

Youth Partnership

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LIFE IS CROSS-SECTORAL WHY SHOULDN'T YOUTH POLICY BE?

Overview of existing information
on cross-sectoral youth policy in Europe

Magda Nico

CIES-IUL (University Institute of Lisbon)
and Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR)

The goal of this paper is to contribute to overcoming the lack of knowledge of the gaps and overlaps in cross-sectoral youth policy all over Europe, by providing an overview of existing information on cross-sectoral policy co-operation based on material produced in the context of EU co-operation, the work of the Council of Europe and specific countries with concrete experience in cross-sectoral co-operation.

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Author: Magda Nico

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c/o Council of Europe

F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex

France

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Executive Summary

The main purpose of this paper is to look beyond the arguments in favour of cross-sectoral youth policy, since the real lives of young people are themselves cross-sectoral and policy must therefore act in accordance. It intends to contribute to overcoming the lack of knowledge of the gaps and overlaps in cross-sectoral youth policy all over Europe. This will be done by providing an overview of existing information on cross-sectoral policy co-operation, based on the material produced in co-operation with the European Union, on the work of the Council of Europe and on the experiences of cross-sectoral co-operation of a number of specific countries. To achieve this purpose, some of the collected documents have been subjected to thematic content analysis using the software Maxqda®. This has provided the means for analysing the formal importance and political recognition given by the European Institutions to the cross-sectoral area of youth policy, and has helped develop an analysis of the national operationalisation of cross-sectoral youth policy.

The formal importance

The importance of cross-sectoral youth policy has been analysed in two contexts. First, an analysis of United Nations (UN) documentation confirmed that, since the late 1990s, the UN has: (i) recognised the importance of “national youth policies and programmes of an inter-sectoral nature”; (ii) tried to identify the development of these policies on a national basis; and (iii) requested more research, monitoring and identification of good practices in cross-sectoral youth policy at national levels. However, these aims have lost support over the last few years, and the definition and approach to cross-sectoral youth policy has not reached a consensus. In some cases cross-sectoral youth policy refers to communication between the governmental and the non-governmental sector, while in other cases it stresses the participation of other – more horizontally situated – partners. This is undoubtedly a counterproductive ambiguity in the design and promotion of cross-sectoral youth policy.

Second, key documents from European actors in the youth field have undergone analysis. The idea that youth policy is much more than youth policy per se, and that it must collaborate with, communicate, encompass, integrate or lead a set of coherent plans, action, programmes and policies that are, in principle, the formal or legal responsibility of other umbrella sectors is absolutely consensual among the documents and those involved in the

field. Therefore, both the importance and the nature of cross-sectoral youth policy are unanimous and well known. However, it is the content and functioning that is unclear; there is a lack of conceptual precision and this is damaging the efficient development of cross-sectoral youth policy.

This paper aims to offer an understanding of the different elements of cross-sectoral youth policy. This includes: cross-sectoral youth policy as a consensual and well-established principle (where youth policy is both transversal and integrated); cross-sectoral youth policy as a process (that includes versions such as co-ordination and collaboration/co-operation); and finally youth policy as a way to deal with cross-cutting issues. This last version provides more flexibility for different realities.

The practical operationalisation

To fully grasp how this formal importance has been operationalised in the design, review, evaluation and monitoring of youth policy it has been necessary to analyse other sources of data, such as youth policy reviews developed by international teams on behalf of the Council of Europe and the data reports written by the national correspondents for the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (although others were also considered).

Looking at the youth policy reviews as a whole (and overlooking for now the fact that they refer to different countries, were written by different teams and were developed in different years and historical contexts), it is possible to reach the conclusion that the topics are usually referred to as dimensions that are either “domains” or “issues”. This is also visible in the first volume of “Supporting young people in Europe: principles, policy and practice” (Williamson, 2002). While “domains” are more easily thought of as having administrative equivalents (ministries or other), “issues”, independently of its terminology, are always more detailed and complex. There are three types of issue considered: (i) single topics; (ii) conjoint topics; and (iii) cross-cutting or transversal topics. “Single” topics represent a minority and so do “cross-cutting” or “transversal” ones. There is no consensus around what is a “cross-cutting” topic, as all expressions have only been used on one occasion (or, more precisely, in one review report, at least in those exact terms). However, from a diachronic point of view it is easy to notice that, with a few exceptions, the use of the phrase “cross-cutting issues” (for topics, themes or fields) has been increasing in recent years. “Conjoint

issues”, on the other hand, are cross-cutting topics not by name but by nature. They are cross-cutting issues because they are complex and represent conjoint, combined or overlapped processes of social inclusion or exclusion in the period of the transition to adulthood. But even so, there are some issues that are at the centre of these interactions, and others that are more on the periphery or, if one prefers, function more as “satellite issues”. The centre and periphery identified in the terms used to refer to conjoint youth topics or subjects in the youth policy reviews (Council of Europe) also reflect the centre and periphery of the sociology of youth, youth studies and the sociology of the transitions to adulthood. A multilevel classification of cross-cutting issues is proposed to organise the plurality of meanings and terms used.

There are some problems in the development of cross-sectoral youth policy. In this paper the following have been identified. First, cross-sectoral youth policy does not go beyond rhetorical exercises, mere intentions or the use of politically correct vocabulary (including lack of legal framework; intentions with no action; principles with no specific programmes, unclear relationships between departments, ministries or agencies). Second, there is a lack of efficiency in existing structures (including no communication, no collaboration or no co-ordination between departments, ministries or agencies) or an overlapping of responsibilities and disregard for what is being done outside or beyond a ministry of youth or equivalent. And, third, there are problems associated with the structures themselves (such as the fact that a ministry or its equivalents are usually at the bottom of or outside the hierarchical organisation of the government) (Table 4).

Cross-sectoral research is particularly intertwined with knowledge-based youth policy. Both the selection of the priority issues (including the more complex or cross-cutting early-stage issues) and the design, implementation or activation of specific programmes and policies are extremely dependent on data. However, the direct and concrete relations between the design and implementation of cross-sectoral youth policy and knowledge-based youth policy are not as frequent as one might expect or desire, nor as standardised as might be anticipated.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, the idea of cross-sectoral youth policy has become important and familiar for those in the field of youth. Arguments in favour of its development are evident in policy discourse at both the European and national level, and examples of practices (concrete, expected or recommended) can be found in different sets of reports, data and documents. Much less controversial than other principles that underlie youth policy design – such as evidence-based youth policy or knowledge-based youth policy – there is a broad consensus among the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum on the idea that any policy, strategy or plan that involves young people must not be constrained or circumscribed to administrative or official divisions and frontiers with other ministries, spheres of life or sectors. Therefore, the idea that the lives of (young) people are cross-sectoral – that young people are multidimensional social agents who, in a relatively short period of time, interact with or make their way into different social institutions or dimensions such as family, schools, labour market, housing, health, culture and others – is itself cross-cutting. It reaches official European discourse, it forms part of the recommendations made by experts on national policy and also, not least of all, it reaches academic research and methodological development in the collection and analysis of multidimensional data, both quantitative and qualitative.¹

The principles present both in research and in policy design can be summarised in the following three points.

(1) “Things” happen at the same time, thus youth policies must take the different combinations of overlapping and accumulation of social conditions into account.

This can be translated into two fundamental principles of the life course (Bruckner and Mayer, 2005) that have direct effects on the lives of young people and their cross-sectoral features.

- (a) The pluralisation of the life course: this means that identities are plural and that the same person can invest in different spheres of life at the same time in his/her life. The period of transition to adulthood is more pluralist than in the past and more

1. There is still a great deal of difficulty in translating some of the results into a format that can be useful to stakeholders and policy makers, without over-simplifying them. The identification of the aspects that could facilitate this bridge falls out of this paper's goals.

than in any other life phase. In real life this is particularly evident in the overlapping of the transitions; that is in the “synchronous number of states or forms of life in a given population or even a given person” (Bruckner and Mayer, 2005: 6). For example, a young person that studies and works, or that works and has children, or that studies, works and has children, etc.. Youth policies in this sense would have to take into account the reconciliation of the various spheres of life.

Luís is the first in his generation (of cousins) who did not go on to higher education and therefore does not have a degree. His choice of a professional course was received with some disappointment by his parents and family. Even greater was the concern at his decision to become a father at 24. As Luís said, “with everything against him” – the very small rented house, the lack of money for day care, etc. – he still wanted to be a father at that point in his life.

In order to attain that, he has had to make sacrifices. For the first two years of his daughter’s life, he worked day and night shifts in a part-time job, alternating with those of his partner, just to guarantee that one of them was with their child at all times. There was simply no money for private day-care institutions. Like Luís, many young people try to reconcile important family, school and economic goals in a very short period of their lives. In the statistics, however, Luís is just a part-time worker.

