

The White Paper on Youth and the lifelong learning strategy: a new impetus for non-formal learning?

The following article tries to point out the relation of the two important initiatives at European level in the field of learning and youth: the European Commission's White Paper "A new impetus for European Youth" (COM (2001) 681 final) and the Communication "Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality" (COM (2001) 678 final). The contribution describes briefly the background and main contents of these recent initiatives, the impact that both initiatives will have, some support actions from the youth field to the lifelong learning strategies, and the role of the YOUTH programme.

I. Background: From Lisbon to Barcelona

For the last couple of years the European Union has been facing up to the "knowledge society". The Lisbon European Council of March 2000 agreed on a new strategic objective for Europe over the next decade: to become the world's most competitive and knowledge-based economy. Some of the Lisbon conclusions concern "education and training for living and working in the knowledge society" and aim at modernising education systems. The European Council invited the Commission and the Council to give high priority to lifelong learning as a basic component of the European social model.

After Lisbon a large number of initiatives have taken place in learning, in the education and training sector and beyond. These are among others the e-learning initiative, the definition on future objectives for education systems, the lifelong learning strategy, the promotion of mobility and importantly for the youth field the White Paper on Youth.

The European Council in Barcelona in March 2002 identified as a priority area, which requires specific impetus "A competitive economy based on knowledge". The synthesis report from the Commission to the European Council highlights the need to have a comprehensive strategy, based on an integrated approach under the common banner "Creating a European Area of Knowledge".

Concerning the contribution of the youth field to this aim two initiatives have a particular priority: the Lifelong learning strategy and the White Paper on Youth. They will have a strong impact on youth policy as such and on learning and especially non-formal learning in the youth context in particular.

II. The Communication "Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality"

In November 2000 the Commission issued a

Memorandum on lifelong learning, followed by a large Europe-wide consultation. On this basis the Commission elaborated the Communication "Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality", which was adopted in November 2001, parallel to the White Paper on Youth.

The lifelong learning framework arches over not only the education and training sector but also important components of employment, social inclusion and youth policies. This framework should ensure coherence between actions taken at European level, support the exchange of good practice for the identification of shared problems, aim at increasing the transparency of policies and systems, enable Member States to develop their own coherent and comprehensive strategies and design and manage their own systems.

The Communication on lifelong learning does not propose or invent a new process or new instruments for implementing the proposed actions. It rather follows the strategy to use existing programmes, instruments and initiatives and to develop coherent and comprehensive strategies for the transformation of the learning systems such as the White Paper on Youth.

The key objectives of learning are promoting personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability. The Communication on lifelong learning places emphasis on learning from pre-school to post-retirement, stresses that lifelong learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning and defines lifelong learning as "***all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective***".

Non-formal learning is defined as "learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective."



by Hans-Joachim Schild



The six priority actions and underlying key aspects are:

1. Valuing learning: identification, assessment, recognition of non-formal and informal learning; transfer and mutual recognition of certificates and diplomas; development of new instruments at European level to support valuing all forms of learning.
2. Information, guidance and counselling: facilitating access to learning opportunities for all citizens through the availability of quality information and guidance services.
3. Investment of time and money in learning: increased investment, targeted funding and more transparency in public investment in human resources.
4. Bringing learning opportunities and learners closer together: to encourage and support learning communities, cities and regions and to enable workplaces to become learning organisations.
5. Basic skills: to ensure that the foundations of lifelong learning are accessible to all and at all stages of life, with a special attention to those with a lack of basic skills.
6. Innovative pedagogy: to take a turn from knowledge acquisition to competence development, implies a new role of teachers and trainers; Non-formal and informal learning are given prominence as priorities for research and exchange of good practice.

III. The White Paper “A new impetus for European youth”

The White paper on youth, adopted by the European Commission in November 2001 was developed through a wide-ranging consultation process. This process was organised between May 2000 and March 2001, involving young people, youth organisations, researchers, policy makers and public administrations.

The four key points emerging from this process were ‘Active Citizenship for young people’, ‘Expanding and recognising areas of experimentation’, ‘Developing autonomy among young people’ and ‘For a European Union as the champion of values’.

One of these four key messages, “Expanding and recognising areas of experimentation” concerns the learning sector, stressing that education and training should be viewed holistically since they are not restricted to the traditional or formal types available.

