



Youth policy and participation in Sweden: a historical perspective

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In this chapter I will concentrate on youth policy development in Sweden in the last century, drawing mainly on reports from public committees and governmental agencies. A special focus will be directed towards youth leisure activities and participation. Much of the information here is also available in the Swedish Board of Youth Affairs publication series *Focus 10*. I will comment on the current situation in respect of youth clubs and discuss a model for youth work that can perhaps sum up the Swedish tradition.

First, I would like to define some concepts and signal the limitations and biases inherent to this chapter. Youth work is a broad concept: it is applied in different forms by different actors within as well as across countries. The welfare regimes in place in different countries indicate the extent of public engagement and the content of activities related to youth work. The scope of this chapter is oriented towards the characteristics of Sweden's large public sector and correspondingly high expectations as to what should be achieved within it. My research focuses on the public sector, so I will talk less about youth work in the voluntary sector, in sports clubs or in social movements and more about arrangements such as what in Sweden

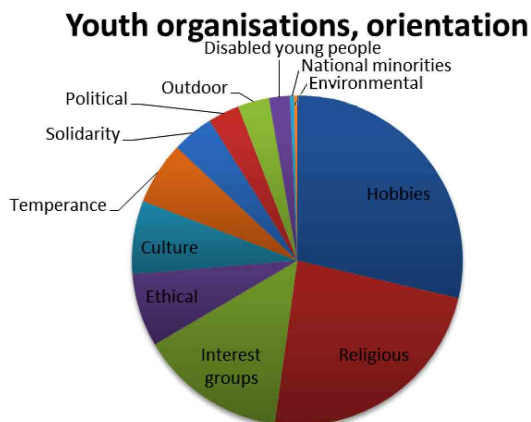
is called recreational centres (main target group young people in the age group 13-16) or youth (culture) houses (for older youth, often 16-25 years). These facilities show resemblance to what in other countries are called youth clubs or sometimes community centres depending on their specific orientation. The policy analyses will mainly address the facilities for the younger youth, that is the recreational centres. In talking about “recreational centres” and “youth clubs” as interchangeable concepts I am of course aware that traditions and practices vary across regions and countries. By these facilities I mean physical spaces such as a building, or spaces within a building, to which young people come on a voluntary basis. In Sweden, such spaces usually have municipality-employed staff. Their activities vary from one centre to another, but usually include opportunities to play games, participate in free sports activities, undergo musical training or simply socialise with friends.

In fact, the specific concept “youth work” is not often used to define the sector in Sweden, but the concept is used in this article since one can find great similarities to it in actual practice with young Swedish people.

Youth leisure: notes on the current situation

Even if recreational centres for young people are a part of the national youth policy towards young peoples’ leisure, this is mainly focused on participation in different associations. Government financial support is therefore mainly channelled to national leisure-oriented youth organisations. This support aims at promoting stimulating leisure activities, democracy, non-discrimination and gender equality. At least 60% of members must be between 16 and 29 years old for an association to receive government funds; about half of the young people in Sweden are members of an association. There are some funds that groups or even individuals can apply for within different programmes (for example for international exchange) or at local level to support young persons ideas (for example to make it possible to arrange certain activities, concerts etc).

Figure 1 – Youth organisations (other than sports clubs) by membership. In total 600 000 members divided into different orientations.



Source: Governmental report 2009.

The main organised activity among young people takes place in sports clubs, which involve about 30% of Swedish youth. Among other national youth organisations, the association for role-playing games is the largest with 80 000 members (receiving about €1.8 million in government support). Figure 1 compares youth organisations other than sports clubs by membership numbers (Governmental report 2009:259-264).

→ Recreational centres and youth clubs

Today there are about 1 350 recreational centres in Sweden's 290 municipalities. These resemble what are sometimes called youth clubs in other countries and are mainly targeted at youth between 13 to 16 years of age. The recreational centres attract about 5% to 10% of the targeted population. In addition there are about 150 "youth houses" (mainly for youth between 17 to 25 years of age). About two thirds of the recreational centres/youth houses fall under the responsibility of the public sector, with the rest being run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Most staff members working in these facilities are trained recreational leaders from the two-year vocational training programme at the "folk high schools", but there are great variations in the training received, and some workers lack formal training (Forkby, Johansson and Liljeholm Hansson 2008). Because of its low or uneven quality, the value of this education has been questioned.