(b) The differentiation of the life course: this means that over time people attain many more different types of status than in the past (for example, they can be single, cohabiting, married, separated, divorced or remarried over their life span, or even only over the period of transition to adulthood). This principle means that in practice, the accumulation of disadvantages (over time or at the same time) would have to be taken into account in youth policy designs. For example, young people from lower social backgrounds that have health problems or young people that are not working, studying or in training would have to have access to different policies simultaneously and these policies should not be mutually exclusive. This would, in terms of policy, require more information and longitudinal counselling on the establishment of individual priorities, and require that no limit be established for the number of times and institutions from which young people can draw support.

(2) “Things” happen for conjoint reasons, thus youth policies must be multidimensional and dynamic. An important aspect of the transition to adulthood is the interdependency in the timing and nature of the transitional events (demographic events and others). In the recent past, the order of events in the transition to adulthood was mainly one, with a clear and normative order: people would finish school and enter the labour market, and only then think about having a family or even starting to

marry or cohabit. In contemporary contexts, however, the complexity of the order or sequence of the various transitions is even greater. This is because not only do the order of events become more irregular (for example, it is becoming more common to start a family without being married or cohabiting, to enter the labour market without leaving school or to return to school after entering the labour market) but also the relation between the events becomes more interdependent. This means that having trouble in accomplishing one transition would have serious effects for accomplishing the others. Ultimately this also means that if life is a process and problems are connected, policies and solutions made available for young people also have to be integrated.²

From a working-class background, Ana is suffering from hyper-reflexivity regarding her own life and from the incapacity to choose between lose-lose situations. Having lived alone for a few years, though recently joined by her boyfriend, Ana wants to leave her job (in her words, a very stressful one, marked by unpleasant hierarchical relations). Besides this professional goal, she wants to get married and pregnant. Knowing that one decision will exclude the other, she feels incapable of making a choice and is becoming more and more anxious, to the point that the only decision she seems able to make is to return to psychotherapy. A second nervous breakdown, again hidden from her family and friends, is the most predictable situation in the short-term.

(3) “Things” happen really fast; therefore there is a pressing need for cross-sectoral youth policy. This is because the period of transition to adulthood is a “demographically dense” period of life (Rindfuss, 1991). It is a relatively short period of life where many voluntary and involuntary life-changing events happen. At the very least, these life-changing events are included in the “three boxes of life” of classic literature on the life course: school, work and family. But there are other equally relevant “boxes”/dimensions or sectors: health, leisure, participation, housing, etc. This means that in this very short period of time many individual experiences take place – such as leaving school, entering, experimenting in and/or leaving the labour market, getting married or starting to live together, having children – making the decisions and the design of life plans even more complex and difficult. The timing and scope of the policies available are therefore crucial, now.

But the previously mentioned consensus and importance in principle, visible in policy documents, may not be matched in practice, meaning in policy making and implementation.

2. In research, for instance, the field of transitions to adulthood is still segregated into school, work and family formation (Buchman and Kriesi, 2011).

The importance of a cross-sectoral youth policy is very much taken for granted. Although the very nature of youth policy implies a cross-sectoral approach and this idea is consensually spread in the youth field, operationalisation is still difficult to standardise and to put into practice because of: (i) the extreme variation, heterogeneity and mutability of the organisational/political structure involved at a national level; (ii) the power relations that tend to characterise the relationship between the sectors (youth usually being in a more subordinated position); and (iii) the variable, complicated channels and layers of vertical and horizontal communication involved in these processes. But if some of these causes are challenging to tackle because they are at the core of political and ideological systems and will,³ others are almost exclusively related to a lack of knowledge, evidence and data. This lack of knowledge is manifested in the undifferentiated use of expressions such as “cross-sectoral”, “inter-ministerial co-operation”, “transversal approach”, “integrated co-ordination”, “holistic perspective”, etc., and in an especially unclear classification of the matches and mismatches between what kind of cross-sectoral policy works in what kind of structure and for what purpose.

Having said that, the link between an importance given in principle, in theory or on paper and the one given in practice, in operationalisation and taking into account the specific national environment, constraints and possibilities, is not and must not be considered self-evident; quite the contrary. The importance given in theory is not sufficient for a successful “self-fulfilling prophecy”. Systematic research on this matter is not common and literature on the subject is scattered throughout documents that have different natures and purposes (a distinction that is taken into account in this paper). The goal of this paper is to contribute to overcoming the lack of knowledge of the gaps and overlaps in cross-sectoral youth policy all over Europe, by providing an overview of existing information on cross-sectoral policy co-operation, based on the material produced together with the European Union, on the work of the Council of Europe and on the experiences of cross-sectoral co-operation of a number of specific countries.

3. As stated by Williamson (2002: 40), “Youth policy, and the legislation which governs it, invariably flows from an ideological vision which informs the strategic orientation of youth policy (...). Some international reports expressed concern that it was a lack of such an ideological vision – an ‘ideological vacuum’ – which jeopardised the likelihood of establishing effective structures and securing cross-departmental and devolved commitment to the delivery of youth policy” .

Methodology and structure of the paper

To achieve this purpose, some of the collected documents have been subjected to thematic content analysis using the software Maxqda® (Table 1). This has provided the means for analysing the formal importance and political recognition given by the European Institutions to the cross-sectoral area of youth policy, and has helped develop an analysis of the national operationalisation of cross-sectoral youth policy.

This will show how much and how often the subject has been mentioned in key documents produced by the European Commission and the Council of Europe over the two last decades, and will provide an idea of the political importance the topic has assumed at the international and, particularly, European level. The scope of the documents used for this purpose will be mainly the United Nations (mainly policy documents) and, especially, the European institutions, both European Union and Council of Europe (with a greater variety of authorship and types of documents – aiming to cover the main agents of political expression in the youth field such as the European Youth Forum, the Council of Europe and the European Commission – but also other types of documents) (table 1).

Table 1: Scope and type of documents collected

| Goal of this paper | Scope | Author | Policy | Policy Review | Reports | Data Report | Others | Total |
|---|---------------|-------------------|--------|---------------|---------|-------------|--------|-------|
| Analysis of the formal importance | International | United Nations | 20 | | | | | 20 |
| | | Europ. Comm. | 7 | | 1 | | | 8 |
| | | Council of Europe | 3 | | | | 1 | 4 |
| | | Individual | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| | | Other | | | 2 | | | 2 |
| | European | Youth Forum | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| | | YouthPolicy.org | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| Analysis of national operationalisation | | Council | | 21 | | | | 21 |
| | | Individual | | | 2 | | | 1 |
| | Country-level | Correspondents | | | | 17 | | 17 |
| | European | Other | | | 2 | | 2 | 4 |

The goal of the second part of this report is to analyse the operationalisation of cross-sectoral youth policy at the national level. Not all European countries are included; their inclusion depends on the availability of data and reports in English. The two main sets of documents to be used in this analysis are the youth policy reviews published by the Council of Europe, particularly the content related to cross-cutting issues and that presented in the Council's recommendations, and the national reports produced by the national correspondents from the

partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth (table 1). Geographical comparisons will be made very carefully because each national youth policy review refers to a different year, so they are not entirely comparable. In addition, diachronic analysis is also not possible in the strictest sense, because each country was not analysed twice. So again, the years are not wholly comparable.

I – The formal importance of cross-sectoral youth policy

1.1. International context: the United Nations discourse under analysis

It would be interesting to see more evaluation of this improvement. What are the outcomes of those policies? What progress has been made? What are the obstacles encountered? What new approaches are needed to better address the concerns of youth in the context of an integrated and cross-sectoral national youth policy? It would be a service to countries and the international community to devote the necessary resources towards a comprehensive analysis of this experience.

(United Nations, 1999)

From an early stage, the United Nations has: (i) recognised the importance of “national youth policies and programmes of an inter-sectoral nature”; (ii) tried to identify their development on a national basis;⁴ and (iii) requested more research, monitoring and identification of good practices in cross-sectoral youth policy at national level (made especially evident in the quotation above). The United Nations has been promoting national youth “policies that are cross-sectoral and integrated” since the International Youth Year 1985 (UN, 1999: 3) and since at least 1999 it has been recognised as one of the “priority youth issues for the 21st century”. This alone justifies an analysis of the United Nations documents on youth for a complete international background scenario on this topic.

