

YOUNG PEOPLE INSIDE OUT. MAIN FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS

Nicole Vettenburg, Johan Deklerck and Jessy Siongers

The present text is the translation of the final chapter 8 of the book *Jongeren binnenstebuiten. Thema's uit het jongerenleven onderzocht* ("Young People Inside Out. Themes of Youth Life Examined") (p. 201-217)¹. The book elaborates on the themes of "self-esteem", "school well-being", "fear of crime", "democratic citizenship", "ICT" and "life-course perspectives" and is based on data derived from the JOP-Monitor 1, secondary analyses on other databases, and data from existing research.

The JOP-Monitor 1 was administered at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006 as a postal survey among a representative sample of 14- to 25-year-olds in Flanders (N=2503). For more information, see: Young People in Flanders: Facts and Figures. Findings of the JOP-Monitor 1 (www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be).

The JOP or Jeugdonderzoeksplatform (Youth Research Platform) is an interdisciplinary and interuniversity partnership between the Youth and Prevention research line (LINC-K.U.Leuven), the Department of Social Welfare Studies (UGent), and the Tempus Omnia Revelat research group (Vrije Universiteit Brussel). The JOP was created in 2003 in order to address the need for a greater structural focus on youth research. It was an initiative by the Flemish minister for Internal Affairs, Culture, Youth and the Civil Service.² Since 2007, the JOP has been integrated into the Policy Research Centre for Culture, Youth and Sport.

1. Introduction

2. Overview of the main findings per item

- 2.1. The impact of personal relationships on the self-esteem of Flemish young people
- 2.2. School well-being in secondary education. A wide variety of influencing factors
- 2.3. Fear of crime among young people
- 2.4. Development towards democratic citizenship
 - 2.4.1. Gender differences
 - 2.4.2. Differences according to type of education
- 2.6. Young people and ICT: a varied public
- 2.7. Life-course perspectives of young people

3. Trends in gender, type of education and age

- 3.1. Gender
- 3.2. Type of education
- 3.3. Age

4. Reflections

¹ The full reference of this book is Vettenburg, N., Deklerck, J. & Siongers, J. (2009). *Jongeren binnenstebuiten. Thema's uit het jongerenleven onderzocht* (Young People Inside Out. Themes of Youth Live Examined). Leuven/Den Haag: Acco.

² The supervisors of the JOP are J. Deklerck (K.U.Leuven), M. Elchardus and J. Siongers (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) and N. Vettenburg (UGent). The coordination is ensured by the Department of Social Welfare Studies (UGent). The researchers who contributed to the publication *Jongeren binnenstebuiten* are T. Boonaert, D. Cops, H. Op de Beeck, L. Roggemans, C. Rombauts, B. Vanhoutte and V. Vyverman. The core mission of the JOP comprises two activities: the systematic analysis of existing research in Flanders, and the development of recurrent measurements in view of charting the world of young people and its evolutions. At the beginning of 2006, a first overview was published in the book *Jongeren van nu en straks – Young people now and later* (Vettenburg, Elchardus and Walgrave (eds)); in 2007 the findings of the first measurement were published in *Jongeren in cijfers en letters. Bevindingen uit de JOP-monitor 1- Young people in Flanders* (Vettenburg, Elchardus and Walgrave (eds.)) For a summary in English, see: www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be, Young people in Flanders: Facts and Figures. Findings of JOP-monitor 1)).

1. INTRODUCTION

The present book elaborates on themes pertaining to young people's social world and is based on the activities of the Youth Research Platform (JOP), namely stocktaking of existing research and the development and application of the Youth Monitor. Wherever possible, this was complemented by secondary analyses on other databases. This book thus makes a valuable complement to *Jongeren in cijfers en letters. Bevindingen uit de JOP-Monitor 1* ("Young People in Flanders: Facts and Figures. Findings of the JOP-Monitor 1") (Vettenburg, Elchardus and Walgrave, 2007), which gave a first description of a large number of themes³. The present book works in greater depth and investigates the following themes: self-esteem, school well-being, fear of crime, democratic citizenship, ICT, and life-course perspectives.

This final chapter presents the main findings per item and pays specific attention to factors such as age, gender and type of education. In conclusion, some general trends and reflections are formulated.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN FINDINGS PER ITEM

2.1 THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SELF-ESTEEM OF FLEMISH YOUNG PEOPLE

Well-being covers various domains. The extent to which young people have a positive image of themselves and the degree to which they feel well at school play an important part in their well-being, particularly during adolescence. The first chapter of the book investigates Flemish young people's self-esteem, or the extent to which they "like themselves". Earlier and current literature studies suggest that most Flemish young people have a relatively positive image of themselves, although there is a group of young people who give themselves a less positive evaluation. International research literature suggests that self-esteem is affected by relationships with people with whom they can strongly identify – the so-called *significant others*. Chapter 1 therefore investigates the nature of these "significant others" who have an impact on Flemish young people's self-esteem. The focus is on parents, friends and teachers.

