# Youth work and its forgotten history. A view from Flanders.

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*It is a common belief that organised leisure activities, such as youth work, produce positive outcomes for the participants. There is a problem however: youth work has a limited reach. Those who seem to be the most in need of this kind of organised leisure activities do not participate. The discussion in youth research and youth policy focuses therefore on the question how to reach the 'hard-to-reach'. However new difficulties show up. New and more open kinds of youth work don't seem to have the same 'positive power' as the so called traditional youth movements. They even seem to create counterproductive effects. We call this mechanism the 'accessibility paradox'. The more we try to move young people into youth work, the worse it seems to get. In a historical excursion we argue that this is not a new question, nor do we give new answers. As a conclusion we shift the focus of the discussion to a question that offers more broadening perspectives: From the question of accessibility of youth work provision to questioning the surplus value of youth work as seen from a historical, political and social pedagogical perspective.*

## Youth Work is a valuable practice, but does not reach (much with) the hard-to-reach

Academic research in Flanders -as in UK, Germany, USA, …- underpins the belief that youth work (especially if it concerns structured programmes) produces positive outcomes for its participants. Participation in structured youth activities contributes to academic results (Fredricks & Eccles 2006), to the development of social and cultural capital (Dworkin, Larson & Hansen 2003), to mental health (Mahoney, Schweder & Stattin 2002), it promotes a sense of citizenship (Williamson 1997), contributes to the process of achieving independence whilst maintaining a good relation with the parents (Larson, Pearce, Sullivan & Jarret 2007), prevents all kinds of risk behaviour (Mahoney, Stattin & Lord 2004), leads to a stronger position in the labour market (Jarret, Sullivan & Watkins 2005), nurtures democratic skills and attitudes (Eccles, Barber, Stone & Hunt 2003), … Developmental and community psychologists and sociologists seem to find each other promptly in further unravelling the relation between participation and positive outcomes.

The 'naturalness' of this relation is also expressed in the media. Very recently youth work in Flanders got twice the headlines in the newspapers. First heading said "Chiro and Scouts have a societal yield of €300.000.000". These two popular uniformed youth movements[22] were ascribed this value because of the huge numbers of volunteers in their local troops. If their work would be done by professional child carers this would involve considerable costs to society. The second news item focused on the Flemish chief-scout and his switch-over to politics. With this step a tradition is maintained. The scouts delivered, as did other youth movements, several members of parliament and ministers -even a prime minister- in recent

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[22] Whereas these types of youth work in most countries would be described as '(uniformed) youth organisations', in Flanders we still call them 'youth movements'. This refers to the historical legacy of the student movements, but in contradiction to the student movement the current 'youth movements' are more structured and they are explicitly focused on leisure time. Some authors speak of youth movement in the first sense and youth movement in the second sense (see further).

decades. Events like that strengthen the idea that our youth movements offer a breeding ground for active, engaged and responsible policymakers.

There are many similar news items focusing on the huge individual and social value of youth work. The media usually don't bother with disentangling cause and effect, nor do most of the youth work researchers seem to do (Fredricks & Eccles 2006). Moreover, it is striking how these messages again and again establish the image that 'youth work' is synonymous to 'youth movement' (especially in Flanders) or 'structured leisure programmes'.

It is clear that policymakers are influenced by these messages from researchers and other opinion makers. Fully in line with these positive messages they are especially concerned about the fact that youth movement membership is unequally distributed across the population of children and young people. Low-skilled young people, young people from low-income families and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds –often lumped together under the label 'vulnerable young people'- are underrepresented in the youth movement. Also in other western countries their attendance in structured youth activities is below average (Larson 1994, Williamson 1997). Let that be exactly the groups who seem to be the most in need of all kind of positive outcomes described above. Hence, participation is a key theme in youth work discussion.