For this purpose, two types of UN documents were analysed, resolutions on youth policy programmes and implementation reports (plus one evaluation). Generally, the cross-sectoral youth policy issues and concerns are more frequent in the implementation reports than in the programmes. Only three out of the eight UN resolutions on youth issues refer to cross-sectoral youth policy and even so with very little preponderance and centrality. Only two of the eight implementation reports do not include references to the importance of cross-sectoral co-operation and policy. This indicates a practical, operationalised and at times critical and analytical approach to the issue by this organisation (Timeline 1).

However, there is some inconsistency in how cross-sectoral youth policy has been presented, even in the implementation reports, where it is more frequent. If we look at the last two decades, we can see that the centrality and preponderance of the cross-sectoral topic, here measured by the number of times cross-sectoral youth policy is referred to (even if not

4. This information on the European countries is presented in the second part of this paper.

specifically in this term), has decreased significantly over the years. This is due to, as will be clearer further on, the content and direction of the reports themselves, and to the concrete understanding of what is cross-sectoral youth policy. However, this decrease is compensated by the increase in the preponderance this topic has gained, approximately in the same period, in the European political discourse.

Timeline 1: Number of references to cross-sectoral youth policy in the United Nations policy documents on youth

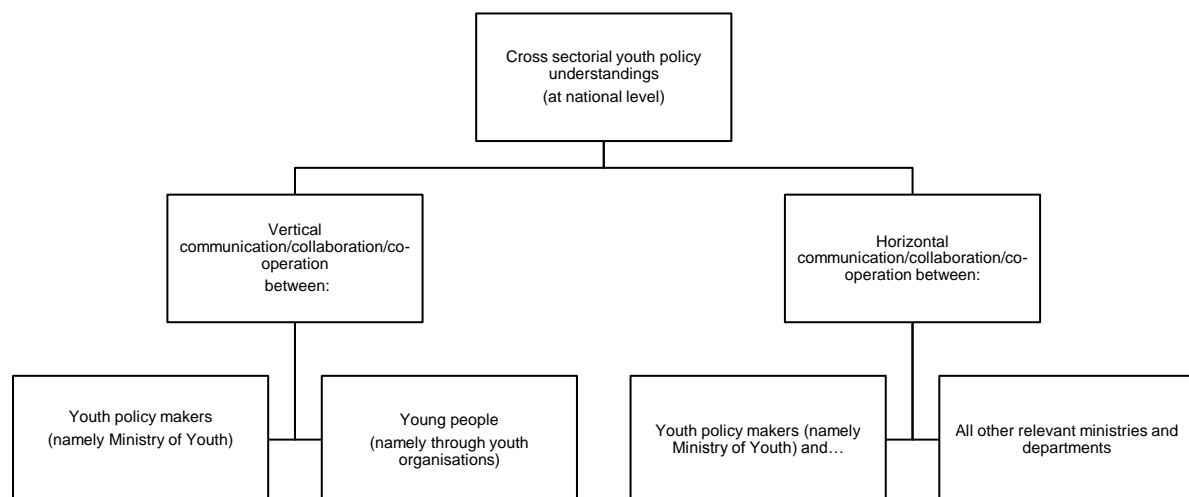
| | 1979 | 1997 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Resolutions | 0 | | | 0 | | 3 | 1 | 0 | | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Implementations | | 12 | 10 | | 6 | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Evaluations | | | | | | | | 3 | | | | |

The content of the references to cross-sectoral youth policy in the documents on youth produced by the United Nations is quite diverse.

The first distinction that becomes clear is that the understandings of cross-sectoral youth policy used in the resolutions and in the implementation reports are quite different. In the resolution documents the idea of cross-sectoral youth policy is not constant and is somewhat influenced by the two types of understanding of cross-sectoral youth policy, one being the communication and collaboration between the youth organisation sector (the voice of young people) and the policy-making sector, and the other referring more to inter-ministerial or interdepartmental collaboration (Timeline 2). In this sense, in some resolution documents it is argued that “cross-sectoral youth policies should take into consideration the empowerment and full and effective participation of young people, and their role as a resource and as independent decision-makers in all sectors of society” (UN, 2002: 2). That implies that there should be communication between the governmental and the non-governmental sector while other documents stress the participation of other – more horizontally situated – partners such as “Member States, United Nations bodies, specialized agencies, regional commissions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations concerned, in particular youth organisations, to make every possible effort to implement the World Programme of Action, aiming at cross-sectoral youth policies, by integrating a youth perspective into all planning and decision-making processes relevant to youth” (UN, 2004: 2). This dichotomy is at the very core of the conceptual confusion around what exactly is – and subsequently should be – cross-sectoral youth policy (Figure 1).

The second understanding mentioned also has different systems of operationalisation that are often presented as mutually equivalent (further developed in the second part of this paper). This is a counterproductive ambiguity in the design and promotion of cross-sectoral youth policy.

Figure 1: The two main understandings of cross-sectoral youth policy at national level



As to the implementation reports, the main aspect to refer to is that, especially in the 1997 and 1999 implementation reports, there is a great effort to advocate and to promote the idea the design of a cross-sectoral youth policy. However, it departs from a very ambitious idea of cross-sectoral youth policy that includes the two often distinct views mentioned above (Figure 1) – cross sectoral and vertical and horizontal collaboration – and therefore a significant number of agents. Basically it urges the promotion of the idea that youth policy should be built on a “multi-level and cross-sectoral basis” (UN, 1997: 6), and therefore should include “participation of youth-related departments and ministries, national non-governmental youth organizations and the private sector”.

This ambitious and inclusive idea tries to theoretically incorporate the three possible understandings of what “sector” means: (i) public, private and third sector; (ii) governmental or non-governmental; and (iii) administrative divisions, for instance ministries. However, no system for the operationalisation of this complex idea is suggested. The following implementation reports approached this issue in a more contained manner, mainly stating the importance “of addressing the concerns of young people from a multidisciplinary

perspective that allows for integrated and cross-sectoral policy interventions” (UN, 2001: 5) and the insufficiency of sectoral approaches to the multidimensional challenges that young people face and “to improve the well-being of young people in a holistic manner” (UN, 2010: 13).

Timeline 2: Examples of references to cross-sectoral youth policy in the United Nations policy documents on youth

| | 1979 | 1997 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Resolutions | 0 | | | 0 | | a. | b. | 0 | | 0 | c. | 0 |
| Implementations | | d. | e. | | f. | | | g | h. | i. | j. | k. |
| Evaluations | | | | | | | | l. | | | | |

-
- a. “Recognizing that global cross-sectoral youth policies should take into consideration the empowerment and full and effective participation of young people, and their role as a resource and as independent decision-makers in all sectors of society” (page 2); “...bearing in mind the need for Member States to develop more holistic and cross-sectoral youth policies and the need to enhance, inter alia, the channels of communication between the United Nations system and youth and youth organizations” (UN, 2002: 4).
 - b. “Calls upon all Member States, United Nations bodies, specialized agencies, regional commissions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned, in particular youth organizations, to make every possible effort to implement the World Programme of Action, aiming at cross-sectoral youth policies, by integrating a youth perspective into all planning and decision-making processes relevant to youth; (UN, 2004, 2)
 - c. “Stressing the important role of effective sectoral and cross-sectoral national youth policies, reflecting youth in all its diversity, as well as of international cooperation in promoting the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals” (UN, 2010:1).
 - d. “It stated that such activities should be cross-sectoral in nature and multidisciplinary in approach and should include the participation of youth-related departments and ministries, national non-governmental youth organizations and the private sector” (Page 3); “It also called for national coordinating mechanisms to be appropriately strengthened for integrated national youth policies and programmes. Where such mechanisms do not exist, Governments are urged to promote their establishment on a multi-level and cross-sectoral basis” (UN, 1997: 6);
 - e. “Since the International Youth Year (1985), the United Nations has been promoting national youth policies that are cross-sectoral and integrated.”; “As illustrated in the table below, out of a total of 185 Member States, 153 have formulated a national youth policy that is cross-sectoral in nature. Compared with a similar survey conducted in 1996, it shows that nine additional countries have taken this step; thus 83 per cent of Member States now have a national youth policy” ; “Despite the progress indicated in the table in paragraph 17, the present report has indicated that many of the Member States that have adopted national youth policies have not done so on a cross-sectoral, interministerial or interdepartmental basis” (UN, 1999: 12).
 - f. “It is an important way of addressing the concerns of young people from a multidisciplinary perspective that allows for integrated and cross-sectoral policy interventions” (UN, 2001: 5).
 - j. Since the challenges facing young people are multifaceted, sectoral approaches are insufficient to improve the well-being of young people in a holistic manner. By combining efforts, United Nations entities are able to draw on their specific expertise, mandates and resources to ensure that youth issues are addressed in a comprehensive manner (UN, 2010b: 13).
 - k. “Promote cross-sectoral cooperation to ensure a holistic approach to youth development and participation (...) as well as the mainstreaming of youth issues into national plans, policies and budgets (...)” (UN, 2010:19).
 - l. “Many young people also renew their call for the creation and implementation of cross-sectoral national youth policies that are developed in collaboration with young people and take into consideration local realities and the needs of specific target groups within the youth cohort” (page 4); “[Young organizations] acknowledge the importance of the five new issues of concern noted by the General Assembly in 2003 and believe that they are cross-cutting issues that should be seen in context of the existing 10 priorities.” (UN, 2005c: 4).
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1.2. Role of cross-sectoral youth policy in the European discourse

“Youth Policy is a cross-sector, integrated policy aimed at young people, with young people and starting from the needs of young people. Its aim is to improve and develop the living conditions and participation of young people, encompassing the whole range of social, cultural and political issues affecting them and other groups in the society.”