The analyses presented in chapter 1 show that the quality of the relationship with father and mother has the strongest impact on well-being. As for the importance of friendship, it was found that the *number* of male or female friends has a bigger impact than the *quality* of the friendships. The quality of the relationship with their teacher plays only a minor role in Flemish young people's self-esteem. In a second stage, we examined whether the role these significant others play varies according to the young people's age,

³ For a summary in English: Vettenburg, N., Elchardus, M. & Walgrave, L. (2007) *Being Young in Flanders. The Principal Findings of the JOP-monitor 1*, see www.jeugdonderzoekplatform.be

gender and type of education (GSE/ASE, TSE, VSE – see list of abbreviations at the end of this chapter).

When it comes to the relative influence of parents and friends on the young person's life course, the literature is divided. The continuity model argues that the relationship with father and mother as well as with the best male or female friend remains important for the young person's self-esteem, even when growing older. Conversely, the competition model argues that a shift from parents to friends occurs during adolescence. Our analyses confirm the continuity model: although the impact of the number of male or female friends on self-esteem increases with age, the importance of the relationship with the parents does not diminish significantly.

Although the literature suggests that the acceptance by others is more important for the self-esteem of girls than of boys, we had to reject this hypothesis. The quality of the relationship with the parents and the number of friends has an equal impact on the self-esteem of both gender groups. Only with regard to the quality of the relationship with the teacher, we find a significant difference: this relationship appears to be much more important for the self-esteem of boys than of girls.

The analyses per type of education show that mainly TSE distinguishes itself from GSE/ASE and VSE⁴. The quality of the relationship with the father appears to be more important for young people in TSE than for those in GSE/ASE and VSE. The number of friends is also more important for the self-esteem of young people in TSE than for young people in GSE/ASE.

2.2 SCHOOL WELL-BEING IN SECONDARY EDUCATION. A WIDE VARIETY OF INFLUENCING FACTORS

The second element that is considered important for young people's well-being is the extent to which they feel well at school. This aspect is addressed in the second chapter. Here again, the majority of young people aged 14 and older appear to feel well at school. A minority, about ten percent, does not feel well at school. This finding is not new and became evident in earlier research already. However, it is advisable and necessary to further differentiate this finding on the various dimensions of school well-being as well as on subgroups (gender and type of education).

Three dimensions can be clearly distinguished in general school well-being, namely the pupils' appreciation of the learning contents, their appreciation of the relationships with their teachers, and their appreciation of the school as a whole. Pupils tend to give a slightly higher appreciation to their school perception – as operationalised here – than to the learning contents and the relationships with the teachers.

⁴ ASE: Art Secondary Education (Kunst Secundair Onderwijs); GSE: General Secondary Education (Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs); TSE: Technical Secondary Education (Technisch Secundair Education); VSE: Vocational Secondary Education (Beroeps Secundair Onderwijs).

Feeling well at school at different levels correlates significantly with a positive perspective on the future, a positive community involvement and positive relationships with friends and parents. Feeling supported by the parents, having a certain degree of comfort at home (i.e. a computer with an Internet connection), being in GSE and being female appear to correlate with a more positive feeling of well-being at school.

General school well-being is related to a number of common factors whose impact differs marginally depending on the dimension of school well-being examined. For instance, the appreciation of the learning content is to a large extent affected by a relationship based on trust with friends and by the support from the father, in addition to the perspective on the future. School perception is also affected by community involvement and self-image, besides the perspective on the future. The appreciation of the teachers is mainly connected to community involvement and only to a lesser extent to the perspective on the future.

The gender-based analyses suggest that the perspective on the future and community involvement are important factors for general school well-being, for boys as well as girls. However, the analyses of the three distinct dimensions of school well-being qualify this finding. With both boys and girls, a positive perspective on the future goes together with satisfaction about their education and the learning content and the pleasure they take in their studies. With boys, feeling unhappy at school and wishing to change schools are best predicted by a negative perspective on the future and a negative community involvement; with girls by a negative self-image and the lack of friends they can trust and who share their interests. With boys, a positive appreciation for the teachers correlates with support from the mother and with the type of education they are in: boys in VSE give a more negative appreciation of their relationship with teachers than boys in GSE. With girls this is rather related to community involvement and self-image.