**The beginning of a systematic youth policy in Flanders: neutral and a-pedagogical**

The discussion seems to neglect the questions what youth work essentially is, what youth work does in practice. The focus lies on the question how to raise participation rates. The low participation rate of different groups of young people in youth work is not a new finding. It seems to be a recurrent problem in youth work policy, in Flanders as in other countries (see for instance Jephcott 1954; Müller et al., 1964; Eggleston, 1975; Williamson, 1997). In most countries it has in fact been the drive behind a huge differentiation in youth work supported by an active, but a-pedagogical youth policy.

From 1945 on the government started to build a national youth policy in Belgium. A central place in this policy was allocated to youth work, and more in particular to the youth movement. After World War II the popularity of the youth movements declined in most European countries. This was not the case in Flanders. For the government put the youth movement at the heart of its youth policy. In the following quote Van der Bruggen & Picalausa (1946) endorse the central position of the youth movement in Belgian youth policy: *'Through governmental measures and through their own initiative, the leaders of the youth movements are now taking a definitive responsibility towards the needs of youth in this changed world: physical health and fitness, moral and character education, vocational guidance and apprenticeship, education toward family responsibility, and an adequate civic education adapted to the technical and moral needs of democracy. The youth movements are firmly decided to help solve all these problems by the influencing of the public opinion and of the government, by a close co-operation with one another, by the extension of their action to the mass of youth, and by the complete and well-integrated education they aim to give to their members, alongside the family and the school, so as to enrich their personality and equip*

*them to accomplish the great task of rebuilding their country and helping to make a better world.'*

The youth movements were at that time amongst the most attractive leisure time activities. They were well-known and eye-catching (cf. the glorious pilgrimages to Lourdes and Rome and the frequently organised mass spectacles and jubilation festivities). They were tightly integrated in their respective mother organisations and their leaders had a fairly big influence on policymakers. The existing youth organisations, mainly catholic, didn't want government to set up new forms of youth work or own youth organisations but asked explicitly to orient 'unattached young people' to the youth movements. Government fully responded to their wishes. It recognised some other, more specific youth organisations and club houses but classified these youth work forms as 'support services for social, technical or civic education'. They were supposed to refer their clients to the youth movements for 'further harmonious education' (Deshormes 1953). Even the fresh air cures of the health insurance organisations were incited to win souls for the youth movement. Government did not interfere in the content of youth work practice. Therefore Flemish youth policy was called neutral and a-pedagogical (Collard 1957, Peeters 1974). The question what youth work is or can be, given the specific conditions in which different young people grow up, is left aside.

**Declining participation, increasing differentiation and the policy of moving up**

By the end of the fifties the conviction gained ground that the youth movement could not grow into a mass movement. The format was considered 'too demanding'. Nevertheless government maintained confidence in the youth movement. The existing youth movements developed new forms of work to attract the unattached young people. Supported by policymakers and academics the youth movement considered itself as the crux around which new forms of open youth work would take shape (Peeters 1963, Cammaer et al 1967). However the profile of the group that was reached by the youth movements did not change a lot. Insofar the new forms of youth work reached some of the so called unattached young people, they didn't succeed in moving them on to the youth movement. In that time the national chaplain of Chiro launched his tea bag metaphor. Members of Chiro should function as a tea bag in the water and spread their beneficent influence to the masses. Cardijn, the founder of Christian Workers Youth, used a similar metaphor. He spoke about 'the yeast and the bread'.

Nevertheless, inspired by British and Dutch examples, open youth work gains ground. Particular in the bigger cities this happens increasingly without interference of the youth movement. Stimulated by a certain moral panic local governments started to focus more specifically at the unattached, workless youth. Open youth work grew into an established youth work form. Thus youth work participation rates increase, but the politics of moving on (catching the unattached and guiding them to the youth movement) did not work. Rather we saw the development of two kinds of open youth work: work with middle-class youth (often young people who grew too old for the youth movement) and work with particular target groups (jobless youth and later also immigrant and underprivileged youth). These work forms soon start to employ professional youth workers. One could observe a growing gap between 'general youth work' (working with middle class children and young people offering them

meaningful leisure activities) and 'specific youth work' (working with target groups offering additional or compensatory educational support). For this kind of youth work the gap between the lifeworld of the young and the lifeworld of the youth workers legitimised professionalisation of youth work.