Since learning lies mainly in the responsibility of the formal education and training policies this *“will require close coordination with the various responsible authorities, at both national and European level. . . The European Commission will ensure that guidelines concerning young people will be taken more into account of in these policies and forms of action wherever appropriate and whatever the instruments used.”*

The White Paper underlines that *“youth associations, social workers and local authorities in many countries are invol-*

ved in in-depth work with young people. While continuing to be innovative and non-formal, and as part of the overall package of lifelong learning measures, this work would benefit from:

- *a clearer definition of the concepts, of the skills acquired and of quality standards;*
- *a higher regard for the people who become involved in these activities;*
- *greater recognition of these activities;*
- *greater complementarity with formal education and training”.*

In the field of learning the White Paper does not only focus on non-formal learning. The results of the consultations also highlight other challenges concerning education, such as the quality and effectiveness of education systems, a better access to education, the renewal of the learning and teaching approaches, different kinds of knowledge and skills, a better recognition of qualifications and skills and the complementary character of formal and non-formal learning. Nevertheless the White Paper will have a particular impact on non-formal learning in the youth context.

The definition of learning in the White Paper corresponds with the definition elaborated in the Communication on lifelong learning and highlights the fact that non-formal learning in the youth context provides a wide range of good practice and experience.

IV. The contribution of the youth field to lifelong learning

The contribution of the youth sector to implementing the lifelong learning strategy and to improving skills and competencies is evident; to name a few examples:

- ♦ social and formal recognition and acknowledgement of the value of participating and learning in youth activities;
- ♦ information and guidance services from and for young people to ease access to learning but also to improve social integration and integration into the labour market;
- ♦ a large investment, mainly of time but also of money, by participating voluntarily and in leisure time learning activities by both, young people and (voluntary) trainers and youth workers;
- ♦ the close relation and attractiveness of learning opportunities in youth work to young peoples’ demands and motivation of young people to take part in the different learning opportunities offered; integrating disadvantaged young people is also seen as an asset of non-formal learning.
- ♦ the provision of basic skills, particularly relating to personal development, to social skills, to active citizenship and democratic values, intercultural awareness and in the acquisition of useful skills for vocational integration;
- ♦ use of innovative pedagogy, mainly by providing a learner-centred approach and a new role of trainers and youth workers, but also by offering a wide range of activities, meeting the demands of young people. The advantage of non-formal learning in youth activities lies mainly in its voluntary and often self-organised nature, its flexibility, the broad possibilities of participation, the “right to make mistakes”, the up-to-date and closer link to young people’s interests and aspirations.

V. The impact of lifelong learning on non-formal learning in youth

As seen before non-formal learning in the youth context will have an important impact on the implementation of the lifelong learning strategy. But what of the possible impact the lifelong learning strategy will have – vice versa – on non-formal learning in youth activities?

◆ Regarding the aspect of valuing learning, of complementarity of all forms of learning and a better recognition of non-formal learning it must be underlined that in the youth sector mainly a better **social recognition** seems to be an appropriate strategy: the acknowledgement of the value of competencies, acquired in youth activities, by economic and social stakeholders. The value of competencies means predominantly aiming at personal fulfilment, social integration and active citizenship and only secondly to employability.

◆ The aspect of **formal recognition** of competencies in the sense of granting official status to competencies, gained in a non-formal setting, is much more difficult to discuss. The introduction of assessment, evaluation, certification procedures normally found in the formal education sector has its benefits towards giving greater employability and is targeted towards the labour market. This is not a complete guarantee of improved quality in training standards and we acknowledge that in this process non-formal training may lose flexibility and attraction to young people.

◆ Nevertheless, in today's "knowledge society" it may be necessary to certificate (and to describe) what young people learn and do in youth activities, not mainly to improve employability, but to encourage them towards citizenship, personal development and self-confidence. In this direction also formal recognition has to be promoted. The youth field will have the task to provide high quality youth work with an open access for all young people on the one hand and to provide appropriate tools by avoiding over-formalising what it offers on the other. Non-formal learning in the youth sector must keep its unconventional and innovative approaches and openness.

◆ Concerning information and guidance the youth field should insist on a holistic approach by promoting services, which are not reduced to formal aspects of learning and of integrating into the labour market. The needs of young people concerning information and guidance are manifold and not restricted to these issues. Social integration, individual support and active citizenship need a comprehensive approach.

◆ Efforts to make visible and publicise regularly the outcomes of non-formal learning that result from the activities of youth organisations will have an impact on evaluation and publication procedures in the youth field at all levels. The link to social recognition of non-formal learning is evident and all actors should take responsibility to improve the visibility of youth activities. Young people should be fully involved in the publication strategies and be part of them.