In all types of education, general school well-being correlates significantly with factors of general well-being, i.e. the perspective on the future, community involvement and fear of crime. Other elements that come into play are, in GSE, the support given by the parents, in VSE the relationship with friends (trust) and age, and in TSE the availability of a computer with an Internet connection and the support from the father. The correlation with fear of crime differs significantly depending on the type of education: the less safe pupils in VSE and TSE feel themselves, the better they will feel at school; with pupils in GSE we find the inverse correlation. For the three subcomponents, the explanatory power of the indicators also differs according to the type of education.

2.3 FEAR OF CRIME AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

The third chapter investigates the fear of crime among young people. The topic of insecurity and the accompanying fear of crime has received a lot of attention in recent decades. However, this increased attention has not produced a clear and coherent image of this fear of crime and what it is affected by. In the past few years, scientific research

has shifted from rationalistic to symbolic explanations. Instead of interpreting fear of crime as a direct and therefore logical and rational response to the (risk of) victimisation, these feelings are rather related to wider sociological factors causing insecurity. The fear of crime acts as a kind of 'sponge' for broader feelings of unease and discomfort. However, a constant element within this research tradition remains the scant attention paid to young people's fear of crime, with only a handful of studies focusing on this specific topic.

The aim of this contribution was therefore to widen this limited knowledge. The broad age range of the JOP (14- to 25-year-olds) is an added value, since most other studies into fear of crime with young people are confined to 14- to 18-year-olds. This study was able to make a comparison between the 14-18 age group and the 19-25 age group.

Not all young people feel equally unsafe or safe. Girls feel a lot less safe than boys. Bivariate analyses moreover show that the level of education allows us to differentiate the strength of the fear of crime. Young people in higher education and high-educated people feel less unsafe than young people in secondary education, irrespective of the type of education they are in, and than low-educated people. Conversely, certain socio-demographic features do not correlate with the fear of crime: socio-economic status and age do not affect the fear of crime.

Rationalistic explanations for this fear of crime appear not to hold, or hold only partially. For instance, victimisation does not produce consistent results: only being the victim of a personal offence appears significant, and then only among 14- to 18-year-olds. Being an offender goes together with a lower fear of crime in both age groups. Conversely, a more negative community involvement correlates with a higher fear of crime.

Notable results were obtained with regard to the parental variables: both a better relationship with the mother and close monitoring by both parents (the latter only in the youngest group) correlate with a higher fear of crime. Finally, a number of variables correlate significantly with the fear of crime in both age groups, although there are differences in their relative weight. For instance, the correlation between a leisure pattern oriented towards going out and a lower fear of crime decreases with age, whereas the correlation between the choice of more popular media and a stronger ethnocentric attitude appears to increase in the older age group. The differences in adults' fear of crime and the evolution we established in the correlation between a number of variables and increasing age suggest that the fear of crime is an evolving and dynamic attitude.

2.4 DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

2.4.1 Gender differences

From Chapter 4 onwards, the focus shifts from young people's perceptions – their internal state – to their position in society. A first contribution covers young people and

political participation. Every adult citizen is expected to give evidence of this type of social commitment, which is crucial to the legitimacy of our democratic system.

On the basis of an analysis of 16 different databases, we initially examined the extent to which young adults (aged 14-25) differ from the rest of the population in the domain of political participation. At the same time, we examined whether young people evolve in democratic citizenship between the ages of 14 and 25 and whether there are any differences between boys and girls. Indeed, scientific literature invariably points to gender differences with regard to political participation. This contribution examines the extent to which these differences manifest themselves with young people, and at what age these differences emerge. Chapter 4 investigates young people's political participation on the basis of four indicators: their willingness to vote validly, their participation in alternative political actions, their interest in politics, and extremist voting behaviour (preference for *Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang*, the Flemish far-right party).

When comparing young adults with other age groups on these four variables, it is not always the same pattern that emerges. Like over-65s, young people are less interested in and familiar with politics than the intervening age groups. And yet, they do not shy away from politics more than the other age groups. Indeed, young people are equally prepared to vote validly as the rest of the population. In the 1990s, young people voted for the far right more frequently than other age groups. However, more recent data suggest that the popularity of the extreme right is waning among young people and that young people's preference for the far right is not greater than that of other age groups. Young adults engage in their own political types of action. Compared with older age categories, they are clearly more inclined to sign petitions and they also participate in demonstrations slightly more often. Conversely, consumer boycotts appear to be more something for people aged between 26 and 54.

Between the ages of 14 and 25, a development towards democratic citizenship appears to take place. The intention to vote validly intensifies during adolescence and reaches at least the same level as that of the adult population between the ages of 18 and 20. At the same time, alternative political action increases as well. In this same period, political interest also intensifies, and this trend continues later on. Extremist voting behaviour reaches a peak between 15 and 18 years and then starts decreasing.