There are about 3 700 recreational leaders in Sweden, with half employed in municipal leisure and culture departments, where most work at recreational centres and a minority at the youth houses. This occupational group is characterised by a relatively low mean age. Many are in temporary employment, have limited work experience, and are comparatively low paid. There is, in other words, room for improvement with respect to the competence and status of the occupation. The next section will trace the beginnings of the profession of youth work, as well as relevant youth policy.

The "social issue"

The year 1898 marked the starting point for the articulation of the Swedish state's responsibility towards children and young people (Lundström 1993). A governmental committee was set up to consider the "social issue". The committee was generally known as the "gang boys committee", a name that reveals a lot about its mission. Urbanisation and industrialisation processes had forced people to leave their homes in the countryside to look for a future in the growing cities. The working classes were about to be organised and socialist agitation inspired by class conflicts around Europe had led the elites to fear the masses, whose living standards were exceedingly low. There was no social welfare system, housing conditions were poor, and there were hardly any organised leisure activities for youth. Young people, habitually gathered at the street corners in their leisure time, were perceived as threats to the social order in a situation similar to what Whyte later wrote about in his famous book *Street corner society* (1943), about young people living in slums. The committee, therefore, in dealing with issues connected to the leisure sphere, addressed child neglect, rowdiness and criminality mainly from a moral perspective.

Leisure activities, if there were any, were up to social movements such as the temperance, religious and sports associations to organise. One example is

Birkagården in Stockholm, the first settlement/community centre in Sweden, established in 1912 by religious and socially committed people.

An expanded concept of youth emerges

We will now move from the first realisation of a more articulated public responsibility towards vulnerable and disruptive youth to a broader view on the youth situation. It took several decades for youth to be discussed as a social category in its own right, with the setting up in 1939 of a second governmental committee, namely the Youth Care Committee. The committee was a milestone in Sweden's history of youth policy, bringing as it did a more comprehensive, scientific approach to bear on the situation of youth. In this way it challenged the prevailing highly moral orientation of discussions on youth. The committee's proposals can be seen as an aspect of the Scandinavian (or social democratic) welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990), which demanded extensive involvement on the part of public authorities not just in politics, but also in the economy and people's everyday lives. With youth, the underlying idea driving the committee was higher engagement from the state, both for preventive and rehabilitating measures. Despite the word "care" in the committee's title it looked broadly at youth-related questions. It considered young people's living and working conditions, leisure activities, sexual habits, and their need for psychiatric care. It reported on associations for youth, commercial entertainment and other sorts of leisure activities. The committee worked through the Second World War, which Sweden was not part of, though it was clearly affected. The experience of 1930s Germany, where the Nazi movement organised masses of youth, was a counterbalancing one. It was thought that too much governmental involvement in young people's leisure should be avoided. A balance was established wherein the state provided support while the actual responsibility for activities was taken on by local authorities and NGOs.

A motivation for the committee was to challenge the moral indignation involved in discussions about young people's behaviour. This was especially obvious when it came to the moral panic about public dances. In newspapers, young people were portrayed as erotic animals seduced by cheap American youth culture, indulging in public dances (Frykman 1988). The concern focused on unemployed youth and organised leisure activities (Governmental report 1951). The committee, being more scientifically oriented and empirically grounded, effectively countered the prevailing opinions on public dances by thoroughly investigating young people's leisure activities and showing that it was not the allegedly immoral unemployed and those who lacked organised leisure activities in youth associations who visited dance halls the most. On the contrary, it was those who were perceived as steady – those who were active in youth associations, had jobs or were studying (Governmental report 1945) – who were regular dance hall visitors. One explanation is that this group had the financial means to take advantage of the new youth culture. An expression of this scientific discourse can be seen in the desire for norms concerning habits and behaviour. The committee found it hard to dictate such a norm for young people's dancing and entertainment, but offered this calming judgment:

