YOUTH
RESEARCHERS

by Bryony Hoskins & Paul Kloosterman

different cultures in the same field.

A few years ago during the coffee break at an event where both youth researchers and youth workers were present you could hear the following comments being made by a group of youth workers about the researchers: *"their documents and reports are unreadable and too fat", "they never meet real youngsters", "I would love to talk to the cute one over there but their language is like Chinese to me", "they are addicted to long speeches"*. At the same time in another corner youth researchers were addressing competences of the youth workers: *"well, they are nice and motivated but they just do", "they don't take any advantage of all the information which has been collected about their target group", "they don't seem to have any theoretical concept", "during a meeting they seem to need a game every ten minutes to keep their attention"*.

The youth sector is made up of a disparate group of actors, for example, young people, youth workers, trainers, NGO workers, youth policy makers and youth researchers. These different groups of people have different needs, skills and competencies and have their distinct cultures.
For example, they use different languages, codes of behaviour and practices that often create misunderstandings between the different groups. In this article we will highlight two of these groups: researchers and youth workers. We will then consider the question, **what are the benefits from greater understanding and cooperation between these two groups?**

Researchers, the first group of people that we will put under the microscope, often write articles and books that describe the complexities of the experiences of young people relating these experiences to sociological analysis of the present day such as the Risk society, globalisation, Late modernity or Post modernity. In order to describe the experiences of young people researchers use methods such as interviews with young people, systematic observation of young people in their everyday lives, the use of questionnaires and large-scale surveys giving statistics on such topics as people gaining employment, pregnancy rates and suicides. Some of the complexities arise from the comparison between different groups of young people: ethnicity, gender, class, youth cultures, periods of time and different countries.

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The language used by researchers to describe youth experiences can be difficult to understand often using complex words and terminology developed within the research community that helps them to be more precise in their explanations.
On the other hand using this language can also serve to exclude others who do not understand the terminology from participating within the debates and using the research results. Within their work this group also spend much time referencing other researchers. **It is necessary for them to demonstrate their knowledge of theory and literature in order that their new research is taken seriously within the research community.** The complex language, the use of terminology created within the community and the referencing of other researchers are the expected practice within this culture and form the rules that need to be followed for them to succeed within this group. In many countries youth research has still to create its own identity and establish itself as a recognised field and thus in many ways youth research has to follow these academic traditions in order to be recognised and taken seriously. As a result of the amount of time spent reading, analysing and writing as opposed to spending time with young people in the field researchers are often (mis) understood as not having spent enough time with young people to understand their experiences and – it has to be admitted - on some occasions this may be true.

Youth workers spend most of their time not describing the situation of youth, but rather working with the day-to-day needs of individuals or groups of young people. This group of people have a lot of experience of the difficulties and needs of specific young people with whom they work. Often youth workers feel very highly involved with these young people, which is a strong motivational factor for working with them. The social status of youth workers in most countries is not very high. More time is spent doing rather than reflecting, comparing or reading other peoples' analysis of the lives of young people.

There is the impression from researchers (which is sometimes justified) that youth workers do their practice based on conviction rather than evidence.

& YOUTH WORKERS

Youth workers also have their own language and rules of practice and methods to succeed. They base their work on the values that all people are equal, that it is important to discuss feelings, participation should be voluntary and that tests and formal qualifications are less important. The community of youth workers and trainers use their own terminology like "energizers", concepts such as "icebergs" and expressions such as the use of "for me" at the beginning of sentences. **For people who are not from this community, who work in another culture where the rules and values are very different it can be equally difficult to understand and to join in.**
Across Europe the youth sector is in a defensive position, always needing to prove itself and convince others of its importance in answering to the needs of young people. The lack of recognition of the youth sector often means that the funds in the pot are not large. This leads to competition between the distinct groups for the small amounts of money. What we need instead of competition is to work much closer together using the strengths of each group to benefit the youth sector as a whole and demonstrate its place in European civil society. The comments that were quoted at the beginning of this article are understandable and certainly there will be some truth in them, but they don't contribute to a cooperation between the two groups that could enrich and improve the quality of both research and practice. Below are two examples of where youth researchers and youth workers have successfully worked together.