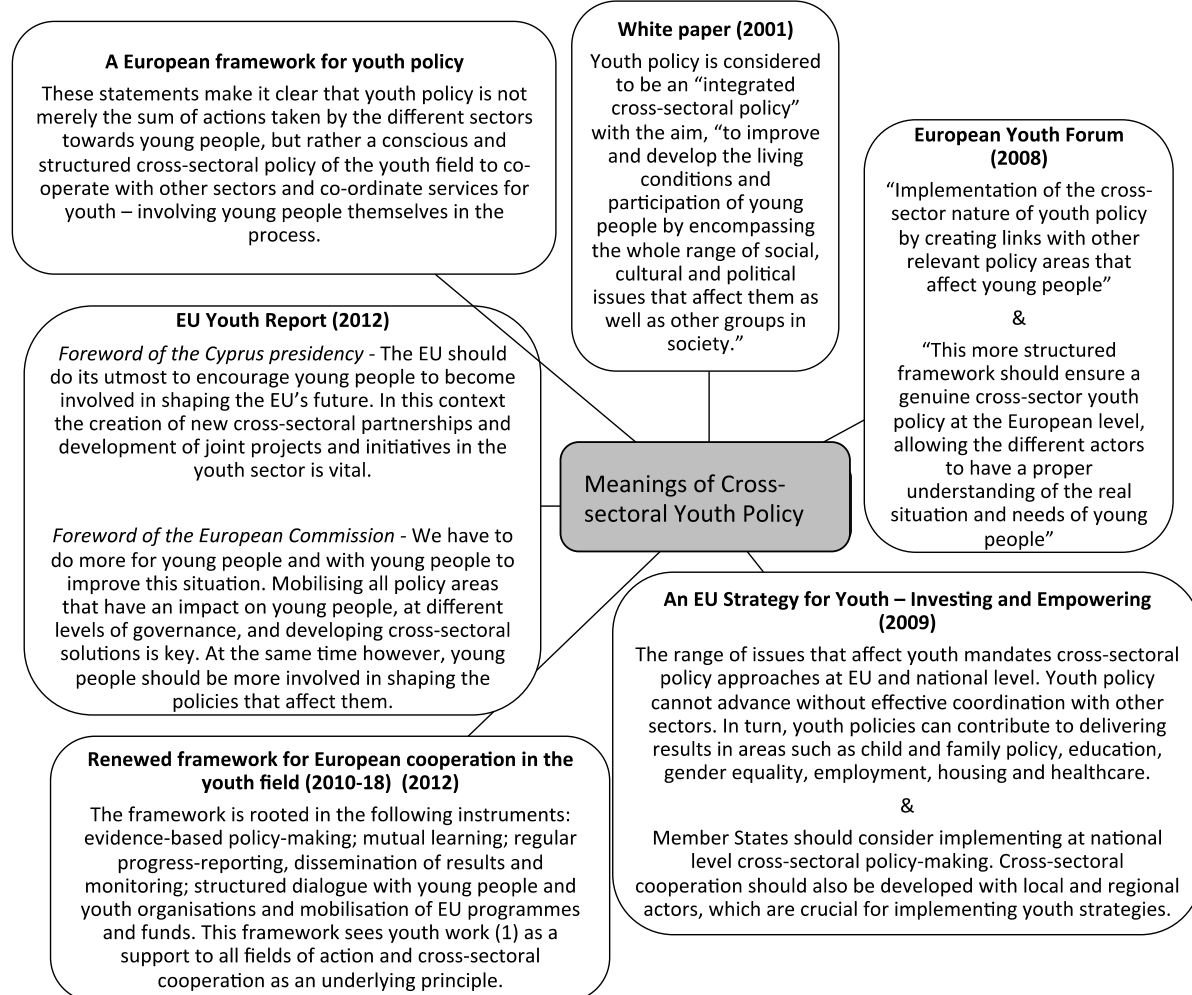
(European Youth Forum, 1998)

The analysis of the presence, importance and content of cross-sectoral youth policy in the European level of discourse takes into account the major documents produced in the last two decades by the major actors in the field: the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum. Other documents considered relevant will also be part of the corpus of documents analysed, such as the state of youth policy report in 2014 published by the Youth Policy Press, the Youth Policy Manual by Finn Denstad and produced by the European Union–Council of Europe youth partnership, or the comparative report on cross-sectoral youth policy by JUGEND für Europa, for instance. At least two types of analysis can be made based on these documents: a comparative analysis of the different meanings and understandings of cross-sectoral youth policy by different actors in the field; and a more detailed analysis of what variables are combined to define these meanings and understandings. Together they will provide an overview of how this concept/characteristic of youth policy is being promoted, used and defined in key documents and by key actors, as well as how it constitutes the raw material, together with other sources of information, for building a tentative framework of classification of both evolution and specificities of different kinds of cross-sectoral youth policy. Identifying the different paradigms that lie behind this heterogeneity is the first step in determining what might work and on what occasions.

In a comparative analysis of the meanings and importance attributed to cross-sectoral youth policy, we can observe that although there is consensus in the youth field that the design of youth policy must be broad, multidimensional, holistic, integrated and cross-sectoral, the practical meanings associated to that vary considerably (Figure 2). To sum up, it becomes clear that youth policy is much more than youth policy per se, and that it must collaborate with, communicate, encompass, integrate or lead a set of coherent plans, action, programmes and policies that are, in principle, the formal or legal responsibility of other umbrella sectors.

But again, it also becomes clear that collaboration, communication and integration, etc. are treated as mutually equivalent, thus taking the very concept for granted and approaching it only as an intention, ambition or target, rather than as a method, plan or process (Figure 2).⁵

Figure 2: Meanings of cross-sectoral youth policy in key documents (a summary)



In all documents and statements about cross-sectoral youth policy its importance is underlined, and there are some documents that encompass all that is being said about it, such as the case in the forewords to certain publications. The 2012 EU Youth Report is one case. Characteristics such as “vital” or “key” are used to describe the “creation of new cross-sectoral partnerships and development of joint projects and initiatives in the youth sector” (by the Cyprus presidency) and the development of “cross-sectoral solutions” (by the European Commission). Other documents, for instance, use the cross-sectoral issue merely as an inherent characteristic of youth policy, a “principle”, or something that is part of the

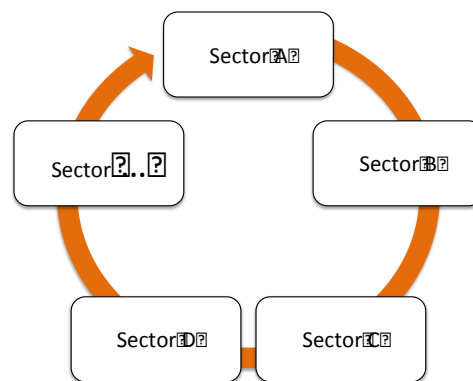
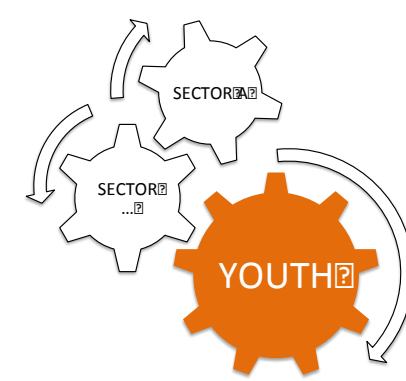
5. With the exception of the European Framework for Youth Policy.

very nature of youth policy. This is the case, for instance, in the definition of youth policy made in the White Paper 2001, where it is stated that “youth policy is considered to be an ‘integrated cross-sectoral policy’ with the aim being ‘to improve and develop the living conditions and participation of young people by encompassing the whole range of social, cultural and political issues that affect them as well as other groups in society’” (White Paper 2001:73). Or in the case of the renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field that a decade later states that the “framework sees youth work as a support to all fields of action and cross-sectoral co-operation as an underlying principle” (2012:6).