It would of course be beneficial to have some kind of objective norm telling how intense dancing can be and still be judged as normal ... However, on the ground of empirical evidence, [we can say] it is only a small part of young people who actually over-actively visits open-air dances or dance halls (Governmental report 1945:58)

Pedagogy and participation for youth

The Youth Care Committee discussed youth participation and influence even if these issues were not considered a top priority. On the contrary, the committee was preoccupied with how adult society could participate in, influence and gain knowledge of young people's lives. This included systematic collection of information in various areas. In a report on youth leisure activities, for example, the committee ponders state intervention and support to young people's leisure activities, asking the fundamental question: "How and by what means do we want to influence youth in its choice of leisure activity?" (Governmental report 1945:18). The answer furnished by the committee was that free time was a problem for (some) youth, particularly those living in low-quality cramped housing with parents who did not provide adequate social and emotional support and in occupations that did not allow them to develop their talents or competences or challenge their strengths. This was believed to lead to unstructured free time outside the family and away from adult supervision. To address this situation, the committee declared, youth should be educated and fostered so they could make better use of their free time. Leisure time should involve productive activity, the pursuit of hobbies and interests, and interaction with fellows in a spirit of companionship. In short, "the independent, active and societal engaged type of youth that here is told as exemplary, is to be fostered." (Governmental report 1945:20)

State-supported socialisation could achieve such a goal, it was believed, through pedagogical and voluntary means. Free-time socialisation would complement family life and preferably be organised through youth associations such as sports clubs, scout movements, and so on. The committee was nevertheless aware that organised leisure in youth associations was not attractive to everyone. Other measures were thereby needed to suit so-called "association-unattached" youth. One response was the expansion of "open activity" in recreational centres, youth clubs and cafés. Hans-Erik Olson (1992) argues that the perceived need to control a new youth generation was the driving force behind such youth policies. However, in reading the committee reports, one can find many instances of an openness to the new manifestations of youth culture. Morally charged debates about the youth generation, for instance in the case of public dances, were more prominent in the mass media (Frykman 1988).

It was proposed that youth clubs/recreational centres should look and feel like a home, so young people would gain from meeting their friends and being guided by leaders in a comfortable milieu. The inspiration for these centres came from the English youth clubs. In the clubs, young people were meant to engage themselves in study, research on a variety of topics, handicrafts, and activities such as table tennis and games. Fostering ambition had to be balanced against young people's own interests. Already in this early articulation of a policy for youth, one can find ideas of youth participation and influence. For example, the committee was sceptical about private interests behind youth meeting points, since they were suspected of being controlled by enterprises that were interested in publicity. Since many more young people started to work at an earlier age back then, this concerned a significant proportion of youth. The committee declared that it would be in the best interests of all parties if recreational centres set up by enterprises were left at young people's disposal (Author's translation. Governmental report 1945:29).

The committee underlined the importance of pedagogy in the public recreational centres. This had to avoid an authoritarian style, instead giving room to young

people to demonstrate their own strength, capacity and initiatives. Young people were expected to participate and take responsibility, especially if they had limited opportunity to do so in their occupations (Governmental report 1945). Young people had to be given the opportunity to participate and enjoy influence in the activities they took part in, rather than be invited to a ready-made table, and in the committee's words: "It's not from gratitude but from a feeling of loyalty and responsibility, that a living interest in and attachment to the clubs should grow". However, the committee was not interested in letting youth take full responsibility for running the clubs, and set limits to participation: "If the participants will benefit from the activity, feel comfortable and joy, a very competent leader is provided. It is far from satisfying to let young people look after themselves" (Governmental report 1945:45). The youth care committee mentions several times, however, that the participant or "guest" should enjoy active influence in the centre's activities, preferably through some kind of "user" association, and should also be given a place on the recreational centre board. The board had overall responsibility for activities and also employed staff members.