**Working with young people and working at young people**

In broad outlines this is the situation as we know it today. Flanders has a high 'youth work index'. For each 250 young people there is a youth work initiative. There are many different work forms, but the distinction between the so called 'general youth work' and 'specific youth work' has remained. The former is labelled traditional or classic youth work, the latter is called 'youth social work'. Table 1 shows in brief the characteristics of both kinds of youth work.

|  | **General** | **Specific** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| Participants | Middle-class | Vulnerable groups |
| Youth worker | Young people, volunteers | Young adults, professionals |
| Frequency | Once a week, weekend | Each day, not always in weekend |
| Radius of action | Leisure time, recreation | Adjusting and compensating for deficient experiences in family or school |
| Activities | Structured program | Unstructured, open |
| Educational philosophy | Holistic | Specific |
| Position in community | Splendid isolation | Uncomfortable inclusion, instrumental |

This is an archetypical description. Actually there are many volunteers working in youth social work for instance. With regard to the fourth and fifth characteristics there are several comments to make. The activities in youth social work are often as structured as in youth work and the educational philosophy is to a large extent the same, which means: implicit and focused on (rather obscure) processes (see Williamson & Middlemis, 1999).

Apart from the distinguished client groups the biggest difference seems to be situated in the way both youth work forms are treated by (local) governments. The attitudes and expectations towards various youth work forms are clearly different. Concerning the youth social work government puts aside its neutral attitude and expects clear results on various themes, like lowering of troubles in the neighbourhood and reducing school drop-out. The ideal remains to move young people into the volunteer youth work. This governmental attitude creates a distinction between youth work working with young people and youth work working at young people (Jeffs, 1997). This is a distinction that is firmly embedded in youth work policy in most European countries and one that grew stronger with the neo-liberal political hegemony since the end of the seventies. It's not by accident that UK youth work in the seventies evolved from a universal, needs-led service –as stipulated in the Fairbairn-Milson report- to a budget led, outcome focused service for areas in high social need. Fairbairn-Milson was

hardly published when Thatcher was appointed Secretary of State of Education (Davies, 1999a; Wylie, 2001).

In recent years we did witness some shifts in thinking regarding the purpose of youth work – *'connexions'* with schooling and labour market purposes are more emphasised for instance- but the discussion does not go beyond methodical questions: which methods are the best to reach the hard-to-reach? The debate on what youth work is or can be on individual and on societal level is pushed away by an instrumental youth work policy. Moreover this instrumental focus leads to other unintended and unwanted consequences. For instance the reinforcement of the dividing lines between young people: these dividing lines -partly an answer to different needs and cultures, partly blowing up and even creating differences- that have been drawn in young people's neighbourhoods and in their schools are now reinforced in leisure time. This is a situation that should at least raise questions with regards to the democratising and other positive youth work effects listed above, for it seems not very difficult to act democratic amongst like-minded souls. Furthermore, this situation confronts us with a youth work paradox: youth work offers a more open provision to attract groups of young people that differ from middle class standards of good development, but at the same time these kinds of youth work do not meet the standards of what good (e.g. efficient and effective) youth work should be.

**Going beyond the youth work paradox?**

The emphasis on increasing participation rates has led to a differentiation in youth work forms and to a schism between youth work and youth social work. The situation in Flanders however is slightly different from that in most other European countries. Whereas in most parts of the western world the participation rates in 'traditional' youth organisations have dramatically dropped (Hart, 2006), they are still fairly high in Flanders. The Flemish youth movements have known a difficult period in the eighties but are still alive and kicking. As a consequence both kinds of youth work -general and specific- are clearly included in one youth policy, whereas until shortly in most countries the relation between uniformed youth organisations and youth social work (usually simply called youth work) is not an item. It is only recently that in some countries the role of the traditional youth organisations concerning the broader youth policy is reconsidered. In London for instance the Scouts will be given grants and publicity to attract young people. This is a part of Johnson's Time for Action plan, which aims to tackle the causes of teenage violence and criminality (Bennet, 2008).