But if there is a general consensus on the importance and the points of view on cross-sectoral youth policy, and their characteristics are not mutually exclusive, this is not the case when it comes to more detailed descriptions or directions, referring mainly to: (i) the content of cross-sectoral youth policy; (ii) the role of youth policy with other sectors (visible for instance, in the statement “a structured cross-sectoral policy of the youth field to co-operate with other sectors and co-ordinate services for youth – involving young people themselves in the process” (A European framework for youth policy) or in the statement “Implementation of the cross-sector nature of youth policy by creating links with other relevant policy areas that affect young people” (European Youth Forum); or (iii) the levels of governance involved (visible in statements such as “Cross-sectoral co-operation should also be developed with local and regional actors” (European Youth Forum) or in “Mobilising all policy areas that have an impact on young people, at different levels of governance, and developing cross-sectoral solutions is key” by the European Commission in the EU Youth Report 2012).

Taking into account the heterogeneity of the meanings and understandings of cross-sectoral youth policy in key documents by key actors in the field of youth, combined with the content of other documents, the following table is an attempt to summarise, organise and separate the different paradigms and definitions.

Table 2: Definitions, issues, nature and missions of different cross-sectoral youth policies

| Nature and mission | The field of cross-sectoral youth policy | Narrow definitions and some issues | Scheme - Example |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| “As principle” | Youth Policy | | |
| | Transversal | <p>Youth concerns all other sectors</p> <p>Therefore “The Ministers responsible for youth policy should also ensure that youth-related concerns are taken into account in these other policies” (White Paper 2001).</p> <p>This would imply a kind of “supervision” role by the ministries responsible for youth, which is inconsistent with the position they usually occupy within the formal hierarchy, and for that reason is also extremely ambitious.</p> <p>This principle would imply information on what sectors to select for specific policies, at what occasions, with what urgency, and when would this transversality take place. It is therefore too abstract.</p> |  <p>Youth sector as an element in other sectors.</p> |
| | Integrated | <p>Youth is part of the interdependency system</p> <p>Therefore both, youth policy and each other policy have to ensure their effective and coherent co-existence.</p> <p>This would imply a mutual and regular co-consultation to avoid overlapping or disconnected goals.</p> <p>These consultations would imply that every sector or office is prepared to collect and organise, on a regular basis, relevant information. Policy based in this principle is extremely dependent on national organisational structures.</p> |  <p>Youth sector as one of the pieces of the system.</p> |

Cross-sectoral

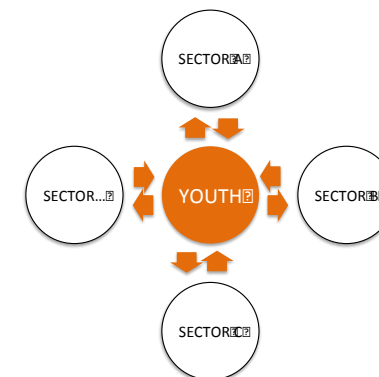
Collaboration/co-operation

Youth as one of the peer actors and an equal partner

In this version of cross-sectoral youth policy the relations are bilateral. The youth sector would share “information and competences, objectives and goals, and also results” with each one of the other relevant sectors (Behrooz Moramed-Afshari, 2014).

This “inter-sectoral co-operation” implies “recognised relationships formed to take short or long-term actions that are effective, efficient or sustainable” (Behrooz Moramed-Afshari, 2014).

This would mean that the collaboration would be fragmented in pairs, and much potential for conjoint solutions could be wasted. A possible solution to avoid this would be the creation of an “inter-ministerial working group as a part of the structure to develop a national youth” (Denstad, 2009).



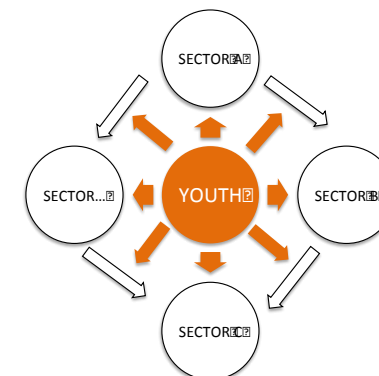
Each pair of issues is tackled at a time

As a Process with fixed roles

Co-ordination

Youth leading the way of youth policy

The main difference between this kind of cross-sectoral youth policy and the previous one has to do with the role that the youth ministry is able and willing to perform. With the right amount of means and resources, bilateral relations would be transformed into multilateral ones.



System that works Independently of the issue put in the center

Process with flexible roles**Cross-cutting issues**

*The rule is that there is no rule
One size does not fit all*

“Back to basics”

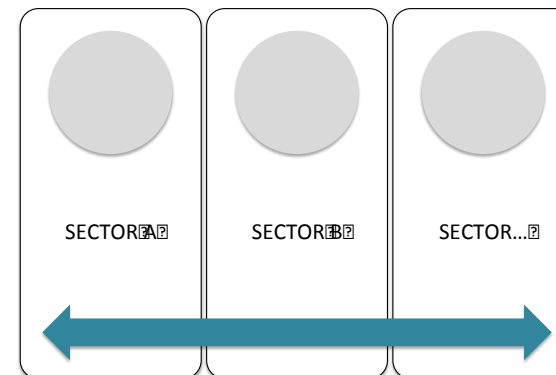
The sectoral property of each one of the issues that, for different reasons, concern youth is difficult to establish. For that reason, some might be disputed with other sectors, and some might be unfairly left to the youth sector, alone, to deal with. And this also varies across the countries.

This is one of the reasons why although all youth issues are “cross-cutting” by nature, each one of them implies different:

- presence or relevance in each country;
- urgency in each country or region;
- power relations with other governmental sectors;
- dependency on the work with and by NGOs;
- associations for prevention, intervention or sustainability needs;
- partnership possibilities and constraints.

This definition would imply a *destandardisation* of the youth policies at a national level, which might be looked at, from a European perspective, as a negative thing. However, doing that ensures that the following is taken into account:

- organisational structure of each country;
- priorities of each country;
- the complexity of each cross-cutting issue;
- the variety of combinations of barriers to social inclusion experimented individually;
- the respect for the main principle mentioned above, that youth policy is by nature (and must be in practice) cross-sectoral.



Multiplied for each cross-cutting issue.
Each cross-cutting issue could demand a different approach and strategy (co-ordination, collaboration, etc.).

Labels: Youth is represented by the colour orange, cross-cutting issues are presented in blue.

II – The European Practice

The nature of youth policy as a cross-cutting issue makes it more difficult to determine a specific angle that is wide enough to embrace the breadth of the matter but can, at the same time, penetrate its surface.

(Reiter et al. 2008: 37)

Analysing the formal and official discourse on cross-sectoral youth policy is not a sufficient indicator of the importance this idea or principle has had in practice. To more fully grasp how this importance has been operationalised in the design, review, evaluation, and monitoring of youth policy it is necessary to analyse other sources of data, leaving the definitions and intentions, for now, behind. The two main types of documents used for this purpose are the youth policy reviews developed by international teams on behalf of the Council of Europe, and the data reports authored by the national correspondents for the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (although others will also be considered). Each document refers to a single country, but while the data reports are all updated in the same year this is not true for the youth policy reviews, which are made in very different moments (Table 3). This makes both the national and the diachronic comparisons more difficult and for that reason they will be done with caution.

In these documents, there are three ways of looking for the way the importance of the principle of cross-sectoral youth policy is translated in the design, review, evaluation and monitoring of youth policy. One is structure/presence, the second is content/argument and the third is the identification of existing structures for the sole development of cross-sectoral youth policy. Section 2.1 refers to the presence of the topic of cross-sectoral youth policy in the documents, and, related to this, how frequently it is mentioned and how transversal to the review or report it is. This allows us to evaluate how important the concept of cross-sectoral youth policy is in documents produced by the Council of Europe, for instance. For this purpose the un-standardised indexes of the youth policy review reports will be analysed, and a “lexical search”⁶ and analysis will also be developed for all the documents. Section 2.2 looks at identifying and characterising the importance of the principle of cross-sectoral youth policy and how it is translated in the design, review, evaluation and monitoring of youth policy is by examining the content itself; in other words, the way cross-sectoral youth policy

⁶ “Lexical search” is a specific tool of content analysis software’s that allows us to count and locate certain words relevant to the research. These outputs facilitate the comparison between documents or sets of documents.

is operationalised, considered and classified and how recurrent (by country and year) are the gaps identified in this matter (namely and specially in the recommendations). This analysis is also developed through the youth policy reviews (published by the Council of Europe). Section 2.3 deals with the third type of analysis and consists of an examination of the potential match or mismatch between the “structures and actors that play a role in gaining a better knowledge of young people” and of the development of cross-sectoral youth policy (based on the analysis of youth reports by the national correspondents of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) of the Council of Europe and European Commission youth partnership).