However, the development towards democratic citizenship appears to differ between boys and girls. Girls start developing their political interest later than boys and show a noticeably smaller interest in politics at the end of their young adulthood. Moreover, men vote validly slightly more often than women in the age group between 14 and 36, except for the period between 19 and 26, during which intentions to vote validly are equal for both genders. However, girls are less receptive to extremist ideas than boys, and this remains a permanent difference. In the field of alternative political action – notably signing petitions – girls have a lead on boys, but this difference disappears later.

Summarising, we can say that as regards young people's sense of public responsibility, there is no reason for panic. From the age of 20 to 22, young people are as politically

committed and interested as the rest of the population. This means that a major development takes place in the period when young people are at school. This emphasises the role education can play in the development towards democratic citizenship.

2.4.2 Differences according to the type of education

The role of education is reviewed in Chapter 5, which examines the development towards democratic citizenship according to the education received. Earlier research showed that one structural feature of our educational system – the division into different types – plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes, tastes, ideas and practices. That is why we examined how and to what extent the development trajectories towards democratic citizenship differ among the types of education and whether any of the differences found are permanent. Political participation was studied by means of the four indicators referred to in Chapter 4 – the willingness to vote validly, participation in alternative political actions, the interest in politics, and extremist voting behaviour.

As far as the willingness to vote validly is concerned, only a non-significant difference was found between the different types of education at the age of 14, with pupils in VSE coming out worst. The willingness to vote increases in all types of education in the 14-20 age group, but this growth is faster and sets in earlier in GSE than in VSE. This gap persists also after graduating, manifesting itself as a difference between high-educated and low-educated people.

Alternative political participation, which we operationalised as petition-signing, is a common practice among over-20s. Almost half of the population takes part in petitions. Although at the age of 25 there is no longer any appreciable difference between higher- and lower-educated people, at an earlier age there is a large discrepancy between the types of education. At the age of fourteen, 47% of GSE pupils claim that they signed a petition in the previous year, against only 16% in VSE. This discrepancy remains virtually unchanged until the end of secondary education. Among students at universities and higher education colleges, the number of petition signers is exceptionally high.

Also in terms of the interest in politics, the initial difference is not very large at the age of 14. However, during secondary education a relatively strong increase occurs in the political interest among pupils in GSE and TSE, compared with a minor increase in VSE. However, this discrepancy is not permanent. There is a small but non-significant difference between high-educated and low-educated 25-year-olds. Among students at universities and higher education colleges, there is again a remarkably high interest in politics.

Among 14-year-olds, extremist voting behaviour strongly differs according to the type of education they are in: among VSE pupils this preference is 66% higher than among GSE pupils. The latter undergo no noticeable evolution during secondary education. Conversely, among VSE pupils this preference even increases: at the age of 16, half of them say they would vote for the extremist *Vlaams Belang* party. From the age of 19 to

20 years onwards, the appeal of extremist points of view and parties starts declining. The differences between low-educated and high-educated people remain very strong: at the age of 23, the likelihood of low-educated people voting for extremist parties is almost three times bigger than among high-educated people, and this is still the case at the age of 36.

It is clear that the development towards democratic citizenship differs greatly in the different types of education. Some differences persist at a later age and between low- and high-educated people. However, the foundations of democratic citizenship are laid during secondary education.

2.5 YOUNG PEOPLE AND ICT: A VARIED PUBLIC

Young people and ICT appear to go hand in hand in modern society. Young people are confronted with new media every day. It is virtually impossible to imagine young people's lives without the Internet, mobile phones, gaming consoles, etc. Chapter 6 examines the access to and the use of the Internet among 14- to 25-year-olds in Flanders.

Policymakers and scientific literature each have pronounced ideas about young people and ICT. In policy terms, the Lisbon Treaty is of capital importance. The treaty says that Europe should become one of the world's most competitive knowledge-based societies by the year 2010. This economic approach also determines our "economic" conception of children and young people. Scientific literature about the digital gap emphasises the cleavages between Internet access (the first digital gap) and Internet use (the second digital gap). These cleavages are determined by age, gender, level of education and socio-economic status (SES).

Our analyses confirm the persistence of these cleavages in the domain of ICT. Ten percent of young people have no Internet access at all, whilst not all young people have equal access to the Internet: the younger population, boys, higher-educated young people as well as young people from the higher socio-economic strata have more access to the Internet than "older" young people, girls, lower-educated young people and young people from families with a lower socio-economic status.

About six out of ten young people have Internet access in their own room. Internet access at home increases with the age of the young person. Outside the home, young people most often have Internet access with friends (58%) and at school (43%). Public places such as social services, community centres or cultural centres are less popular for Internet use among young people.