Suggestions were also made by the committee that some kind of new political board of youth affairs at the municipal level would be better qualified to deal with these issues, instead of the existing child welfare board. Such a board would not function satisfactorily without the participation of young people. It should be mentioned, however, that by "young people" the committee meant people who were younger than 35 years old, and participation would take place in the leisure time of these individuals, who were likely to be employed already.

One may conclude at this point that for the first time, a more comprehensive youth policy had been articulated in Sweden, and that there were proposals and attempts to establish forms of what we today call "user participation". User participation could be informal, in terms of visits and participation in activities, or formal, in terms of representation on boards and steering committees. Youth participation and influence on a broader scale was also under consideration, with proposals to include youth on other boards at a municipal level, that is to influence arrangements that were not specific to youth (these proposals were however not realised at that time).

Prevention reconsidered

Recreational centres were established in almost every city in Sweden, as well as in smaller towns, starting from the 1940s. The most impressive recreational centres were built in the newly built housing areas under the Million Programme in the 1960s and 1970s. These recreational centres included special rooms for sports, informal socialising, photography, and so on. They were usually still run within the ambit of the child welfare agency, which implied a socio-political angle since this agency had the responsibility to protect and support vulnerable children. Of special importance was preventive work with disruptive boys (Olson 2008a).

An ideological shift towards a different kind of youth work was formulated in a commission report from 1967 (Governmental report 1967). No longer would it be the risk of social maladjustment that would guide the programmes, but individual predispositions and prerequisites. In other words, the perspective was shifted from prevention to promotion, and instead of threats and risks, strengths and resources

came into focus. The report also emphasised the need for recreational centres to train and develop young people in democratic practices and decision making.

The ambitions articulated in the late 1960s to work on promotion at the youth clubs were, however, difficult to realise. One explanation could be resistance to change; another could be that social disturbances were becoming more common as a consequence of a loosening in the legislation on alcohol. Semi-strong beer, for a couple of years in the 1970s, was sold in ordinary groceries (an experiment in Sweden that was abolished some years later). This resulted in drunken youngsters visiting the youth clubs. Narcotics had also made their entrance, and the resulting situation led to an intense discussion among recreational leaders. While some wanted drug-free centres, others thought it was better if these young people continued to be welcomed into the fairly organised recreational centres so that they were off the streets. Some centres actually had rooms where young people could get high, preferably on marijuana or hashish (Olson 2008b). The situation soon got out of hand and the campaign for drug-free centres began in earnest. The focus on confronting the drugs problem, which was part of the liberalisation of the 1960s and 1970s, meant that to some extent youth policy stalled. Prevention of social problems was the most important goal, not capacity building.

Commercialistic dystopia

At the end of the 1970s an important report, "Not for sale", was published (Statens Ungdomsråd 1981). It captured the zeitgeist and heralded a new approach to youth policy in Sweden; it is perhaps the most pessimistic report on the situation of children and young people that have been published by a government agency in Sweden. Right from the beginning, one is invited to read about marginalised youth, abused or neglected by their parents. While some young people have a hard time coping with all that has to be done, the commission says, life for others is mere emptiness. A dystopian future is portrayed in its entirety. Children were said to be using media and just about "revelled in the science-fiction-like world that will become the future of tomorrow" (Author's translation. Statens ungdomsråd 1981:66).

The great threat to young people, according to the report, is commercialism. Youth tend to be consumers, not just of goods and material things, but also of lifestyles and identities. The debate on narcissistic culture, as expounded by theorists such as Christopher Lasch (1978), was clearly relevant. With leisure and participation, in particular, the question of whether youth are consumers or producers became central: how often were young people involved all the way from the articulation of ideas, planning for an activity and being responsible for enactment? Were they simply being allowed to choose from a ready-made array of activities? What is the role of the recreational leader – is it to promote the capacity and entrepreneurship of youth or is it to offer youth-friendly activities? The commission believed that commercialism had turned youth into consumers and generally created a tougher social climate, one in which children were removed from adults and rendered incapable of controlling their own lives. The report begins with this sobering assessment: "A society in fear of the future doesn't care much about the next generation. Ways to give the child love and a feeling of this importance doesn't liquidate the underlying feeling of coldness" (Statens ungdomsråd 1981:77).