The example shows that the connections between different kinds of youth work could open up perspectives to go beyond the dividing lines between young people. Accessibility is also a key-word in Flemish youth policy. The example shows also a clear restriction however: accessibility only seems important in one way, from 'youth social work' to 'youth work'. Sixty years after the first youth policy steps the civilising discourse of moving up from 'youth work working at youth' to 'youth working with youth' is still unaffected. The youth work field has grown (although it stayed principally within the boundaries of leisure time), youth work policy has been decentralised, participation has become a common word in youth work discussion, … but the basic principles have remained the same. The youth movement is seen

as the 'real and natural' youth work, the highest point to reach for young people (hardly surprising with all our boy-scout-MP's). Youth social work represents a kind of second class youth work for second class young people. Youth work researchers underpin this distinction by stating that more open kinds of youth work don't have the same 'positive powers' as the traditional youth movements or even seem to create counter-productive effects. Open youth centres for instance bring along drugs, consumerism, aggression and troubles in the neighbourhood (Dishion, McCord and Poulin 1999; Mahoney, Stattin and Lord 2004).

This brings youth social work in a very ambiguous position. It is needed as long as 'real youth work' is not accessible for everyone, but in the meantime it is said to hinder the accessibility of general youth work. Youth social work has no identity of its own. It has an interim status and, at best, a derived identity: it has to stop the gaps left by general youth work. Youth social work is as vulnerable as its clients, a position that led to a crisis of the youth work profession (Banks 1996). It does not fit in the traditional youth work ideology (voluntary work, young people leading young people, work restricted to leisure time, …) and above all youth social workers need a budget to do their work. So if they don't succeed in their mission of moving up the unattached youth, what's the point in organising youth social work? Solely to prevent young people from boredom as Furlong et al. (1997) put it? To put it mildly, this does not seem a very ambitious mission.


**Giving youth work an identity of its own**

The interim status of youth social work determines the way we look at its participants: they have a not-yet identity. They are doing better than 'hanging around kids', but are not yet behaving as they should. Policymakers seem to hope that the intervention of youth social work will civilise those vulnerable young people so they can participate in 'normal', volunteer youth work and enjoy the benefits from this real work. Clearly, that is an illusion, but an enduring illusion. One of its consequences is that the highest achievable purpose with regards to the positive outcomes described above seems to be 'individual empowerment within the existing societal balances of power'.
So the civilising politics of moving up do not work, but maintaining the separate circuits won't either. Therefore we must have a close look at the fundamental principles of our youth work definition. They seem evident, but how fundamental are they, how 'natural' and how 'original'?
In this respect it seems difficult for youth workers to articulate what youth work is all about (Ingram & Harris 2005). France and Wiles (1997) recorded this definition: '*Youth work is social education and social education is … what youth workers do*'. Or as Baizerman (1996) puts it: '*Youth workers do youth work they say, and often this is a vague category because they tend to claim that their practice is ineffable, or artistic, a craft which can be seen but not described or analysed*'. He continues: '*Youth work praxis has many forms worldwide and it is necessary to accept this and not urge a single model. A definition of youth work as a family of practices gives legitimacy to this variety*'.
The lack of a clear identity however means that youth work is vulnerable to instrumental forces. As Howard Williamson (1995) states: '*If anything goes it is hard to identify the defining features of youth work.*' The German author Nörber calls youth work therefore an

*Allzweckwaffe* (a weapon for all targets) and he adds: '*Wer für alles offen ist, ist nicht ganz dicht*' (Nörber 2005).

To construct the identity of youth work we need to overcome three big shortcomings in actual youth work theory: (1) Youth work theory is a-pedagogical and not funded in practice. (2) Youth work theory is a-political and restricted to individual empowerment. And (3) youth work theory is a-historical representing the (middle class) youth movement as the real and original youth work. These critiques are important to give shape to broadening youth work research in the future.

