

Finding interesting historical backgrounds for youth work and youth policy in Europe

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In May 2008 we, the team for International Youth Policy in the Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Youth and Adults of the Flemish Community of Belgium and the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe organized a first workshop on 'the History of Youth Work in Europe and its relevance for today's Youth Work Policy'.

From where does the interest in history of youth work and youth policy come?

Today, some youth movements and youth organizations celebrate their 75th, 80th or even 100th anniversary with a variety of activities, amongst efforts in developing instruments for safeguarding their heritage. Especially at the local level youth organizations organize exhibitions, explore their archives presenting the origins and historical developments of their organization and in many cases they are publishing a book full of pictures, memories and texts. In 1981 for instance, one of the authors of this introduction (Jan Vanhee), together with other youth leaders of his youth movement set up a whole project to celebrate the 35th anniversary of their Chirogroup ...

At the universities, particularly in social and cultural studies, sometimes students provide a paper or an essay on youth work or youth work related issues, and exceptionally one can find a PhD. So some years ago Filip Coussée was defending his PhD at the Ghent University. It was not only fascinating to get such a historical and pedagogical overview, it was especially amazing to see the links with similar and parallel developments in other countries like UK and Germany.

Since the end of the 1990s international cooperation in youth policy is a dynamically growing item, particularly within the European Union, but also in the Council of Europe. In the latter the major focus since the early 1970s had been given to capacity building of youth organizations and the training of youth workers and youth leaders. This changed in the 90-ies completely with the introduction of youth policy reviews and later youth policy advisory missions (for more information, see <http://www.coe.int/youth/>, Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe) .

It is not by chance that at that time, the end of the 90-ies, both authors of this introduction joined in different functions and responsibilities bodies that were involved in European youth policy development. Since then, we heard from time to time in international meetings and conferences, but never systematically organized, interesting historical reflexions and opinions about the development of youth work and youth policy in the various countries.

A better knowledge and understanding of youth is one of the key priorities of youth policy today and it is more than obvious that a historical dimension of this knowledge is crucial for the development of policy and policy making. Until now this historical knowledge was only nationally and incidentally produced and collected; we found however, it is time to start a collective process which puts the different developments and realities in a joint framework. Therefore we took the initiative to start with collecting interesting documents, studies, opinions and views on this theme from different parts of Europe and putting it in a kind of jigsaw puzzle. Another important step was of course to identify the right experts in the different regions and countries of Europe, not the easiest exercise.

From the very beginning we had in mind to invite experts in the field for a joint reflection and exchange in a small workshop. The main aim was to increase the attention for the history of youth work and youth policy and to *start* a discussion and reflections on this issue, putting it also higher on the European youth agenda; furthermore the workshop intended to identify the close links between youth work and youth policy developments and broader social, cultural and historical trends.

It is one of the major objectives of the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe to produce and to provide knowledge on youth in Europe; for this purpose the Partnership organizes thematic events (seminars, workshops) and some studies on specific issues. The relevant information and knowledge gathered in these activities are distributed via the European Knowledge Center for Youth Policy and by special publications which both aim at contributing to what is called evidence based youth policy. In many cases the Youth Partnership organizes its activities in cooperation with other partners. The scope and positive outcomes of this workshop, including this publication, achieved in cooperation between the Flemish Community, and the Partnership are an excellent example

In this publication you can find the result of the different contributions of this first workshop. For this first workshop we invited eight experts from seven different countries: Louis Vos and Filip Coussée from Flanders (Belgium), Bernard Davies from UK (England), Miriam Teuma from Malta, Christian Spatscheck from Germany, Marcin Sinczuch from Poland, Helena Helve from Finland and Patricia Loncle from France. To start, a keynote was presented by Walter Lorenz (Free University of Bolzano, Italy) in which he commented on the function of history in the debate on social professions in Europe. Pierre Mairesse and Rui Gomes contributed respectively to the opening and closing session on youth policy development at the European level We have also the ambition to continue this process especially in view of the lessons that we can learn for developing youth work and youth policy in Europe today! May we invite you to contribute to this exercise?