The commission queried the very notion of "free time", bounded as it is by practical tasks such as travelling to work and back, and given that commercialism has

penetrated just about every inch of the life-world. The general role of people, it stated, has changed from being a part of production to being given a place in consumption. The commission turned against the developing service culture, in which municipalities had an array of leisure opportunities for young people to choose from as leisure consumers. It suggested that it would be better to direct public spending to voluntary organisations and programmes aimed at strengthening youth capacity to influence, and to self-organised groups. It also suggested that commercialism could be counteracted by supporting leisure activities in the local community – a kind of traditional “small village” idea. When youth participation is discussed in the report, in fact, it is primarily seen as a way to counteract the “service ideology”. The report concludes that young people must (together with persons of other ages) be given back the opportunity to take the responsibility that has been taken away from them:

A lot of the local opportunities of leisure today are too “ready-made”. Both children and youth are served leisure activities. The employed recreational leaders embrace the goal of offering as many activities as possible. The head of the municipality sees it as an obligation to offer as many and as expensive arenas as possible.

Children, young people and adults must be allowed participation, responsibility and belonging. The inhabitants in a neighbourhood must to a higher extent be given the responsibility of the local leisure- and culture-milieus. (Authors translation. Statens ungdomsråd 1981:521)

The issue of power

With the United Nation designating 1985 as International Youth Year, youth questions rose to the fore. The three goals stated for 1985 were participation, development and peace. Sweden chose to concentrate on participation, and also installed its first minister of youth (Ulf Lönnqvist). From here on, youth policy has sought to realise a comprehensive or holistic view on the situation of young people. In 1989, the second minister of youth, Margot Wallström, called in a committee to consider how democracy, participation and equality should be achieved and how international youth exchanges could be strengthened.

One of the commission’s reports, “Youth and Power” (Governmental report 1991), considered the possibility and inclination of young people to participate in and influence events in their free time. It notes in its introduction that though “participation has been a catchword in the debate on youth during the last ten years” (authors translation. Ibid:112), Swedish youth lacked substantial opportunities for real participation even with a relatively good knowledge of social affairs. The commission explained this partly in terms of barriers between generations, and partly by class differences that made it harder for certain groups to make their voices heard. In order to realise democracy for all groups of society, there had to be a more active and precise policy directing power, participation and youth questions. The committee proposed that a comprehensive youth policy be put in place, including a fuller view on the situation of youth, and a reformation of economic compensation to associations into a goal-oriented system. Funds were proposed to induce the political participation of youth and greater user participation in general. In discussing work at the recreational centres two goals were mentioned:

- the recreational centres have a responsibility to work for greater equality between the sexes;
- better collaboration between agents is called for to address multi-dimensional youth affairs.

In addressing leisure, the committee discussed how associations such as sports clubs could find new ways to encourage youth participation, for example by letting young persons join steering committees. To achieve this, adults had to be prepared to step back and make room for the younger generation, even to the extent of letting them make their own mistakes. The rationale behind this is that being responsible includes the right to make mistakes – and to learn from them. The culture of traditional youth associations wherein adults decide about activities and young people are activated had to be changed. Even timely and bureaucratic decision-making processes had to transform, if young people were to be engaged. Inspiration for this new *modus operandi* came from the social movement sphere, where organisations such as Greenpeace seemed to be more successful at attracting young people.

The youth committee also discussed recreational centres from the perspective of participation and influence. It was open to a greater influence from civil society in the recreational centres. It was proposed that all or at least parts of the activities should be decentralised to local managers in association with community groups and local associations and clubs. The committee was influenced by projects that were set up to develop “club democracy”. But there were potential hindrances, too, such as staff attitudes and habits, youth (dis)inclination to take greater responsibility, lack of training in giving voice to or even recognising one’s standpoint, rules and legislation, as well as commercialism and a prolonged period of time that defined youth.