### (1) Youth work theory is a-pedagogical

The increasing emphasis on outcome focused work means that youth work policy is not neutral anymore, but it is still a-pedagogical. We discuss the worth of different work forms and desired outcomes. We do that to a large extent apart from the youth workers and young people whom it concerns. As a consequence youth work lacks theory that is funded in practice. That is not a new criticism. The British authors Jeffs and Smith came to the same conclusion in their 1987 book '*Youth Work*'. The German authors Giesecke, Mollenhauer, Müller and Kentler wrote already in 1964 a book called '*Was ist Jugendarbeit?*' (What is Youth Work?). The authors started from the finding that youth work was stranded in 'Praktizismus', but lacked every theory. As far as we have youth work theory now, it is built up from psychological and from sociological perspective. Respective key questions are: Why is it important for young individuals to participate in youth work? And: What is youth work's value for society? The more youth work seems to gain societal approval, the less social pedagogues seem to interfere in the youth work discussion. It is only recently that pedagogical voices in youth work research regain some strength (see Jeffs and Smith, 2005; Stein et al., 2005). As a matter of fact the same goes for social work theory (Lorenz, 1999, 2001; Petrie et al., 2006).

Social pedagogical research can help us in finding an answer to underexposed questions. Youth work research should focus less on the question which learning outcomes youth work should produce and pay more attention to the question how youth work interferes in the learning of young people. We need pedagogical research that goes inside youth work and shines a light on the social pedagogical nature of youth work from the perspective of young people and youth workers themselves (see Spence, et al., 2007). Therefore we need to go beyond the thesis that youth work is '*an art*' (Young, 2006) or '*a craft which can be seen but not described or analysed*' (Baizerman, 1996).

### (2) Youth work theory is a-political

Youth work is supposed to emancipate young people. The meaning of that concept is filled in in many different ways, but as we saw above 'individual empowerment' seems to be the highest achievable purpose for youth work. Youth work policy is not about social change in an unequal society (Taylor, 1987), but seems obsesses by the quest for more effective methods to 'organise' young people. The question is which elements inherent in our youth work definition possibly restrict the emancipatory force of youth work? How emancipatory can youth work be if we insist on the fact that youth work should be run by young people

themselves, or that it should be restricted to work in leisure time, or that youth work quality can be measured by looking at its individual outcomes, …? Do these characteristics really provide a royal way to emancipation for every child? Or is it rather the reflection of a policy context in which individual autonomy and responsibility are overvalued? It seems as if the interim status (and the hierarchical inferiority) of youth social work is the reflection of the destiny of all social work in a residual policy context where the pursuit of social cohesion determines the agenda, rather than the pursuit of social justice (Lister, 2000)?

Jenkinson (2002) states: '*Too much youth work practice has remained at a recreational level and not enough thought has been given to standing back and evaluating the work, asking; 'why do we do what we do'?', 'what is the purpose of it?', 'what is its aim?*'. The author concludes that there are 'many examples of excellent youth work there are around country, with well-defined aims and clear direction based on principles of real participation, liberation and empowerment.' We need urgently to study that kind of excellent, but apparently not very eye-catching, youth work practices.

### (3) Youth work theory is a-historical

This brings us to our last serious critique on youth work theory and policy. The characteristics of the youth movement or implicit but inextricably linked to a spirit of youthful enthusiasm and inspiration. The 'derived' work forms seem to lack this spirit. Open youth work has apparently nothing more to offer than a watered-down version of the real youth movement spirit. A real spirit that is represented by references to the first youth movements in our regions: the Wandervögel in Germany and the Catholic Student Movement in Flanders. In our 'classic' histories of youth work both are represented as autonomous organisations of young people, fighting against industrialisation and oppression and striving for cultural renewal (Laqueur, 1962). This mythical Wandervögel-spirit dominates to this day our youth work discussion, but to a large extent in an invisible way.

