. Another interesting trend is that the ties of volunteers to their natural geographical communities are weakening and people are looking for options to volunteer away from home. Consumer culture plays an important role and volunteers are increasingly looking for the emotional and material benefits that volunteering can bring – such as new skills, new opportunities and recognition. Moreover, information technology plays an important role in volunteering and not-for-profit organisations need to use new networking and social media tools. This has also led to virtual and global awareness of the problems and challenges that the world is facing, and an increased interest in volunteering.

➔ Legitimacy, transparency and accountability

The legitimacy, transparency and accountability of not-for-profit organisations are essential for the sustainability, effectiveness and protection of the sector and

are more important now than ever before. We must increase the public trust and the credibility of not-for-profit organisations and their activities through the enhancement of their accountability systems and structures. The freedom to operate and the ability to do so in a responsible manner is critical in ensuring that civil society actors are able to effectively represent their constituencies and support democratic decision making.

➜ Information on not-for-profit organisations

There is more public information about not-for-profit organisations than ever before. As governments are increasingly expected to publish detailed data about how they spend public money, not-for-profit organisations will also come under pressure to publish open data in more detail. However, the focus of information about not-for-profit organisations is moving away from purely financial comparisons such as administration or fundraising costs. Instead, initiatives focus on how effective not-for-profit organisations are by looking at what they achieve – expectations of evidence.

➜ Attitudes to participation

Reactions to authority are changing across society, in what can be termed a "decline in deference". People – especially younger people, who are used to participating online and having their voices heard and opinions recognised at home and at work – have new, high expectations of participation in all areas of their lives. New technology is responding to, reinforcing and directing this change.

➜ Professionalisation of campaigning

Campaigning is an area of not-for-profit work that long resisted professionalisation, but this is now changing and starting to become a career based on transferable skills rather than expertise on particular issues. This is resisted by some single-issue activists who do not want transferable skills or see themselves as part of the not-for-profit sector. The growth of non-violent direct action also runs contrary to "professionalisation", but the marginalisation of dissent means that it is increasingly necessary to be organised to succeed in a difficult environment for campaigning.

➜ Levels and sources of not-for-profit income

Following a decade of increasing income for not-for-profit organisations, future funding streams are uncertain. The main sources of funds are donations, legacies and fundraising from individuals and grants, and contracts for service delivery from statutory sources. During the recession, individual giving declined, but it is now growing again, although it has yet to reach previous levels. Constrained public spending means that funding from statutory sources will decline, especially grant funding, but other reforms mean that there may be more opportunities to bid for contracts.

➜ Environment

Climate change affects us all and increasing numbers of people are concerned about ethical living and consumerism.

What is the future for youth work?

Youth organisations need to be aware of these trends and see how they can make use of the opportunities and work with the threats. Kumi Naidoo, International Executive Director of Greenpeace International, suggests that:

Civil society needs to find a "new way" in which we:

- always distinguish between access and influence (don't compromise to preserve access);
- engage those in power but keep questioning the quality of this engagement;
- build genuine constituencies and be able to demonstrate the power of those constituencies;
- propose solutions more clearly;
- stop competing with each other for air time (learn not to let small issues divide us).

These trends that I have touched upon in my look at civil society developments can easily be related to youth work. The rise in collaboration and blurring of boundaries between the sectors is a trend that youth work could benefit from. For youth work, this would mean increased intermingling of volunteer-based and professional strands and wider integration of the two alternatives into a united, supportive service offered to young people. It would open up additional opportunities for youth work compared to that which has been largely accessible to either volunteer-based youth work or professional youth work. Increased collaboration would encourage volunteers to bring their youth work ethos into professional youth work while accepting youth work quality standards. It would also lead to professional youth workers adopting a more youth-centred approach and treating all young persons as valuable members of society in their own right.

More and better collaboration between sectors is appropriate at a time of economic recession, as it will lead to more efficient usage of resources. More and better co-operation could also be useful considering the decreasing proportion of youth in European societies, with every young person even more valuable than before.

For more information, visit http://ncvoforesight.org/.