VI. Support actions from the youth field to the lifelong learning strategies

The lifelong learning strategy is the first one at European level to implement the proposed approach of the White Paper of taking youth more into account in other policies. The youth sector will contribute to the implementation of the lifelong learning strategy by following two strands: giving support and resources to the implementation of the lifelong learning strategy and – in addition and complementarily - realising actions under its own responsibility. At this initial stage the youth sector should focus upon a certain number of priorities:

(i) Valuing learning

- An exchange of experience and good practice in the field of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning will be initiated by the Commission at the end of 2002; the European Forum on the Transparency of Qualifications will co-ordinate this process in co-operation with the Member States, involving all relevant players in the field, including social partners, NGOs, providers of non-formal learning, etc.; parallel to action at European level Member States should develop methodologies, systems and standards for valuing non-formal and informal learning.
- The establishment of an inventory of methodologies, systems and standards for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is planned for the end of 2003; as one of the first initiatives the proposals for the 2002 joint actions of the programmes LEONARDO, SOCRATES, CULTURE and YOUTH on " Non-formal and informal learning " will contribute to the exchange of experience and to the set up of a network in order to establish the inventory.
- The development of a 'Portfolio' system to group together all acquired qualifications and competencies and the development of a 'modular' system for the accumulation of qualifications in 2003 will complete actions under this pillar.

(ii) Information, guidance and counselling

- The Internet portal on learning will provide (from the end of 2002) information on different learning opportunities in Europe, including non-formal learning in the youth area;
- The European Guidance Forum will involve representatives of all relevant players to undertake reflection on the quality standards for guidance services; the youth sector will contribute by giving inputs concerning the experience and good practice on information, counselling and guidance of young people;
- The examination of the networks and structures in the field of information, guidance and counselling for both education and training will take place by the end of 2003.

As an additional action the youth sector should make use of information channels of young people in order to become acquainted with all possibilities of lifelong learning.

(iii) Bringing together learners and learning opportunities

- It is proposed to make visible and publicise regularly the outcomes of non-formal education that result from the activities of youth organisations.



VII. The role of the YOUTH programme

The strategies to implement the lifelong learning priorities and the proposals resulting from the White Paper on Youth, the creation of a European area of knowledge needs the greatest possible involvement of different partners at all levels. At European level the youth sector will – as mentioned – mainly act under the lifelong learning umbrella.

But also the Youth programme has to be seen as a resource for a new form of co-operation. It is the aim of the programme ***“to encourage young people to make an active contribution to European integration, to developing intercultural understanding, strengthening fundamental values such as human rights, and combating racism and xenophobia, developing a sense of solidarity, encouraging a spirit of enterprise, initiative and creativity, stimulating the recognition of non-formal education, and strengthening co-operation on the part of all people active in the youth field” (White Paper on Youth).***

Already now, within the existing actions of the programme, the work in the youth field benefits from the promotion of quality standards and of a higher regard for people involved in these activities, e.g. by providing training courses for trainers, like the Training courses on European citizenship, the Advanced Training of Trainers in Europe (ATTE), both within the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe, the SALTO Training courses or the Youth programme staff training.

Another example of how the YOUTH programme is involved in lifelong learning activities might be the funding of Action 5 large-scale projects in the field of non-formal learning. Those are projects are aiming at improving active citizenship and participation of young people with less opportunities in society. They also aim at combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia by facilitating a dialogue and joint activities of young people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds with special emphasis on the integration of young people from minorities, by using sports and outdoor education as a tool for social integration and non-formal education with special emphasis on the inclusion of disabled young people.

The joint actions of the programmes LEONARDO, SOCRATES, YOUTH and in the future CULTURE contribute as well to the implementation of lifelong learning strategies and in particular a better recognition of non-formal learning, in the 2001 call for proposals. They do so e.g. by funding projects which build bridges between qualifications, by improving guidance and advisory services and by creating multipurpose training centres. The 2002 call for proposals aims at the social integration of target groups, the support of active citizenship of young people, the improvement of local information and guidance services, the setting up of a network in order to establish an inventory of methods and systems in non-formal and informal learning, and the improvement of mobility, its concepts, norms, conditions, methods and recognition.



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Relevant web sites:

White Paper on Youth:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth/ywp/index.html>

Lifelong Learning:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/life/index_en.html

Training courses:

<http://www.salto-youth.net>