

Youth work in Greece: a historical overview

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Introduction

There is no doubt that any attempt to study the history of youth work always presents a vexing challenge as the subject under consideration cannot be accurately described. As Coussée has very pertinently put it:

Youth work is a polyvalent and multifaceted practice. It takes place in a wide range of settings, it varies from unstructured activities to fairly structured programmes, it reaches a large diversity of young people, touches a lot of different themes and is on the interface with many other disciplines and practices. (Coussée 2009:7)

The aforementioned complexity of youth work is precisely what determines the kind of methodology that has to be employed in every study of its history: we will thus move simultaneously in time and space, along different levels and heterogeneous social contexts, focusing sometimes on state institutions (for example, education, welfare foundations, the army) and the policies they produce so as to manipulate or to emancipate younger generations, and sometimes on civil society practices (such as charity and its voluntary initiatives) and the activities of youth organisations.

However, we should make clear from the outset that the aim of this chapter is to provide a general outline rather than an exhaustive account of the history of youth work in Greece. Moreover, the field of youth work in the country has not managed as yet to emerge as an autonomous subject of research, which also explains the nearly total lack of relevant literature which could render this account more adequate and comprehensive.

In this respect, I will try to show that although there is to date no official definition or comprehensive legal framework concerning youth work in Greece, youth work has existed as a social practice in the country since the 19th century and acquired relatively stable characteristics at least since 1900.

My analysis will be divided into three parts.

In the first, I will delineate very briefly the main characteristics of youth work in Greece from the 19th century to 1974. This is when the first forms of social services for young people were introduced by the state and some charitable organisations.

In the second part, I will refer to the most important moments in the development of youth work following the restoration of democracy (1974) by giving special emphasis to the creation of the General Secretariat for Youth (1983); I will also examine how these developments affected national youth policy and the character of youth work in the coming years.

Finally, in the third part, I will present the state of youth work today (from 2000 onwards): what the main fields of action are, what the basic structures and actors are and what the current legal framework is. I will also try to highlight the basic problems and challenges for Greek youth work under conditions of severe economic crisis.

The first phase: birth and development of youth work – 1900-1974

The history of youth work in Greece begins with the foundation of the Greek state in the 19th century (1830). The basic concerns of the time comprised the accommodation of orphans from the War of Independence and the moral education of the younger generations.²⁵ During this period no organised state service for young people existed; nevertheless, there were some stuttering steps towards state funding and involvement in youth work, as well as a variety of youth work activities mainly emanating from civil society for the social welfare of the orphan children of war, such as charities for needy young people, orphanages and vocational training schools.

The most important orphanages of the 19th century were founded between 1850 and 1920 in the urban centres of Greece, mainly by private charities. The provision for orphans included not only accommodation and food, but also literacy

25. Greece was under the occupation of the Ottoman Empire for four centuries. The War of Independence lasted almost nine years, from 1821 to 1830.

classes, vocational training and religious teaching. Other charitable institutions were responsible for the development of a variety of vocational training services for young males: for instance, in 1837, the first technical school was founded. This was the so-called “Polytechniko Scholeion”, later the Polytechnic University, where young people from the working classes had the opportunity to be trained to become architects or craftsmen (Riginos 1995:76). During the same period, the literary society Parnassos – the oldest cultural organisation in Greece – established in Athens the “Scholi Aporon Paidon” (School for Poor Boys), encouraging at the same time the foundation of other branches in the rest of the country (Korasidou 1995:109, 155). In addition, by the beginning of the 20th century, several schools of engineering – mainly in the port of Piraeus and the city of Athens – as well as other technical schools were established all over Greece (Riginos 1995:79-80).

It is worth noting at this stage that the foundation of the aforementioned institutions targeting young boys followed a series of public order incidents that proliferated during the 1860s. In particular, increases in the number of burglaries, especially during the night, became associated with the emergence of young *magkes* (a culturally specific vagabond figure). In other words, the idea that young boys constituted a threat to society became a widespread view. In that sense, one should interpret the foundations of the aforementioned schools not only in reference to educational policy, but also within the framework of emerging mechanisms of control, obedience and discipline.

Given this overall picture affecting boys, what was the situation as far as girls were concerned?

Literacy campaigns and the vocational education of girls were also a focus of charitable activity, especially within women’s organisations. Hence, in 1872, the “Laboratory of Poor Women” was founded, where women and especially girls were trained in skills such as sewing, embroidery, and weaving (Korasidou 1995:183, 187, 192). Similar schools, the so-called “Sunday Schools for Poor Women and Girls of the People”, were created in 1890 in many cities of Greece, in which girls had the opportunity to learn reading, writing, numerical calculations, domestic economy and hygiene (Kokkinakis 2010:221). Some of these schools also included in their training programmes lessons in sewing, cutting and hairdressing. Another vocational training school for women was the “Professional and Housekeeping School” established in 1896 where poor girls were trained to become seamstresses, cooks, cashiers, accountant assistants, typists, stenographers, and so on. Such schools functioned in many regions of the country with the same objectives. It must be stressed at this point that many of these girls would end up being employed as maids in bourgeois households.