Table 3: Documents consulted for the “practical” importance of cross-sectoral youth policy by country and year

| Countries | Youth Policy Review | Data Reports by National Correspondents | Other⁷ |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Albania | ✓ | | |
| Armenia | ✓ | | |
| Austria | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Belgium | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Cyprus | ✓ | | |
| Czech Republic | | | ✓ |
| Estonia | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Finland | ✓ | | ✓ |
| France | | ✓ | |
| Germany | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Hungary | ✓ | | |
| Ireland | | ✓ | |
| Italy | | ✓ | |
| Latvia | ✓ | | |
| Lithuania | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Luxembourg | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Malta | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Moldova | ✓ | | |
| Netherlands | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Norway | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Poland | | ✓ | |
| Romania | ✓ | | |
| Serbia | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Slovakia | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Slovenia | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Spain | ✓ | | |
| Sweden | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ukraine | ✓ | | |

2.1. Have youth issues always been cross-sectoral?

An analysis of Council of Europe youth policy reviews

In the previous analysis it was possible to verify that cross-sectoral youth policy appeared more systematically, at the level of the official international discourse, in the late 1990s. In the European context more specifically, it started to appear from 2000 onwards and has

7. Used more systematically in the tentative typology in the conclusions of this paper.

intensified since, particularly in the last decade. But how and how long did it take for this preponderance on the official discourse to be translated to the practical design, review, evaluation and monitoring of youth policy? When did “youth issues” become, in practice, “cross-sectoral”?

Looking at the youth policy reviews as a whole (and overlooking for now the fact they refer to different countries, that they are authored by different teams and that they were developed in different years) we can see that the topics are usually referred to as dimensions that can be divided between “domains” and “issues”. This is also visible in the first volume of “Supporting young people in Europe: principles, policy and practice” (Williamson, 2002) where the dimensions of youth policy are divided into key domains (such as “education, training and employment”, “youth work and non-formal education”, “health”, “housing”, “social protection”, “family policy and child welfare”, “leisure and culture”, “youth justice”, “national defence and military service”) and key issues (such as “participation and citizenship”, “combating social exclusion and promoting inclusion”, “information”, “multiculturalism and minorities”, “mobility and internationalism”, “safety and protection”, “equal opportunities”). The “issues” – the term that is the most used to circumscribe the youth-related topics – can then be divided or referred to as: “government identified issues”, “issues identified by the international team”, “key issues”, “transversal issues” and, finally, “cross-cutting issues”. They can also be referred to, although less frequently, as “themes”, “types”, “arenas”, “priority themes” or “fields” (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Word cloud of the terms used to refer to the youth topics or subjects in the Youth Policy Reviews (Council of Europe)



But more important than the variety of the terms used is the heterogeneity of how they are put together. The combinations are extremely variable, from some cases with no sub-organisation at all, to some cases where the categories where the different kinds of “issues”

are put into are quite numerous and detailed – these can or not include “cross-cutting issues”. Some examples of this heterogeneity can be found in table 4.

This variability in the combinations of terms used reveals not only the natural and expected differences between the issues analysed in each policy review, but also the lack of consensus on the terms made explicit by the authors of the reports, to a large extent as a consequence of the national specificities. This lack of conceptual and analytical de-standardisation and oscillation is counterproductive for:

- the exchange of good practices between countries (horizontal comparisons);
- the analysis of the recurrence of certain issues across time (diachronic comparisons);
- the development and implementation of cross-sectoral youth policy itself.

Table 4: Examples of the heterogeneity of the levels of categorisation of “youth issues” in the Youth Policy Reviews (Council of Europe)

| Level of categorisation of the “issues” | | Youth Policy Review Reports |
|---|-------------|---|
| Lowest level (only one category of issues) | level one | The Lithuania Review Report (2003) where the topics are presented solely within the umbrella of “general issues”, taking a more descriptive approach. |
| Low level (two categories of issues) | level two | The Albania Review Report (2010) where the issues are dichotomised in ones identified by the government and ones identified by the international team. This approach implicitly critically questions the specific priority issues identified by the government. |
| High level (two complex categories of issues) | level three | The Ukraine Review Report (2013) where the issues are organised in “priority themes” and “cross-cutting themes”. |
| Highest level (four complex categories of issues) | level four | The Moldova Review Report (2009) where the youth issues are categorised into “key”, “other”, “transversal” and “cross-cutting” issues. |

The most important aspect of this conceptual and analytical heterogeneity is that even in the cases where issues are not identified as “cross-cutting” their complexity and multi-dimensionality are also considered. While “domains” are more easily thought of as having administrative equivalents (ministries, for example), “issues”, independently of the terminology, are always more detailed and complex. So there are three types of issues considered: (i) single topics, (ii) conjoint topics, (iii) cross-cutting or transversal topics (Figures 4, 6 and 5, respectively). A first note is that even when youth issues are not referred

to as being cross-cutting or transversal, there are few review reports where these are not paired with others. For this reason, “single” youth topics represent the minority among the three types mentioned. With this reference, and with the exception of once-used single topics such as accommodation, justice, entrepreneurship and housing, among others,⁸ the few remaining single topics used are hegemonic in the field. This hegemony is justified by the importance of topics such as education or employment – the most frequent ones; or by the link to the heart and identity of “youth policy” and also “youth work”, as is the case of “non-formal learning” (Figure 4). This in some sense also reflects the hegemony in the social sciences studies of the transitions to adulthood – the transition from school to work and the sociological proposition of schooling or knowledge as a mechanism for ascendant social mobility and the mitigation of social inequalities.

Figure 4: Word cloud of the terms used to refer to single youth topics or subjects in the Youth Policy Reviews (Council of Europe)



As was already mentioned above, “single” topics represent a minority, but so do “cross-cutting” or “transversal” ones. As can be noticed in figure 5, there is no consensus around what a “cross-cutting” topic is, as all expressions have only been used on one occasion (or in one review report). This underlies the previous conclusion about the lack of terminological, conceptual and analytical consensus, which makes the accumulation of knowledge and the comparability of (good) practices extremely difficult. In an effort to cluster these once-used cross-cutting topics together, one could consider the following.

⁸ Which particular and one time emphasis might be explained by a national specificity, for instance, would be the cases of “housing” and Luxembourg, or “relationships with the others” in Spain, or “Drug problems” in the Netherlands.

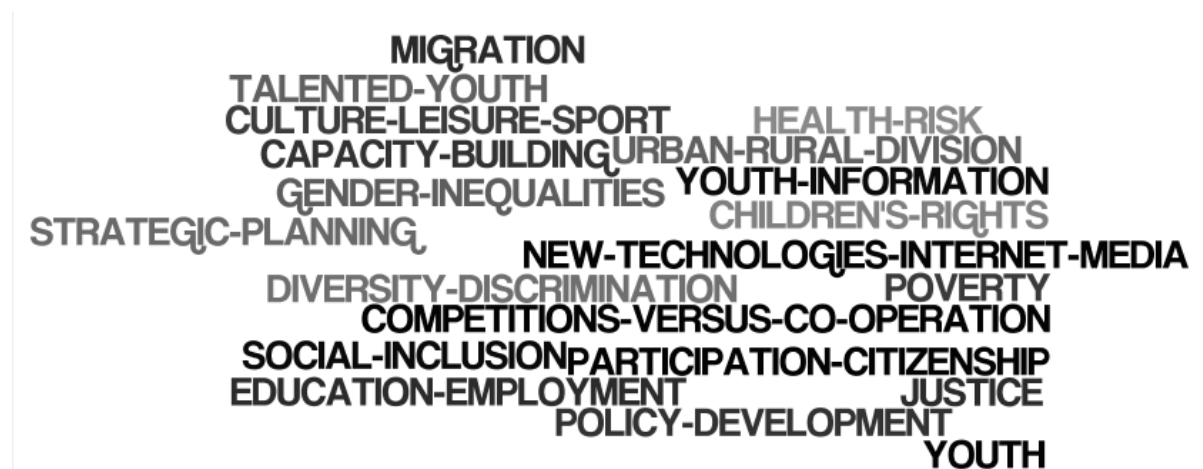
1. A cross-cutting cluster of (new manifestations of old) inequality topics would include “gender inequalities”, “social inclusion”, “urban-rural division”, “migration”, “diversity and discrimination”, “poverty” and “children’s rights”.