**The impossibility of isolating pedagogy from its social and historical context**

Historical conscience is not one of the strengths of our youth work. That's one of Davies' (1999b: ix) remarks concerning the UK youth service: '*This is a service, I am tempted to conclude, without a history and therefore, if it is not very careful, without an identity.*' What we emphasise in this paper is the impossibility to define a pedagogical identity isolated from its social and historical context (Giesecke 1964). Youth work theory can not be developed without taking along youth work history. Youth work theory can not be extended without taking in account the diversity in the category 'youth' and their educational environments. Therefore the first step in developing youth work theory is to deconstruct youth work history and reconstruct it from a broader point of view. Second step is the development of a coherent body of youth work research focusing on the question how youth work intervenes in the lives of children and young people, rather than racking our brains over the problem of leading youth to youth work. We don't have the place for a comprehensive elaboration of these two steps. In what follows we sketch important evolutions in Flemish youth work history and try to show some new perspectives in a contextualised youth work approach.

*From youth movement to youth work method*

Our classic youth work histories take the existing youth organisations as their starting point and go back in history reconstructing the life of the various organisations. Depaepe (2004) calls this 'presentism'. History is built up starting from the present situation. As if the shape contemporary youth work has taken, were inescapable, following an internal logic. It is important to identify the underlying concepts of our debate, as these concepts structure the youth work debate. Even though they are often invisible and no longer open for discussion, they define what's possible and what seems impossible (Lorenz, 2007).

Usually history is traced back to the interbellum period, when the youth movements knew their heydays spurred by the Catholic Action. Under the umbrella of the JVKA (Jeugdverbond voor Katholieke Actie) there were several class- and gender-specific youth movements: KSA (student action), BJB (young farmers), KAJ (young workers), KBMJ (merchants youth), in each case with their feminine counterparts (Loriaux and Rosart 2002). Besides this Catholic Action Youth Movements there were also some so called auxiliary works like Scouts and Guides and Chiro. These were youth movements that appealed to younger children. They were -at least according to the Church- less focused on direct Catholic Action. Next to this youth movements in the catholic segment there were liberal, nationalistic and socialist youth groups. They were much smaller than the catholic ones and get only marginal attention in youth work histories.

What we now call youth social work did exist already in those days. Since beginning of the Industrial Revolution the bourgeoisie and religious congregations established patronages, catholic youth groups for working class kids. Often these activities are not integrated in youth work histories. Sometimes they appear as 'youth care', a kind of youth work that became redundant as the youth movement made the synthesis between adult concerns and youthful idealism and subsequently spread out its wings and tried to grow to a mass movement. It is important to complete and to refine this 'classic history of traditional youth work'.

The youth movements form a significant part of youth work history. Romano Guardini (Quickborn) for instance was an important German youth work pedagogue with strong influences in Flanders. He canalised the unbridled youthful enthusiasm into a religious and educational program. In doing that he turned the first expressions of a youth *movement* as a social movement into a *youth* movement as a method of youth work. In 'methodising' an existing youth movement the first youth work pedagogues were clearly inspired by the scouting method. The story of Baden-Powell is well-known. Inspired by Ernest Thompson Seton's Woodcraft Indians and his own skills and experiences gained in public school and in the British Army during the Boer War he prepared a training program for boys. He developed the scouting method for William Smyth of the Boys Brigade but his method grew into a movement that conquered the world (Rosenthal, 1986; Jeal, 1990). The dissemination of the scouting 'method' contributed to the transformation of youth work into a decontextualised and apolitical concept (Lewin, 1947) where social struggle and redistribution made way for cultural renewal and character building.

*How the youth was won*

The youth movement in Flanders is studied for the most part isolated from other educational interventions and pedagogical theories. This youth work method acquired a monopoly position. That happened after World War I stimulated by a certain moral panic (again) concerning the physical and mental health of children and young people right after this disaster. There were also concerns about growing leisure time possibilities. The introduction of the compulsory education made the distinction more clear between family, school and leisure time. Another important factor was the development of psychological theories concerning the 'nature' of adolescence (in particular the influential theories from German-American scholars like Stanley Hall and Eduard Spranger who studied the German youth movement, the Wandervögel). The new youth work method called scouting offered the possibility to connect these adult concerns to adolescent nature and thus it was welcomed as the remedy for 'the youth problem'. It may be clear however that it intrinsic got modelled on the image and supposed needs of the middle class adolescents that participated in the Wandervögel movement. In that way the 'youth question' was disconnected from the 'social question'. Moreover, this view on youth was more fed by myths than by empirical observations or real participation. The flower of the German Youth Movement got slaughtered in the mud of Flanders in world war I (Tyldesley 2006: 25) and he myth grew stronger in between the two world wars.

