



**HOGESCHOOL  
UTRECHT**

# Youth work in the Netherlands

Hans van Ewijk

Professor in social policy and social work, Utrecht  
University of Applied Sciences

Visiting Professor in International social policy and social  
work, Tartu University.

# Typical Dutch

- Tenderness and happiness
- ‘the problematic issue for humanistic educators how to educate a child without losing its innocence’ (Schama)  
Be imprisoned in a state of perpetual political adolescence

## Typical Dutch (2)

- Pillars and pacification
- Professionalisation in youth work
- Instrumental thinking, political debate dominating
- Lack of academic interest
- Innovation and fragmentation
- Localisation and market

# The Dutch framework: definitions



- Youth work: The not profit oriented efforts by adults to offer recreation, informal education and support in age-defined organisations in leisure time
- Youth organisations: are volunteer organisations, supervised and counseled by adults with some professional staff.
- Professional youth work: carried out by professional together with volunteers.

# Categorisations of youth work

- Age
  - 0-4 / 5 -12 / 12-15/ 15 – 18/30
- Target groups
  - class, ethnicity, gender, deficit
- Fields of activities
  - Open youth work, streetcorner work etc.
- Core tasks
  - Recreation, informal education, support...

# Ambiguous relationships

- Youth work and social work
- Youth work and social youth work (youth care)
- Youth work and local social policy and politics

# History: pre-history

- Focus on children from long ago.
  - Orphanages, rasp houses, correction houses
  - Jan Steen: children games
- YMCA 1853
- First fenced playground 1897
- 1919 National committee researching development of youth (Stuart Hall 1904, Spranger 1924).
- Civilisation + recruitment + Help

# Within the own vestment 1910-1950)



- Youth organisations
  - Banners, groups, methods, supervised self activity (25% maximum)
- Youth movement
  - Hardly existing (kwekelingen, students)
- Church based youth work (recreative, bible study, ceremonies)
- Scouting 1910, open door work / Eykman (1920), AJC /working class movement 1921, clubhouses Zeemeeuw en De Arend (1922), youth hostels (1927).



# Vestment 2

- Three roots already there:
- Youth organisations for middle class and upper labour class
- Clubhouses for the poor
- Open door for the in-betweens

# To be young and mass youth: 1950 - 1965



- World War II shock: banners, uncritical acceptance of ideology, mass youth open for manipulation
- Post war effects: traumas, severe loss, disruption of social networks, cynism
- Open youth centres in the city and poor regions
- Youth organisations in defence (AJC 1959†)
- *'a fair full of quite idiosyncratic hobby horses'*
- Non Formal Training for young labour force (Mater Amabilis, Pater Fortis)

# Open youth work versus youth organisations



- Activity centered      ideal centered
- Participants      members
- No traditional youth      traditional youth
- Above 15      under 15
- Modern life style      traditional life style
- Context centered      method centered
- Professionals      volunteers
- No national umbrella      national umbrellas

# Professionalisation and emancipation: 1965 - 1980



- Radical open youth work, along with alternative youth care and critical non formal learning institutes (breeding place)
- Mainstream emancipation: socio cultural independence, socio economic equality (enabling place)
- Marginal youth orientation (integration place)

# Commoditization and work, work, work: 1980 - 2000



- Activation to work
- Discipline and correction
- Targeting
- Effective solutions
- Early alerts
- New management
- Cutting and attacking youth work

# Theo Schuyt 'vulnerable transitions'



- Productive contribution to society
- Developing a strong identity
- Most risks in transitions (school to labour, living at home and living independently, primary school to secondary school)

# Back on the agenda. From 2000 on



- Because of incidents, fear for radicalism, high youth criminality rates, waiting lists in youth care and mental health, and early unemployment schemes

# Operatie Jong

- Fragmentation, breaking down impediments (barriers), fighting exclusion and derailment
- Preventive, curative and restorative
- Local centres for youth and family
- Youth social work chain
- Youth work as essential linking pin



# Other positive developments

- New research findings: young people, partners, policy makers positive about youth work
- Minister of Youth (2007)
- Professorates (lectoren) and research centres at Hogescholen, moving into Universities of Applied Sciences
- WRR: overcharged children. Need for contextual approach. Youth work as partner.

# Profile of the profession

- Youth work as an easy accessible provision or service
- For all young people (12 – 23)
- Changing behaviour, preventing sliding down, neighbourhood pedagogues, self activity, social resilience, participation

# Current situation

- Optimistic
- Further professionalisation
- Move from project diarrhea to sustainable approaches
- Recognition preventive value (more common knowledge than evidence based)
- Certain individualizing trends
- Talent challenge approaches

# direction: separate youth phase?



- 'The true appearance of human kind is adulthood' (Kuyler)
- The greatness of adolescence (Diderot)
- Young people more positive about adults than the other way round
- The sooner you treat him as a man, the sooner he will be one (Locke)
- Enlarge or bridging the difference?
- Multi faceted perspective

# Some reflections on this

- Try to keep the maximum age low (18 or 21)
- Makes difference between early adolescence (10-15) and late (15-19).
- Late adolescence is full life
- How about socio culturale difference and socio economic equality?
- Youth work as integrated part in social work, not as outsider but insider
- Youth work as link in the chains

# The youth social model

- Medical model, education, justice or economic model very recognisable
- Social model: fragmented, underdeveloped
- 1. Social work aims at supporting, promoting, improving social competences, social behaviour, social relationships, social contexts.

## 2 Activating citizenship

- 2. the core concept is in activating citizenship (citizenship based social work). Self and social responsibilities based on social rights.
- + Relative citizenship: each person to his or her capacities
- + relational citizenship: a common project of society and community.
- Applied in youth work: make young people producers in stead of consumers or objects of interentions.

## 3 Lead professional

- Lead professionals and generic front line workers
- Partnership model
  - Act as a single point of contact
  - Ensure appropriate interventions
  - Reduce overlap and inconsistency
  - Ensure – if needed – effective hand-over



# Three lines

- Youth work lead professional
- Youth work activities and interventions professionals
- Institutional youth work (youth care)

## 4 Perspective of participation

- Political, labour and civil society participation
- + User participation
- Based on human rights and children rights
- Definition of problems and direction of solutions, the planning of the process and the implementation in partnership.
- Motivated user and committed competent professional -> 80% of effectivity.

# concluding

- Paradox youth work that works is not accessible, accessible youth work does not work:
- From Dutch experience highly debatable
- Dilemma: social question or youth question
- -> recognizing being young as transition (as whole life is) but not one dimensional (focusing only at age).
- -> it is about social positions, social problems and social potentials.

# Recession again ?



- Expecting increasing unemployment
- Firm cutting in social work and youth work
- Risk of youth work again as activating to labour market and keeping control over young people.