Not all Internet applications are equally popular, with search engines, e-mail, chat and playing music or films in particular scoring well. Starting from these different Internet applications, we were able to distil four different types of Internet use: entertainment, information, communication, and commercial activities. Here again, we found differences among young people in terms of age, gender and education. Each of the different types

of Internet use is more frequented by boys than by girls. Internet use for entertainment purposes is more popular with young people having the lowest education levels, whereas the other types are used less by this group. And while Internet use for entertainment and communication purposes decreases with age, the use of this medium for information and commercial purposes increases with age.

These findings suggest that the concept of the "Internet generation" should be qualified. There exists a great diversity within the younger generations with regard to both Internet access and Internet use. Secondly, questions can be raised as to the economic image of the child, the position of the child within Europe's ambition to become one of the world's most competitive knowledge-based societies. Young people may feel pressure from this unilateral approach to Internet use solely for knowledge-based economic purposes. Internet use that does not meet these criteria may be labelled as "deviant". Thirdly and following on this, the current study place calls for an examination of the significance these young people attach to their Internet use: do young people view the Internet in the same way as adults? Does the Internet, in their experience, improve their opportunities for personal development? For which young people? In what way does the Internet affect young people's socialisation process and how do they perceive this?

2.6 LIFE-COURSE PERSPECTIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The final chapter investigates young people's life-course perspectives and focuses on two research questions. First of all, it was examined whether young people's perspectives on the future develop along different life paths. Next, it was examined whether these different life paths can be related to their ideal of self-fulfilment and to being in the "moratorium phase" or not. Young people are in the moratorium phase when they have experienced fewer transitions than may be expected on the basis of their chronological age, the "major responsibilities" of real life being postponed temporarily.

The data provide evidence for the existence of two different life paths: the family-oriented life path and the ego-oriented life path. The family-oriented life path or perspective on life refers to people who focus their perspectives mainly on family and relatives. These respondents wish to devote more time to persons from their primary network in the future, especially their children and their partner, and they want to devote their leisure time to their family in the future. They intend to devote more time to household tasks, doing things with the children and visiting relatives. Their future lifestyle involves the following elements: raising children, living in the countryside, spending more time with their partner, having more time for odd jobs about the house and, in general, living a quieter life. Young people choosing the ego-oriented life path or perspective on life want to do something totally different with their lives than young people choosing the family-oriented life path. They are people who wish to live in the city and travel a lot. They want to live in a flat in the centre of a large city, and they intend to go out a lot in their leisure time, with friends to the pub or the cinema. Cultural and social participation also play an important part in their lives.

The choice for either life path is clearly linked to the strength of young people's focus on their self-fulfilment and to being in the moratorium phase or not. This is where the answer to the second research question lies. Young people who think that self-fulfilment is very important and who are still in the moratorium phase will choose the ego life path more often. The family life path is especially popular among young people who are less interested in their self-fulfilment and who have gone through the moratorium phase already. It is therefore quite plausible that the different life paths are related to different value patterns or life views, with a conflict or at least a clear difference arising between the more traditional ethic and the more recent self-fulfilment ethic.

3. TRENDS ACCORDING TO GENDER, TYPE OF EDUCATION AND AGE

Jongeren in cijfers en letters ("Young People: facts and figures") (Vettenburg et al., 2007) concluded that a majority of young people are relatively well off and are doing relatively well, although it also highlighted a number of social differences and inequalities among young people. The present book investigates the differences among young people in even greater depth by applying multivariate analysis techniques. The persistence of social differences among young people appears clearly from the summary of our findings. Our society has clearly dealt with various material and structural limitations, and we cannot deny that various conceptual frames of references have become less important than in the past. At the same time, the number of domains where we are expected to make choices and decisions has increased exponentially. This definitely applies to young people, who are expected to make decisions with regard to education, political participation, use of the media, the future course of their lives, etc. It may be daunting to have to make so many choices, wondering whether you have made the right decision. It may increase feelings of uncertainty and fear and affect aspects such as self-image, well-being or fear of the unknown (or more concretely, fear of crime).

It would seem that all young people deal with these choices in the same, unique way and are confronted with uncertainties in the same way. However, the different chapters of the present book suggest that young people do not make their decisions or choose their behaviours and ideas in such a unique way. Strict rules of conduct may have disappeared, but young people keep doing what is expected of them. These boundaries are no longer solely determined by predefined structural limitations but are given a more cultural content today through for instance gender and education. Ideas and behaviours differ according to gender and education, and these differences can also be noted when it comes to self-image, school well-being and the fear of crime. However, they are not constant throughout the life course. Gender identity and the cultural boundaries fixed by the levels of education are constructed gradually. Adolescence is an important phase in this regard. During adolescence, ideas and preferences are crystallised and young people develop their social maturity. This growth process may also cause more pronounced boundaries or differences between boys and girls and between adolescent with different levels of education. The following paragraphs summarise the main differences between

boys and girls, between young people in different types of education, and between young people in different age groups.