The transformation of student movements as the Wandervögel or the Flemish student movement in youth movements (as a method of youth work) didn't change the profile of their participants. In Flanders scouting didn't succeed -maybe because of the influences of the romantic Wandervögel mythos- in reaching working class kids, although Baden-Powell himself had the intention to bring boys of different social classes together through scouting. Like the student movement, Flemish scouting –for the most part catholic- was clearly animated by priests and middle class students. The spirit that is linked to these middle class movements is not naturally the 'real and original' youth work spirit, but the youth movement *in the second sense* (based on the scouting method) seems to have dispelled other forms of youth work, which may have led –from the perspective of some young people- to a situation of 'boring uniformity'.

*Where have all the working class kids gone?*

The history of youth work -even if restricted to the so called youth movements- is much richer and more complex than classic youth work history suggests. There was never just one youth work spirit or model. 'Youth work needs and demands' change through the ages. Giesecke shows that the Wandervögelgeneration was strong integrated in society. They strived for individual freedom and independence. Whereas post war youth grew up in a plural society and looked in the first place for orientation and security. This drove the Weimar pedagogues to despair, because they supposed that young people searched the same things in youth work as they themselves had searched and found in youth work when they were young (Giesecke 1981). Youth work spirit also varies in relation to the people involved in it. The working class

youth movements like the Christian Workers' Youth and the Young Socialist Guards were mutually very different, but differed also strongly from scouting troops.

The defining of the youth movement (as a method of youth work) as the best and most effective kind of youth work instigated a strong push to transform existing youth work into scout look-a-likes. This was not a sudden transformation but a process that took years. The Church replaced the first Student Movement with the KSA, a youth movement that was more in line with the catholic assumptions. In fact it was the socialist party that started with the introduction of 'scout-alike methods'. Some leading socialists got inspired by the German Wandervögel mythos and the back-to-nature wind, which also blew in the field of education. After the international socialist youth conference in Stuttgart (1907), under the presidency of the Belgian Hendrik de Man, the pedagogical aspects were stronger emphasised (Collignon, 2001). Next to the Socialist Young Guards –a one-issue social action movement- they established a less political and from pedagogical viewpoint more valuable youth movement, later called the AJC (Algemene Jeugdcentrale). Following the socialists the catholic action movements introduced little by little scouting methods in their activities. Self-government, participation and learning by doing became the basic principals of all youth movements. The patronages became Chiro, KSA and KAJ evolved from 'study circles' and 'social movements' to youth movements, and also the fresh air cures introduced 'youth movement techniques'. Gradually they all began to ask the same question 'Where have all the working class kids gone?' (Coussée, 2008).

### Cardijn meets Baden-Powell

There seems nothing wrong with the emphasis on self-government and other at first sight emancipatory elements. Nevertheless, in this uniformisation of youth work we seem to have thrown away some important aspects of what youth work also was or could be. How can otherwise be explained that working class kids gradually disappeared from youth work land? How can it be that 'youth workers' like Don Bosco (ran one of the first catholic patronages in Turino) or Joseph Cardijn (founded the Christian Workers Youth), whose initiatives at some points seemed less emancipatory and more paternalistic, obviously appealed to working class kids?

The priest Joseph Cardijn, in later years he was raised to the purple, is in this context a useful 'antidote' for the Baden-Powell glorification. They both founded a movement that conquered the world. Nevertheless the differences between the two youth work forms are large. Very clarifying is the discussion they had when they met in London in 1907. Baden-Powell made the proposal to Cardijn to become scouts officer for Belgium. Cardijn tried to explain to the chief-scout that one has to distinguish between 'youth in general' and 'working class youth'. An excerpt of their conversation as written down by Cardijn (1948: 137, *my translation*):

Cardijn: -Do you know that there are young workers who have particular problems and needs?