2. A cross-cutting cluster of classic youth policy topic combinations would include “culture, leisure and sports”, “participation and citizenship”, “justice”, “health and risk”, “education and employment”.

3. A cross-cutting cluster of youth policy development topics would include “strategic planning”, “competitions versus co-operation”, “capacity building” and “youth information”. These would refer to the changes that youth policy itself would have to make, from within, to gain capacity to perform the changes mentioned in points 1 and 2.

From a diachronic point of view it is easy to notice that, with a few exceptions, the sole use of the term “cross-cutting issues” (topics, themes or fields) has been increasing in the last few years.

Figure 5: Word cloud of the terms used to refer to cross-cutting or transversal youth topics or subjects in the Youth Policy Reviews (Council of Europe)

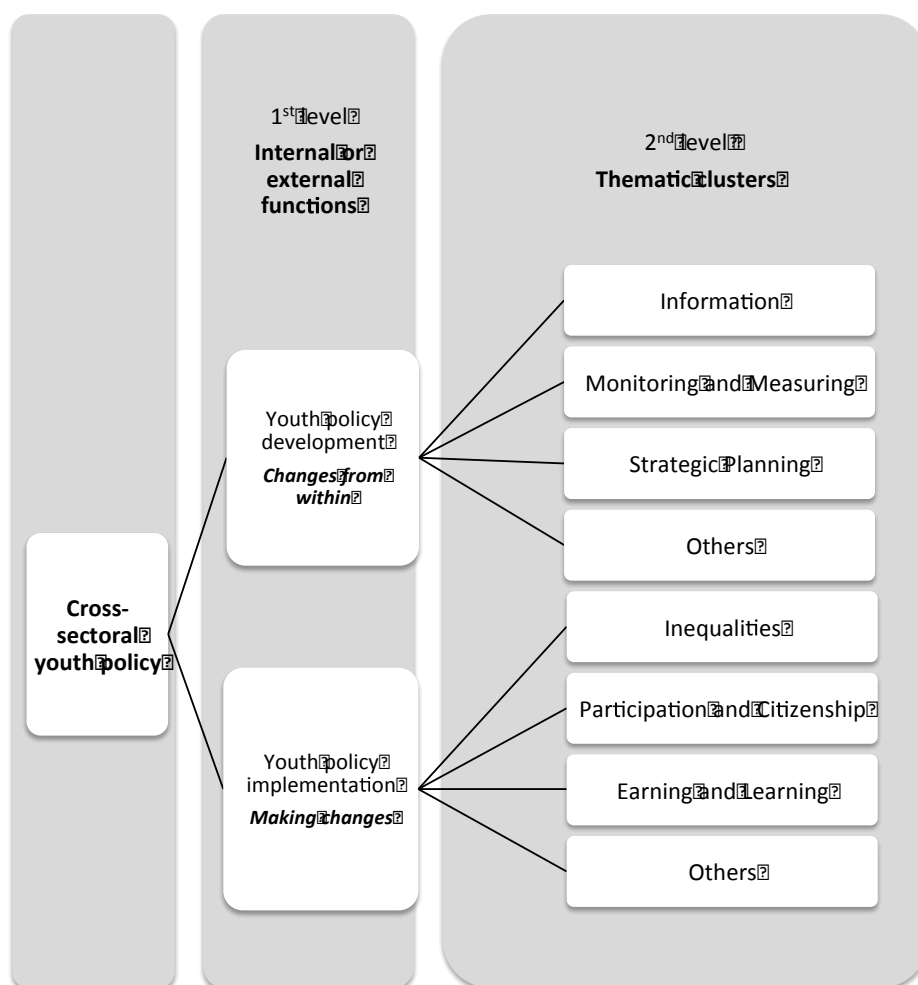


By now it becomes clear that the most common types of issues referred to and analysed in the youth policy review reports are the conjoint or combined issues. This is the group where the variety of topics is wider and the consensus around some of them is clearer (Figure 6). They are cross-cutting topics not by name but by nature. These are issues – often with separate administrative agencies, such as ministries – that interact meaningfully with others, in such a way that the measures, programmes and policies that involve them must be necessarily planned, designed and implemented by more than one sector, agency or organisation. They are cross-cutting issues because they are complex and represent conjoint,

accumulated information and knowledge. The second volume of “Supporting young people in Europe (Lessons from the ‘second seven’ Council of Europe International Reviews of National Youth Policy)” (Williamson, 2008) dedicates a section to the analysis and identification of old and emergent “cross-cutting issues”. On one hand, some “cross-cutting issues” are present across time and space (in European countries) in a stable fashion. This is the case for “youth participation and citizenship”, “social inclusion”, “youth information”, “multiculturalism and minorities”, “mobility and internationalism” and “equal opportunities” (note that some of these are visible and confirmed by figure 5, above). Some of these issues are characterised by the previously mentioned lack of conceptual precision and comparability. On the other hand, other cross-cutting issues are emerging and need to be tackled with more detail in forthcoming international reviews. This is the case for “radicalisation/reaction versus conformity”, “new technologies”, “local versus global pressures”, “centre–periphery”, “urban-rural polarisation”, “elites and outsiders”, “environmental issues” and “the role of diaspora”. The large majority of these issues concern old and new processes of production and reproduction of inequalities.

A meta-analysis of this analysis would confirm the idea towards a better conceptual definition, on one hand, and thorough clustering of issues, on the other. This categorisation would have to be a multilevel one, as is illustrated in figure 7.

Figure 7: Levels implied in a more clear definition and classification of cross-cutting issues



2.2. What cross-sectoral youth policy problems are identified?

An analysis of youth policy reviews (Council of Europe)

Cross-sectoral youth policy is an unavoidable subject in national youth policy reviews. In itself, it works as an indicator of the establishment and development of youth policy. But in the development of (cross-sectoral) youth policy what are the internal and external problems that can be identified? From paper to implementation (and thus, to young people), what is lost in the way? Where and at what stage? The national youth policy reviews of the Council of Europe provide some very direct clues. Following the principle that one size (of cross-sectoral youth policy) does not fit all, listed below are some examples of things that did not

work, or that were lacking from youth policy development, taking into account the specific national context. These are not necessarily comparable between the countries.⁹

These aspects can be organised into three large topics.

1. Cross-sectoral youth policy that does not go beyond rhetorical exercises, sole intentions or the use of (youth) politically correct vocabulary (including lack of legal framework; intentions with no action; principles with no specific programmes, unclear relationships between departments, ministries or agencies).
2. Lack of efficiency in existing structures (including no communication, no collaboration or no co-ordination between departments, ministries or agencies, or the overlapping of responsibilities and disregard for what is being done outside or beyond a ministry of youth or equivalent).
3. Problems associated with the structure itself (such as the fact that a youth ministry or equivalent is usually situated aside the hierarchical organisation of the government) (Table 5).

Table 5: Problems in the development of cross-sectoral youth policy

| | | Country Examples |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Intentions | No legal framework | This is the case in Hungary where “there is currently no explicit interministerial structure which would allow a mainstreaming process as suggested by the European Youth Pact (...). Co-ordination is limited to consultation with the ministry on all legislative initiatives of other ministries where young people may be affected.” (Walther et al. 2007) |
| | Good intentions, no action | Ministries often “churned out strategies, laws and action plans often quite oblivious of what was taking place elsewhere, whatever the claims were for interministerial communication, consultation and collaboration” (Williamson et al. 2010) |
| | Too abstract, no specific programmes | In Finland, this distinction between informal and concrete programmes was very important to detect: “Despite the encouragement to forge cross-sectoral partnerships and networks, we encountered limited evidence of this happening in practice. There is an important distinction to be made between formal and informal networks. Certainly, we found evidence of the latter, but there was little indication of more formal partnerships being forged at political or institutional levels.” (Fremerey et al. 1999). |
| | Unclear | The International Review Team in Latvia stated that “One of the questions that emerged during the review, which did not |