3.1 GENDER

In terms of well-being, hardly any differences between boys and girls, if any, were found with regard to both self-esteem and school well-being, although girls express a greater appreciation for the learning contents than boys. However, in other domains the differences between boys and girls are more substantial. Girls feel a lot less safe than boys. Moreover, they are significantly less interested in politics than boys. In general, boys vote validly more frequently than girls in the age period from 14 to 36. Conversely, girls appear to be less receptive to extremist ideas than boys. Significant differences between boys and girls in terms of alternative political action do not occur in all ages. However, when significant differences do occur, we typically find that girls participate more in alternative political action than boys. Girls consequently participate in politics in different ways than boys. With regard to ICT, we found differences between boys and girls as well. Boys have more Internet access and also make more use of the Internet than girls. This difference characterises both general Internet use and the specific types of Internet use, entertainment, information, communication and commercial activities. Finally, girls more often opt for a family-oriented life path and its focus on family leisure activities and unwinding, centred on the primary network.

The analyses of self-esteem and school well-being also investigated whether the explanatory force of the indicators differs according to gender. Here again, some differences were noted. For instance, the relationship with the teacher is more important for the self-esteem of girls than of boys. With regard to general school well-being, the same factors, viz. the perspective on the future and community involvement, are the best predictors. However, among boys the responsiveness of the mother also has an impact on school well-being, whereas with girls it is self-image that is important. This appears to apply most to the "appreciation of the teachers" dimension. As regards school perception, with boys it is mainly the perspective on the future that comes into play, with girls it is their self-image again. The first two chapters allow us to conclude that the evaluation of the well-being of girls is more closely linked to the evaluation of the school than is the case for boys.

3.2 TYPE OF EDUCATION

With regard to general school well-being, we also found a difference between pupils in VSE and pupils in GSE. VSE pupils have a lower school well-being, and this is clearly related to the "appreciation of the teachers" dimension. VSE pupils report a worse relationship with their teachers. No significant differences occur in well-being in terms of learning contents and school perception.

In secondary education, there are no differences regarding fear of crime: young people in GSE feel as (un)safe as young people in TSE/VSE. However, this changes when they switch to higher education: young people in higher education feel significantly safer than young people in secondary education. This effect persists after graduation: higher-educated students (college/university) feel significantly safer than lower-educated young people (secondary education at most).

Young people's political participation is strongly differentiated according to their level of education. These differences between high-educated and low-educated young people are already present in secondary education and persist after graduation. Among young people in secondary education, pupils in vocational education are in general least interested in politics. They have the lowest intention to vote validly and the highest intention to vote for the far right, and they also sign petitions less often. Conversely, young people in GSE express a greater political commitment. This difference persists after the transition to higher education. And after graduation, it is especially higher-educated people who manifest a greater democratic sense of public responsibility at all levels.

When it comes to ICT, education remains a determinant factor as well. Low- and medium-educated people have less access to the Internet and use it less often. Moreover, respondents with a lower level of education use the Internet mainly for entertainment purposes and to a lesser extent for information, communication and commercial purposes.

Finally, young people having a higher education degree have other perspectives on the future than young people having no higher education degree. Young people possessing a higher-education degree more often choose an ego-centred life path, with the prospect of life in the city and leisure activities that are oriented towards going out, travelling, self-fulfilment, participation in social life, etc.

The type of education also affects self-esteem and well-being at school. With regard to self-esteem, TSE appears to distinguish itself clearly from GSE, ASE and VSE. The quality of the relationship with the father appears to be significantly more important for TSE pupils than for GSE, ASE and VSE pupils. The number of friends is significantly more important for the self-esteem of young people in TSE than in GSE and ASE. With regard to school well-being, GSE distinguishes itself from VSE and TSE mainly on the importance of the fear of crime and the relationship with the mother. In VSE and TSE, stronger fear of crime are accompanied by greater school well-being. This appears to be the case mainly for TSE with regard to the appreciation of the learning content. In GSE, fewer fear of crime are accompanied by greater school well-being. This applies particularly to the appreciation of the relationship with the teachers. In GSE, support by the mother is accompanied by a positive school perception, whereas in VSE and TSE this factor hardly comes into play.

3.3 AGE

Self-esteem is not only affected by gender and type of education, but also by age. We found that the impact of the number of friends on self-esteem increases with age. However, this does not significantly reduce the importance of the relationship with the parents. The relationship with the father and the mother as well as with the best male or female friend remains important for the young person's self-esteem, even when growing older.