Importantly, the committee report emphasised that youth had to be offered “real” participation. This meant that young people were to be permitted to be in positions of power, and through this, learn what influence is about and take responsibility. This kind of reasoning was influenced by what was called the “free zone” or “free room” debate. The German socialisation theorist Thomas Ziehe was an important figure in Sweden (along with theorists from the British subculture school), and influenced a number of youth culture researchers (see Sernhede 1984). A “free room” meant a space free of adults and commercialism, a place where young people could develop so-called unusual learning processes with friends. This line of thinking would later be realised through self-organised youth clubs.

A study from 1991 (Henriksson) recounted that 86% of experts asked about youth affairs thought that youth had a low level of influence in society as a whole and 80% that they did not have influence in school. In the report, participation, responsibility and the perspective on youth as resources were connected in a way that has been a recurring theme in Sweden’s youth policy to the present day.¹⁶ The shift in perspective demanded that young people’s right to give voice to their opinions and to experience a real sense of participation also meant to be able to change things – that is to have real power. Scarcity of apartments, lack of jobs and educational matters were seen as the most important areas in youth policy. But youth participation, responsibility and influence were not far behind. Schools were seen as the key arenas to achieve the latter goals, but activities in leisure time were also perceived as important. Participation in cultural activities such as music and theatre were seen as natural. Responsibility was also related to youth from a pedagogical perspective; the capacity to take on a responsibility is not a given from the start but must be given opportunities to grow. This includes the

16. During this period Sweden had its second youth minister, and later EU Commissioner, Margot Wallström.

right to make mistakes. If young people are given responsibility the inclination to serve them ready-made activities will be counteracted, it was felt. A central theme was a close connection between participation and responsibility:

[Y]outh need real participation, influence and responsibility. Perhaps it is even more important ... that one is allowed to make mistakes and that youth are going to make such mistakes. This is a good and natural way to learn. (Author's translation. Henriksson 1991:22)

One question arises when talking about responsibility – what is it for? The report suggested that young people should be able to organise their own meeting places, and that they should become leaders in associations and organise events, but also that they should be enabled to take more responsibility in their families, for instance by carrying out chores and voluntary work in social care. But this notion of responsibility also met with criticism from those who felt that adults were doling out tasks to young people, which they then took responsibility for completing. Young people, Henriksson notes, should instead be invited from the start to decide on what tasks needed to be accomplished and then become partners in the planning:

“Tasks?” This is the most ridiculous thing I've heard. It doesn't have to do with distributing tasks here and there, but to give young people a place in society. If you do that, you don't have to give them tasks. Then they take them. (Author's translation. Henriksson 1991:25)

Participation and influence are elements of power. If young people are to gain power, others must agree to make room – to back off. Youth must be let into those arenas where agendas are made and decisions are taken. This has to do with a change in attitudes so as to transform distrust of youth into a sense of reliance and trust. But it also demands structural changes, such as a lowered voting age and the setting up of local youth councils.

Existing institutional systems and cultural norms have been identified as barriers to youth entering society as equals. Those who lack experience of associations and possess meagre social networks find it difficult to understand and deal with the structures already in place. The situation calls for organisations to become more youth friendly, and to come up with appropriate socialisation structures for youth.

Towards a holistic view in youth policy

The need for a holistic view on the youth situation has been a recurring theme since youth questions were first discussed. But it became a central theme in the first half of the 1990s (Governmental report 1992). This was spelled out in a government bill:

Youth politics can therefore not just be for example leisure politics or educational politics. The point of departure must instead be the accumulated picture of the reality young people live in and their needs, resources and problems. (Author's translation. Governmental proposal 1993/94)

Youth participation and influence were still important questions, coupled to the need to provide room for youth initiatives and responsibility. It is through enhanced responsibility, after all, that democratic working methods can be instilled in youth. In the aforementioned government bill, state involvement in youth affairs was

strengthened by a reformulation of the assignment to the National Board of Youth Affairs. From this moment, the government started to talk about a comprehensive or holistic youth policy, instead of sectoral policies that pertained to different aspects of a young person's life. A primary goal was to enhance intersectoral collaboration, for example between schools, social services, the police and NGOs. In the same manner that new managerial ideas had influenced other parts of the public sector, it became obvious in youth politics that from now on these should be managed by objectives.¹⁷ In the government's opinion, the most important steps were to secure democratic schooling/socialisation and enhanced equality between sexes; counteract social maladjustment, giving more attention to migrant youth; and to develop opportunities for participation. These steps were broken down into subsidiary objectives that were meant to be followed up.