B-P: - I don't know young workers. I only know young people and I want to create strong-willed men.

Cardijn: -Do you know that how young workers have to live inside factories, how they get influenced by this workman's sphere? How could we help them to remain kind-hearted, even to exercise a positive influence in the factory?

B-P: -I'm not acquainted with working class life.

Both men have a clear view on the youth work purpose. Baden-Powell obviously sees the essence of youth work as something that can be defined apart from the young people it concerns. Cardijn on the other hand takes the situation of working class youth, and the (supposed) needs connected with that status, as his starting point for '*social pedagogical*' action. It is Baden-Powell's 'abstraction of context' that is characteristic for our actual a-pedagogical and a-political youth work theory. Unfortunately Cardijn's Catholic Workers' Youth evolved -as did Don Bosco's patronages- into a 'real youth movement'. This happened partly under the pressure of the church and partly under the influence of the catholic trade-union. Both catholic organisations found each other in the wish to see less political action and education in the Worker's Youth and more attention to the fostering of scouting values like '*learning by doing/playing*' and '*guidance without dictation*'.

### *Methodical (re)differentiation, unaffected basic assumptions*

It needs more and intensive historical research to present a solid picture of the aspects of youth work that got 'ruled out' of the youth work discussion with the establishment of scouting hegemony. The ruling out of adults seems one of the central aspects in this narrowing down of youth work and the exclusion -not as an intention, but obviously as a consequence- of working class young people. It seems clear that we made a 'cultural turn' in our youth work discussion. The somewhat paternalistic but down-to-earth youth work with kids from the working class has been replaced by a view on youth work participants as a cultural vanguard. The scout method, with an injection of German Wandervögel romanticism, formed the prototype of the youth movement that suited the concerns of leading adults in government (beyond left and right!), churches and schools: emancipation, but within the prevailing social order. Pedagogues adopted this model at one of the first pedagogical conferences in 1919. Policy makers gave it the status of 'best practice' with the start of the official youth work policy in 1945.

How practitioners underwent these evolutions is far less known, but from then on evolutions in youth work were presented as differentiations of the ideal youth movement model to 'democratise' its lovely spirit. To make the youth movement more accessible to 'those who were the most in need of democratic socialisation', the aspects that had been eliminated in the youth work discussion have gradually been reintegrated, but in a mere methodical way. The involvement in debates on working conditions or learning circumstances thus have been replaced by a not reciprocal attuning from youth work to the demands of school and labour market or to all-embracing prevention-issues (joined-up thinking!). All these methodical differentiations of the ideal model are somehow considered as inferior or subordinate (as are their 'clients'?). We seem to have forgotten that the central place of the youth movement itself was a serious narrowing down of the youth work concept. In a sense youth work history is not a history of democratisation but of 'civilisation'.

## Conclusion

A less mythologized and more politicised view on youth work history opens up possibilities to conduct research that goes beyond the quest to *impose* emancipatory solutions on 'recalcitrant' groups. This search inevitably leads to 'what-we-need-is-more-of-the-same'-conclusions and an increasing 'formalising of the non-formal'. Historical research and research grounded in youth work practice throwing a light on the perspectives of young people themselves, must contribute to a social pedagogical identity for youth work. Emancipation remains a key concept, but needs to be reconsidered in the light of that research. In recent decennia the youth movement indeed successively emancipated itself from adults, church, school and party politics, but doing this further ruled out the working class kids. This emancipation is one that falls back on the modern concept of emancipation that has its roots in the 19th century moral crusade. A crusade that is still, or again, very much alive: one that restricts emancipation to the promotion through education of individual social mobility within the prevailing social relations and balances of power. The elimination of the *social* in *pedagogy* is the reason why youth work, just as much as social work in general, does not seem to get much further than empowering the powerful and appease the vulnerable.

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