The present book investigates school well-being among pupils aged 14 and older in secondary education. The age margin is therefore not very broad and does not produce any differences in terms of school well-being. The analyses in *Jongeren in cijfers en letters* ("Young People: facts and figures") (Vettenburg et al., 2007) show that pupils in secondary education score worse than higher education students on all dimensions of school well-being.

As for the fear of crime, no differences were found with increasing age. However, it does seem that in the course of growing older, (relative) differences emerge in the factors affecting the fear of crime.

Moreover, like over-65s, young people are less interested in politics than the intervening age groups. In addition, we found that between the ages of 14 and 25, a growth towards democratic citizenship does take place. The voting intention strongly increases during adolescence and reaches at least the level of the adult population between 18 and 20 years. At the same time, alternative political action increases as well. Political interest intensifies in this same period too, and this trend continues later on. Extreme voting behaviour reaches a peak between 15 and 18 years and then starts decreasing.

The growth towards democratic citizenship occurs among all young people, in GSE as well as in VSE or TSE, and with boys as well as girls. However, for some aspects of democratic citizenship this development is initiated a bit later in vocational education. This gap between the different types of education never disappears completely. Girls and boys also go through a relatively parallel political development process, which means that the original differences at the age of 14 generally persist at a later age. There is one exception to this parallel evolution, though: between the ages of 14 and 25, girls' political interest increases only marginally, whereas for boys there is a marked rise. As a result, whereas there is hardly any difference in terms of political interest between girls and boys at the age of 14, a clear gap manifests itself at the age of 25.

The "ICT" theme we investigated also shows differences according to age. In the 14-25 age group, the rule is that the younger they are, the more access they have to the Internet and the more they are actually using the Internet. Conversely, we found that as they grow older, young people have increasing access to the Internet in their own room. Moreover, we also found differences in the nature of Internet use. At an early age, the Internet is used predominantly for entertainment and communication purposes, at an older age for information and commercial purposes.

As described above, young people can choose between two life paths: the ego-oriented life path and the family-oriented life path. Here also we found evolutions in terms of age, in addition to for instance differentiation in terms of gender. Whereas the ego-oriented life path is predominant at first, we found that when growing older, people in the group of 14- to 36-year-olds opt less for the ego-oriented life path and focus more on a future family existence and the accompanying lifestyle.

4. REFLECTIONS

The youth monitor is a treasure-trove of information allowing in-depth research into a wide range of aspects. The present book *Jongeren binnenstebuiten* ("Young People Inside Out") is based on a number of secondary analyses of this material, partly in combination with other quantitative and qualitative data available.

It enables a deeper analysis and interpretation of what is going on among young people in Flanders today, what the differences and similarities in their lifestyle are, how certain qualities develop through puberty, adolescence and young adulthood and their potential social significance. It provides new data on how education, politics and other social institutions can address them adequately in order to offer (even) better support for young people – including the future democratic potential – how to deal with risks and vulnerable groups, or what the broader social developments – for instance in the attention paid to objective and subjective insecurity – may mean for young people.

This has produced some unexpected insights and findings. For instance, bivariate analyses initially appeared to show that the more friends young people have and the more they belong to a delinquent peer group, the more frequently they will have a lower fear of crime. However, after checking these original effects in the regression analysis, it appeared that they could be explained by a leisure pattern that is oriented mainly towards going out. The more young people adopt such a pattern, the safer they appear to feel. Another example is the significance of the media. As regards the influence of media preference, it appeared that the more young people prefer popular media, in contrast to a preference for elitist media, the less safe they appear to feel. Moreover, this effect appears to intensify with age. This is an interesting correlation as well, since it may be important for media education or for establishing (ethical) quality criteria for the media. It also appears that school well-being is best predicted by elements of general well-being and is hardly, if at all, related to school factors or to belonging to a certain social class. With regard to the types of education, there were some surprising findings as well, for instance with regard to community involvement and fear of crime among pupils, or the unexpected differences between GSE, VSE and TSE. These and similar elements suggest that we should be very cautious in formulating far-reaching interpretations of correlations which in subsequent analyses appear not to apply equally to all subgroups or which are affected by other factors.

The rich source material provided by the JOP Monitor, which offers the advantage of being repeated systematically in time, enables a profound understanding of the social evolution of youth culture in relation to for instance changing family structures, new demands placed on education, evolutions in politics, the development of ICT and Internet use. Some elements appear to be more stable than we initially expected, such as the importance of the relationship with the parents or the type of education, but also a number of gender differences within a society in full development.