On culture, a national commission considering the policy in the culture sphere pointed out that youth culture and expression had to be respected to a higher degree (Governmental report 1995). Youth creativity and the desire to create had to be taken account of. To enhance this, changes were necessary in the often slow-moving traditional organisations. It was also seen as important for youth to join in cultural activities, because these involvements brought out the motivation, passion and engagement of youth.

In 1997, three goals were set out to guide state-formulated youth politics (Governmental report 1997). These goals are easily translated into ideas of promotion and capacity building:

- young people shall be provided with the opportunity to live independent lives (especially to do with employment and housing);
- young people shall be given the opportunity to exercise real power, influence and participation;
- youth shall be perceived as resources and the potential of their critical thinking taken account of.

It was further decided that youth policy was not to be caged in by any specific area or sector, but would be an integral part of all areas concerning young people. To make the policy more effective, several measurable goals were stipulated. The National Board of Youth Affairs was to be responsible for the follow-up of goals and reporting to the government. One conclusion was that girls still had fewer opportunities for real participation as a result of the fact that most youth institutions such as arenas and youth clubs had been to a great extent designed with special attention to boys' needs. Another conclusion was that societal institutions, in more recent times, had in fact improved in their inclusion of young persons' cultural expressions, and in preparing to allow them into decision-making processes (see also Ungdomsstyrelsen 1996). In the Governmental report (1997) it was also proposed that the municipalities be more attentive in promoting meeting points for young people where they could pursue their hobbies and interests and take part in cultural activities, and become involved in discussions with peers and adults. In sum, these meeting points would be places in which democracy would be realised. Leisure and cultural institutions had to be better aware of what young persons really wanted, and what they thought about

17. The ideas that became more influential from the 1990s on are often conceptualised as "New Public Management". In short, this is about letting the principle of the market influence management of the public sector. Objectives, auditing and decentralised responsibility are common aspects (Almqvist 2006).

existing choices. To gain this knowledge, regular surveys of leisure habits at the municipality level were suggested. The report also nurtured a hope that more agencies would develop real user-governed activities. They proposed a change in the funding system for youth activities so that young people could be given small amounts of support in a short time (i.e. in a non-bureaucratic manner) so they did not lose their motivation.

In the subsequent government bill, "On terms of Youth" (Government proposal 1998/99), most of the propositions from the Governmental report of 1997 were transformed into policies, especially management through objectives and the need for intersectoral youth work. It is also mentioned that participation and influence are at the very core of Swedish policy for youth, and that the point of departure should be to value young peoples' resources and sense of responsibility. Regarding leisure activities, the bill states that the most important thing is to support young people's own organising abilities and to reform traditional associations in a way that makes young people feel at home and motivated to contribute while promoting participation in the activities offered. Youth were also to be allowed greater influence in policies at the municipality level through youth councils and other forms of participation, as well as in governmental authorities and policies at the national level. The bill also introduced somewhat new themes, namely internationalisation and youth exchange.

Promotion of vulnerable youth

Six years later, another government bill on youth policy was presented, "Power to decide – the right to welfare (Government proposal 2004/05). The bill discusses opportunities for young people to participate and be included in society. A conclusion is that culture and leisure activities should be strengthened, especially for vulnerable youth living in poor suburbs. The so-called "open activities" at the recreational centres were said to have a strategic role in establishing local infrastructure to enhance youth participation and creativity at a local level. What the government called "the new national policy for youth" aimed to decrease differences in life circumstances in the youth group, raise awareness of problems, and support those young persons who had a harder time than others in accessing welfare and reaching real positions of power. The government stipulated renewed goals for the youth politics: a reform of the auditing system and new prioritisation, in which contributions to young persons' life circumstances were held as important. Two objectives were declared: youth should have the opportunity to access welfare and real power.