In the Netherlands, between 2001 and 2003, a project was carried out which involved close co-operation between researchers and practitioners (social workers, youth workers and teachers). The central issue for the project was **"in what way can you motivate those youngsters that even drop out of special programs for dropouts?"**.
Starting with three months of research - literature research, plus interviews with youngsters and practitioners - initial conclusions led to the development of an action plan. Here, researchers and practitioners decided together about pilot projects to experiment with these first conclusions. After these pilot projects again youngsters and practitioners were interviewed followed by an evaluation process. The project produced a research report, a book for practitioners which was in a way a popular version of the report and a training manual for training practitioners. For all involved the result was very satisfying. Researchers profited from the input of practitioners when "designing" their research and could see a direct follow-up to their work in practice after the project. Practitioners were in a way forced to reflect inten-

Paul, why did you become a youth worker/ trainer?

The main reason that I decided to study youth work was that it combined all the things that I was involved in as an 18 year old youngster. As a volunteer I was active in the local youth centre and next to that I was fighting the world being part of the left wing movement. So when it was time to decide about my education I was nicely surprised when I found out that I could make my "life" a profession.
In those times being a youth worker was partly a political statement. To be honest we discussed sometimes more about Marx or the political situation in South America than the methodological concept of youth work. To empower youngsters to be ready for a new society was our idealistic dream in the beginning of the seventies.
The daily practice of youth work then brought us back to reality and made me focus more on the situation of these youngsters in their life, their neighbourhood, their families, their school or their unemployed status.

Paul, why did you start to work with researchers and policy makers?

When I take a closer look at the youth work in my country, the Netherlands, I have to admit that I'm not impressed by both the methodological concepts of youth workers and the reasoning behind policy decisions taken by youth work organisations. Choices are often made based on contacts with those youngsters who "'happen to be there" in the youth centre, on personal priorities of youth workers or on accidental events. Also politicians don't contribute to a coherent policy in youth work by reacting strongly on "he news of the day". There seems to be a big lack when it comes to reflection and having a proper overall view on the situation and needs of young people.
Therefore, in my opinion, it's crucial to establish a better link with youth researchers in order to develop youth work policy, to better evaluate results and to be able to show the importance of the work done to the outer world.

sively on their work during the project and were provided with new methods and tools after the project. Both agreed that the cooperation increased the quality of the project. **Three months after the project, 85 % of the participating youngsters were in a job or vocational training.**

Evaluation work is another example where researchers benefit the youth work and youth training fields. The European Commission YOUTH Programme as a whole, the SALTO training courses and the Partnership training courses on European citizenship and the Advanced Training of Trainers in Europe have undergone evaluation research in different forms.

In most of the evaluations all the interest groups will have had a chance to input their views into the process. The results have given youth workers and trainers and policy makers the chance to have feedback on youth work and youth training in Europe. The feedback can then be used to implement changes and increase the quality of practice and also, importantly, to reaffirm where and when practice has been successful and of high quality. Thus when evaluation can show successful impact, for example, highlighting the benefits of the youth work for young people and show that the quality is high this evidence can be used in arguments to maintain or increase the number of activities for young people and youth trainers. Youth researchers then feel that they are actively contributing to the benefit of the youth sector.

Conclusion

In this article we have worked on one of the topics within the debate at the New Generation YOUTH Programme seminar: how to translate youth research into policy and practice. Through exploring the different codes and practices of youth workers and youth researchers we have tried to explain the reasons for why these cultures behave differently - in order to promote future cooperation between these groups. In the future YOUTH Programme we hope to see a greater involvement of researchers contributing to European youth work and training. This research should above all be directly useful for policy and practice. To facilitate this process we need to work on developing a better understanding of each other and improving the working methods between the different actors in the youth field.

Bryony, Why did you become a researcher?

The motivation of researchers is not that much different to youth workers - the reason that they go into this area of research is in order to create change, to empower young people and give them better opportunities. For me this was certainly the case, I became a researcher because I wanted to create greater equality between women and men and I wanted to put what young people said and felt into the field of research. Feminist youth research was an obvious place to start because it focuses on the lives of everyday young women and men and what they say; it places importance on personal experiences and puts an emphasis on the ethics of research.
The difference between researchers and youth workers then is not the commitment but in the approach to creating change. The research approach is to describe the situation of young people and to document the evidence of the difficulties faced and it is hoped that policy and practice will take notice.

Bryony, Why did you start to work more with youth workers/ trainers?

The difficulty that researchers face is in transmitting the results into the fields of practice and policy.
Journal articles, books and talks are often created in a language that is impenetrable and I realised more and more that the results of research filled libraries rather than made changes. Hoping that policy and practice would take notice was not enough and I wanted to be involved in the process of translating research into the worlds of policy and practice, to provide the evidence where needed to back up good policy and practice and to bring evidence to challenge policy when it does not fit the reality of young peoples' lives.

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