9. Some of the information may not have been updated, since some of the reports are from more than a decade ago.

| | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| | | become sufficiently clear, is related to the way in which EU affairs, including youth affairs, are co-ordinated across governmental bodies. The national report does not include any information on this and the discussions in Latvia were not able to fill this knowledge gap.” (Reiter et al. 2008) |
| 2. Functionality | Overlapping | One of the recommendations of the IRT for Latvia is to “advance the consolidation of its national youth policy structures in order to promote continuity and avoid redundancy, additional bureaucratic structures and competition.” (Reiter et al. 2008). A clearer division of responsibilities is also a recommendation for the youth policy of Moldova (Vanhee et al. 2009). |
| | No communication | As concerns some youth issues, there is sometimes “a complete absence of communication between the relevant ministries.” (Williamson et al. 2010). In Armenia, for instance, it was acknowledged that the youth policy remained “fragmented and uncoordinated” (Sipos et al. 2009) |
| | No co-ordination | The Youth Policy Review of Norway also stressed the following importance: “Across each level of administration and between the different levels of administration, emphasis is placed on effective and productive co-ordination and the appropriate allocation of roles and responsibilities.” (Wolf et al. 2004). |
| | No collaboration | Education and Health are usually given as good examples of good collaboration (note the case of Belgium and Moldova, respectively). (Pudar et al. 2010). |
| 3. Structure | No power | The very straightforward youth policy review of Finland explains this aspect very well with the statement that “Every Minister predictably says that co-operation and co-ordination is important but, when it comes to tough political decisions, there are inevitably other forces at play, such as trade unions' powerful influence on the labour market, or the lobbying power of pensioners, who represent some 20% of the population.” (Fremerey et al. 1997). |
| | No inter-ministerial committee | Inter-ministerial groups are believed to contribute to the “well-functioning of cross-governmental co-operation” (Williamson et al. 2010). However, in some countries, this is not yet developed. In Armenia, for instance, it is recommended that there should be a more “formalized cross-ministry structure (an interministerial committee/group on youth affairs)” (Sipos et al. 2009). |
| | No sustainability | There needs to be a structured set of arrangements for contact, communication and potential collaboration (Williamson et al. 2010). In Hungary, the lack of sustainability was a very serious issue: “in fact, every new government rebuilt youth policy structure, including the cross-sectoral co-ordination of youth policies at national government level, the changing role of Mobilitás (the main official service for youth affairs) and the involvement of youth organisations” (Walther et al. 2008). |

2.3. Are there conditions to develop cross-sectoral youth policy on national levels?

An analysis of the better knowledge of youth information sheets (EKCYP)

Cross-sectoral youth research does not and cannot emerge from a vacuum. In fact, cross-sectoral research is exceptionally intertwined with knowledge-based youth policy. Both the

selection of the priority issues, the more complex or cross-cutting ones (at early stages), and the design, implementation or activation of specific programmes and policies (at later stages) are extremely dependent on data. On the one hand data that “cross” different sectors of life – either with well-established or conflicting indicators such as “NEETs” (those not in education, employment or training) or as a result of the effort made by different ministries, departments or agencies in collecting and sharing information relevant to each other – are necessary for a informed and successful selection of “issues” to be tackled. On the other hand, data concerning the impact, success and/or partaking of each policy or programme are absolutely fundamental to the improvement, repetition or abolishment of each policy or programme. The country sheets produced by the national correspondents for the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy were analysed to assess the degree to which each country possesses research structures capable in principle and in practice of tackling this intertwinement and cross-cutting feature of youth issues.

The direct and concrete relations between cross-sectoral youth policy design and implementation and a knowledge-based youth policy are not as frequent as one might expect or desire (which is undoubtedly a negative thing), nor as standardised as might be anticipated (which can be actually be turned into a positive thing, for there is much more to be shared and learned between the countries). The country sheets show there are only a few examples of direct relations between the two mentioned principles and approaches to youth policy.

- In France the National Institute for Popular Education and Youth (INJEP) is the second major public structure to gather knowledge and develop research on youth, more specifically developing “the analysis of the cross-cutting aspects of youth policies and their articulations” (Fourcoux, 2012: 5). Probably because of this, this institute has been developing since 2013 a dashboard along the lines of the EU Dashboard to monitor inter-ministerial policy (Fourcoux, 2012: 13). This seems to be a sustainable partnership strategy. *One good example of one of the lines of the so-called ‘magical triangle’.*¹⁰

¹⁰ “The “Magic Triangle” provides a tool for understanding “who makes up the youth sector” (at the national and international level) and, therefore, also the parameters of participation in youth policy making. In an ideal world, international and national youth policy would be made collaboratively among governments that have the executive mandate to prepare and implement policy (policy), nongovernmental (youth) organizations that legitimately represent the needs and concerns of young people and professional and voluntary youth workers and educators (practice) and the academic community (research), which provides evidence of the situation of youth—in other words, the actors of the «Magic Triangle». (in official site of youthpolicy.org)

- By contrast, in Italy, cross-sectoral research and co-working strategies are established to respond to a short-term goal. In 2012, the department of youth established a inter-ministerial committee but only with the purpose of drawing the National Youth Report (Rota, 2013: 5). *A thin line of the triangle.*

- In Norway, there is one major research institute for social policy research, namely conducting national and regional youth surveys both cross-sectorally and longitudinally (Huang, 2013: 3). However, the links between its activities and the development of youth policy are unclear. *Two points, no line.*

- In Germany, there is a permanent national network for knowledge on youth linking researchers and others actors in the field, which advises the federal government “on general issues of child and youth services and on cross-sectoral issues of child and youth policy”. (Schauer and Klinzing, 2012: 8) *A dashed line of the magical triangle.*

Conclusions

This document advocates a (clear, transparent, classifiable, flexible but sustainable) cross-sectoral youth policy. But in doing so, it develops a critical approach and analysis to the documents and practices produced at international, European and national levels. For that purpose, a content analysis of several comparable documents (and least grey literature possible) was developed. Although many other documents could be further explored, especially the ones reflecting national realities, it is already possible to develop some conclusions. These are briefly presented below.

Craving for a formal definition beyond wishful thinking

From the resolutions and implementation documents of the UN to the main official documents produced in the European framework, it is clear that cross-sectoral youth policy means different things in different contexts, documents and organisations (not to mention researchers). One can identify three diverse approaches:

(1) In some cases it means vertical communication (between a youth ministry or its equivalent and young people, namely through NGOs), while in others it means horizontal communication (between a youth ministry or its equivalent and other ministries).

(2) For the second approach the use of the idea of “cross-sectoral” youth policy can vary: it can mean “cross-sectoral youth policy as principle”, that is an umbrella expression to argue that any policy that concerns young people has to be drawn having in mind every other sector. This principle is well established, but that is not enough. It has to “work”. And as a system, there are also many conceptual confusions and redundancies. Cross-sectoral youth policy can also mean collaboration or co-ordination – which imply very different responsibilities and power resources for the ministry responsible for youth or its equivalent – or it can “solely” (and this is the proposal of this paper) approach the many cross-cutting issues implied in youth policy directly. The use of an approach based on this last concept – which is approximately what is done in the Council of Europe youth policy reviews – would imply a de-standardisation of the youth policies at a national level, but it would ensure that the following is taken into account: the organisational structure of each country, the priorities of each country, the complexity of each cross-cutting issue and the variety of combinations of barriers to social inclusion experimented individually.

(3) Based on the third possible approach, the analysis of the youth policy reviews also confirmed, implicitly and explicitly, this lack of conceptual consensus around the term ‘cross-sectoral youth policy’ and the variable attribution of the term “cross-cutting issue” to specific youth issues.

All this lack of precision is counterproductive for the exchange of good practices between countries, the analysis of the recurrence of certain issues across time, and ultimately for also the development and implementation of cross-sectoral youth policy itself.

There should not be such thing as a “grounded” youth policy.

In the social sciences, “grounded theory” is known for being a theory that is the result of an inductive process from a corpus of data. It is the direct use of empirical data, without (many) theoretical preconceptions or knowledge. Youth policy cannot follow that path. However, in many cases – which was also underlined by the lack of information or communication about or between research and cross-sectoral youth policy designs and implementation – it seems that the tent is not yet put together and the performances have only started, anyhow. The analysis of key documents has demonstrated that the lack of conceptual and definition consensus about cross-sectoral youth policy and underlying working systems is, in practice, translated by a lack of organisation in the development of youth policy following this holistic approach. In fact, beyond the problems of mere definitions, there are also problems of comparability and sustainability and of knowledge and research. But most of all, problems of balance between two counterproductive temptations: bureaucratisation and de-standardisation. When taken to the extreme, the former will lead to inter-ministerial groups to deal with each specific problem, multiplying and outsourcing the youth problems to “satellite” groups that usually do not have the right amount of power, resources, knowledge of the “big youth picture” and autonomy to completely tackle the issue. On the other hand, the latter, when taken to the extreme, would annihilate any changes of comparability, evaluation and sustainability. Youth programmes can and should be un-standardised (in the sense of being flexible, adaptable to complex and accumulated disadvantages) but not youth policy. The system of cross-sectoral youth policy should be clear, transparent, but also classifiable and sustainable.

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