By welfare, it was meant that every young person should have a good material, cultural and social living standard. By power, it was meant that youth should have the chance both to engage in and affect societal change, to control their own lives, and be a part of the development of their local community. Four different perspectives were to guide youth policy:

- resource-perspective: youth should be seen as resources, focusing on their capacities and strengths;
- rights-perspective: every youth has an equal right to welfare and power;
- independence-perspective: youth have the right to live an independent life;
- diversity-perspective: youth are not a homogenous group but should be understood in terms of various backgrounds, traits and needs.

These four perspectives were meant to penetrate youth policy in different areas, and their impact was to be followed up yearly.

The (social-democratic) government of the time emphasised support and compensation to those groups which were the worst off economically, socially and culturally. The intention was that all young people would be given equal opportunities and rights. The need to strengthen the identities of young persons was underlined as well as the need for work that gave them tools to be involved in democratic processes, including the opportunity to have one's voice be heard and taken account of. There was a special emphasis on open leisure activities, which were seen to have a key role in the promotion of young persons' social development.

Similar goals as described in the previous sections are to be found in the 2009 declaration by the centre-right government of the time (Skrivelse 2009/10:53). One recurring goal is that youth must have the opportunity to access welfare and to participate. Subsidiary objectives cover education and learning, work and support, health and maladjustment, influence and representation, and culture and leisure. A greater focus on civil society and NGOs taking responsibility for youth leisure activities may also be noted. However, a major investment proposed by the former government in recreational centres was removed directly after the centre-right government came into power.

Highest on the agenda today (in 2012/13) in Sweden seems to be the reformation of schools and the educational system, youth unemployment and disturbances of social order in some suburbs. The promotion of young persons' leisure is relatively low on the political agenda.

Concluding remarks on youth participation

There are a few recurring themes in Swedish youth policy. Questions of participation and influence have been of interest ever since youth policies were formulated in the 1940s. In a historical review it is possible to broadly mark out three phases or periods, in respect to what were perceived as threatening and attractive goals for the situation of youth.

During the first period, as is clearly seen in the reports from the Youth Care Committee, state officials were involved in building a base of various arrangements in order to enhance young persons' growth into responsible citizens. But the state also acted as its own watchdog, withholding itself from being overly controlling of young people's lives, especially their leisure. State involvement was at this time two-faced; the state can be said to have been its own enemy. Youth participation, it was felt, should be protected from too much state intervention, as well as from private interests.

The second period is exemplified by the "Not for Sale" report from 1981. The expansion of the welfare state had led to a varied system of supporting measures, but one thing had been forgotten – peoples' lack of orientation in the newly built society. The welfare state had its black holes. Youth participation was perceived as a part of the struggle against the enemy of commercialism that was colonising young

people's life projects, dreams and hopes for the future. The enemies during this period were private interests and commercialism, which were perceived as letting the market transform human values and feelings into goods to be bought and sold.

During the third period, described in the report "Youth and Power" from 1991, the report targeted local authorities in order to stimulate them to reconsider their traditional way of looking at youth affairs. It called for a structure for youth participation to be built up through various forms of local youth councils, but also by letting youth access power in a more direct way, for instance through youth-organised meeting points. In this period, the municipality was not the enemy, but the counterpart that was challenged to become more involved.

Many of these lines of thought regarding youth participation are recurring. Still, there are some changes in what official policy underlines from one period to the next. For example, to what extent participation is to be understood as being in power to influence decisions or if it has more to do with being recognised and taken account of may depend on the official view of the day. The latter has often been seen as leading to greater control of one's own life – to be in power regarding one's own circumstances or self. But perhaps views on youth participation and influence reflect the ever-changing relation between generations. They may therefore be seen as a symbol of the hopes and anxieties of both adults and young people.

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