AUTONOMY THROUGH DEPENDENCY - Histories of co-operation, conflict and innovation in youth work. 5th History Seminar 8-10 June 2014 Espoo, Finland

Organizers: Finnish Youth Research Network and the Ministry of Education and Culture in cooperation with EU and CoE Youth Partnership, Humak University of Applied Sciences and the City of Helsinki

Background and aims: The Helsinki seminar continues to explore the identity and meaning of youth work through histories of the youth field in European countries and beyond. The approach is thematic: How can histories of co-operation, conflict and innovation help us understand the current status and tasks of youth work and its future challenges? How has youth work been able to react to changing youth conditions, social and economic uncertainties and pressures? What role has the co-operative relations both with other sectors and within the youth field itself (research, policy and practice) played in this process? In short, how is the identity and autonomy of youth work constructed through dependencies, both external and internal?

Target groups: youth workers (public and 3rd sector), youth work students and youth work educators, youth policy makers and researchers. We are prepared to receive 40 participants.

Program and working method: The seminar is based on presentations of thematic histories of youth work and plenary discussions. Young people (youth worker students) will be provided an active role in the discussions.

OUTLINE OF THE THEMATIC SESSIONS OF THE SEMINAR

From the 1st and 2nd history workshops in Blankenberge, Belgium (2008 and 2009) through to the 3nd in Ghent (2010) and 4th in Tallinn (2011) different countries of Europe looked at *the identity of youth work* through their national histories (for references, see the attached concept paper). Youth work was seen to be constantly constructed in time and between two apparently opposing interests of *emancipation* and *control*. Youth work was about young people's emergent aspirations but it was also about public concerns on youth and their problems. The approaches and methods of youth work tended to emphasize more the societal expectations of integration of youth rather than changing the society according to the desires of the young people. Youth workers became instruments of social policy, using their expertise to make the young people understand what the society wanted from them.

The contradiction between emancipation and integration, or ''social forum' and 'transit zone', is not an "either – or" question, but a "both – and" question. At best their relation is dialectic: Their internal tension is useful to the reflection of the identity of the entire youth work field. The dialectic relation of youth work between young people and the society was rephrased into "youth work as an oxymoronic[1] practice". Youth work can only be understood as a practice which tries to find the right blend between two seemingly contradictory and arguably insoluble aims; working *with* youth and *for* the society.

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[1] An **oxymoron** is a figure of speech in which incongruous or seemingly contradictory terms appear side by side, like "*act naturally, original copy, alone together, awful good, deafening silence, definite possibility".*

Session 1: **Histories of Co-operation – Integrated Youth policies**

A historical approach should look at how and why the concept of integrated youth policies was originally initiated. What was the role of youth work and the different actors of the youth field in the birth and propagation of this idea? What were the reasons for their success or failure of implementation? Are the shortcomings linked to the isolation of youth work from more mainstream youth provision and interventions in the lives of young people? Do we have successful examples of integrated youth policies? What are their success factors? How has this co-operation affected the image, approaches, working methods, resources, dependencies and the autonomy of youth work? To what extent have the alliances been a conscious policy of youth work, something imposed on youth work or simply a result of unintended succession of events?

- Description of the origin of 'integrated youth policies' ('comprehensive youth policies', 'youth policy' understood as planned cross-sectoral co-operation), its further development and relevance for today on a national or municipal level (in your country, municipality)

Session 2: **Histories of Co-operation and Conflict – The Magic Triangle.**

The youth field sometimes makes a collective assertion about its internal collaboration between research, policy and youth work – the so-called The Magic Triangle. A success story has been the youth organizations and their national and international structures to represent and cater for the interest of young people. They work in close cooperation with the policy makers, sometimes through specific arrangements like 'co-management' (Council of Europe) or 'structured dialogue' (European Union). But how can it be historically understood that other youth field actors like youth research, other youth experts in the life of young people, municipal youth work, others working with young people, youth movements and other non-ngo youth actors have been in the shadows of youth policy or have had a supportive role at the best?

The history of The Magic Triangle and youth participation can also be seen as a history of cooperation and conflict in the youth field. What are the internal and external conflicts within youth research, youth policy and youth work that have held back co-operation between the corners of the Triangle? As an example, when and how was the legitimation of youth and youth organizations as the sole sources of knowledge, representation and method in youth work constructed? What was the role and the resulting recognition and mandate of other youth field actors like youth research, non-organized youth, non-NGO youth workers, adult organizations, youth experts in other fields? What kinds of youth structures were established on the credo "there are no better experts on youth than young people themselves"? How did these structures shape the approaches, methods and the identity of youth work and youth policy? What kinds of tensions were created between collaborative relations (within the Magic Triangle)? How do the historically defined roles, mandates and power positions of the corners of the triangle meet the current youth policy challenges? Is it possible to imagine alternative histories and futures? How authentic is the triangle?

- How has co-operation and tension *between* youth policy, practice and research evolved?
- What has been the role of the tensions *within* the corners of the Triangle?
- How has this development shaped today's youth work and its structures?

Session 3: **Histories of Collaboration – Threats and Possibilities**

The youth field is often a relatively small field. Youth field actors and services struggle with their existence or trying to guarantee a minimum amount of services, facilities and support. One strategy

has been to attain recognition and resources through alliances. For example, through cooperation with the school youth work can expand its clientele, promote recognition of non-formal learning and make wider use of its working methods. The alliances are often other bigger sectors or external funders, which lead to another kind of questions: What is the threat of these dependencies? For example, strong engagement with the social sector can put more emphasis on work with marginalized young people and their families, and make the youth sector appear as an instrument of social work or as social work itself. Also private funding and sponsors, as well as co-operation with commercial companies of youth work raises the question of moving too far from the core and ethos of youth work. Ultimately, the consequence of alliances can also contribute to invisibility of youth work. The positive and negative consequences are often long-term effects on the services, working methods, pedagogy, competence, image and the profile of youth work, thus requiring historical analysis.

- Description and analysis of a historical relationship between youth work and the school, social sector, culture, a ruling party or private partnership or private funding in a national or local perspective, or through a case study; also looking at the negative and positive effects of this relationship to the image, importance and nature of youth work today.

Session 4: **Histories of Innovation – Determinants of renewal and deterioration**

Competence and its continuous development is the key factor of a discipline to establish its recognition, identity and autonomy. What kind of processes have contributed to renewal and innovation in youth work and youth policy? What has been the pressure of societal concerns to develop new measures and policies to combat issues like marginalization and unemployment? What are the internal incentives to renewal, like finding ways to work with youth in the Internet? How have the established ways of thinking and working given way to innovations and new ways of thinking? Are there 'sacred cows' to be slain or 'cherished values' to be defended? What role has the field's dialogue with the policy makers and co-operational relations with other actors played in its renewal and innovations?

- Identifying innovations or new ways of working and their historical origin: What has been the role of external pressures and internal incentives on creativity in youth work? How has the youth field reacted to change: Taking risks or minimizing them? Becoming defensive of offensive? Focusing in internal development or establishing alliances? Lessons to be learned about renewal in youth work.
- Are there 'sacred cows' to be slain in youth work? Are there approaches, working methods or discourses which need re-thinking within the light of their historical origin compared to today's challenges; 'forms of youth participation', 'youth centers' etc?
- Successful examples of making youth work transparent and recognized.

For a more detailed discussion, see the concept paper "AUTONOMY THROUGH DEPENDENCY - Histories of co-operation, conflict and innovation in youth work" at www.nuorisotutkimus.fi/HYW