A great deal of elements in the database (JOP-Monitor 1) have not been investigated yet. Although we examined a number of aspects of gender, type of education and age, this study did not systematically assess how they affect young people's well-being and attitudes. Still, the results suggest that the different agents of socialisation help to shape young people's feelings, ideas, preferences and behaviours. This should make us aware of the extent to which socialising institutions can play a part in young people's well-being and of the responsibility they hence bear, especially in more vulnerable groups. It is often assumed that socialising institutions compete with each other, particularly during adolescence. The contributions in this book suggest that the agents of socialisation need not compete with each other and that, also during adolescence, peers, the school and the parents, and even the media, can have an impact on young people's feelings and attitudes which is complementary rather than conflicting.

However, since this was not analysed systematically, a further in-depth analysis of specific themes surveyed in the JOP-Monitor 1 is required. Examples are the family situation, young people and their leisure, their relationships with friends, the significance of social life, etc. This confirms the necessity of further analyses of the material that is already available and that was collected in the past and will be collected in the future by the youth research platform.

The publication *Jongeren van nu en straks* ("Young People now and later") (Vettenburg, Elchardus & Walgrave, 2006) enumerated a large number of gaps in youth research which we will not repeat here. This goes beyond the material that was and is collected by the JOP-Monitor itself. By choosing the JOP-Monitor, we opted for a quantitative approach in order to obtain a representative picture of Flemish youth. This approach is necessary if we are to make well-informed statements about Flemish youth and chart a (youth) policy in tune with the aspirations, needs, wishes, preferences and ideas of Flemish young people. Only thus can the persisting social differences be charted as well. The research results raise questions for further research, again mainly concerning the need for further in-depth analysis, in other words the quantitative and qualitative deepening of such diverse topics as family, school, leisure, political participation, etc. This partly requires a further quantitative approach. We need adequate recurrent (cross-sectional) survey research among young people. This will enable us to chart trends among young people and to examine the effect of policy measures and changing social circumstances on young people. Regular survey research among young people makes it possible to gear policies to today's youth, not yesterday's. Moreover, additional quantitative research will prove useful for certain groups. For financial reasons, the JOP-Monitor is not organised face to face but through a postal survey. This approach offers several advantages, such

as a relatively low cost price and the possibility to take a completely random sample. However, it also has a disadvantage. Socially weak groups and foreign-language speakers are generally underrepresented in postal surveys. Next to this, the database (JOP-Monitor 1), which comprises 2,503 young people in the 14-25 age group, contains a too small and too diverse group of young people of foreign origin. This excludes using ethnicity as a background indicator.

In addition, there is a clear need of further complementary qualitative research. Such research would enable a better interpretation of the present findings, for instance by introducing perception research into various themes which are important to young people. The central theme in this regard is the young person's well-being at school, a socialising institution which is of very great importance during puberty, adolescence and to a certain extent in young adulthood. What does school well-being mean for young people from different social backgrounds, with different living conditions and life styles and in the different types of education? What are the consequences, for instance for the development of a problematic or non-problematic life course? Other themes could be envisaged as well, such as the significance of Internet use. Here also the environment of the young people can offer an important complement to data and insights gained on a quantitative basis. Moreover, qualitative methods may be more appropriate for groups which are hard to survey, such as young children, young people from socially weaker environments, or foreign-language speakers.

Finally, a major challenge resides in the insights which are to be gained into young people outside Flanders. How can the insights provided by this Flemish research be linked to the French-speaking part of Belgium? Or to other countries in Europe, and beyond? What scientific knowledge can we acquire about similarities and differences, about culture-related differentiations, about unity in international diversity? We need Europe-funded research in order to create optimal opportunities for young people. In order to achieve a European youth-friendly policy and to provide an answer to the position of young people, in all their diversity, within our complex western society, a lot more will have to be "turned inside out".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Vettenburg, N., Elchardus, M., & Walgrave, L. (Red.). (2006). *Jongeren van nu en straks, overzicht en synthese van recent Vlaams jeugdonderzoek*. Leuven: LannooCampus.

Vettenburg, N., Elchardus, M., & Walgrave, L. (Red.). (2007). *Jongeren in cijfers en letters. Bevindingen uit de JOP-monitor 1*. Leuven: LannooCampus.

Vettenburg, N., Elchardus, M., & Walgrave, L. (2007). *Young People in Flanders: Facts and Figures. Findings of the JOP-Monitor 1*, www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|---|
| ASE: | Art Secondary Education (Kunst Secundair Onderwijs) |
| et al.: | et alii (and others) |
| GSE: | General Secondary Education (Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs) |
| ICT: | Information and Communication Technologies |
| JOP: | JeugdOnderzoeksPlatform (Youth Research Platform) |
| TSE: | Technical Secondary Education (Technisch Secundair Education) |
| VSE: | Vocational Secondary Education (Beroeps Secundair Onderwijs) |