Gradually, and especially during the first decades of the 20th century, the state acquired a more active role, putting forward important initiatives. Among them, one could mention the following:

- the founding of the Patriotic Institution of Social Protection and Custody (PIKPA in Greek), in 1915, which among its obligations included the protection of mothers, children and the youth;
- the establishment of four social welfare institutions, in 1922, following the mass influx of Greek refugees expelled from Asia Minor: the National Orphanage, the Nursery School, the National Rural Kindergarten and the Rural Housekeeping Schools;
- the founding of the first School of Special Education, in 1937, offering education and care to children with special needs;

- the establishment of the Free School of Social Welfare, in 1937, providing education to young girls desirous of engaging in social work;
- the adoption by the state of the institution of summer youth camps which after 1929 were organised under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (Pantazis 2007).

During the same period the state started regulating child labour, strengthening at the same time the obligatory nature of education (Riginos 1995:21, 94; Dikaios 2010:287).

In parallel with the above state measures and initiatives from private bodies for the social welfare and vocational training of the homeless and poor children and youth, this period also witnessed the development of other forms of youth work, such as youth sport clubs, scouting groups and other youth organisations (student, political, religious, etc.) (Liakos 1988:11).

At this point it is worth describing the most important of youth organisations active during this first phase.

→ Religious youth organisations

In this period – but also throughout the 20th century – religious youth organisations played a significant role, seeking to regulate the social behaviour of young people through the control and management of their leisure time. Their aim was to “shape the features of the Greek Christian citizen and, by extension, to create a Christian political leadership” (Karamouzis 2010:117). In other words, their role was essentially conservative, serving the entrenchment and the reproduction of the dominant state-religious political ideology (Karamouzis 2010:119). The most important religious youth organisations during the period were the Young Men’s Christian Association-YMCA (HEN in Greek) and the Young Women’s Christian Association-YWCA (HAN in Greek).

YMCA began its activities in Thessaloniki, a multicultural city and economic hub of the Balkans, and the theatre of many military confrontations at least until the First World War. Initially, it was active in the Greek Army with the so-called “Soldier’s Houses”. The Soldier’s Houses had been created in 1918 by the Military Mission of the American YMCA in co-operation with the Greek Government to boost the morale of Greek soldiers, offering them a range of services during their rest and leisure time (HANTh 1924:36). In this context, Soldier’s Houses operated canteens, restaurants, libraries, reading rooms, cinemas, and activities such as board games and sports. They also organised lectures on national-religious themes and excursions to archaeological sites (Gourlis 1997:15; HANTh 1924:38-42).

However, from 1920, YMCA entered a new phase of activity, formally establishing two annexes, one in Athens in 1920 and another in Thessaloniki in 1921. According to the charter of the organisation, its basic mission was the “balanced development of the soul, the spirit and the body, and the smooth socialisation of young people” (Gourlis 1997:13). To that end the organisation expanded its activities, offering young males education, entertainment (mainly through sports, cultural events and youth camps), youth hostels and material support (an important initiative, in this respect, was the establishment of the Committee for the Protection and Support of Young Vagrants – Epitropi Prostatias Alitopaidos – in 1924) (Gourlis 1997:55).

YWCA was established immediately after the Turkish defeat of the Greek Army and the disaster in Asia Minor, which led to a vast influx of Greek refugees from Izmir (Smirni). It became active first in Athens (1923) and then in Thessaloniki (1925), and its activities were organised around four sectors: education (night schools, domestic economy schools, professional education programmes, etc.), entertainment, social welfare (providing accommodation and catering to young students and working women), and camping.

The two religious organisations endeavoured, in effect, to horizontally pervade Greek society, but they managed, in the end, to exert a greater influence on young people coming from lower social strata.

→ Scouting youth organisations

Scouting was first introduced to Greece in 1910 with the establishment of the first Greek scouting group by Athanasios Lefkaditis. The official establishment of the Scouts of Greece (SEP in Greek) followed a while later, with the ratification of its charter.

According to its 1912 charter, the aim of the organisation is “the moral and physical development of the Greek youth, the production of good citizens and soldiers” (Isaias 1949:36; Kourkouris 2009:17). The means to this end was the “entrenchment of moral principles, the transmission of hygienic knowledge, shooting exercises, games and appropriate excursions, which can lead the scouts to love country life and to develop their natural capacities” (Isaias 1949:36; Kourkouris 2009:17-18).

The activity of scouts was embraced from the beginning by the state. It is characteristic that King Constantine himself received, in July 1914, the title of the general leader of the Scouts of Greece, while the then Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, supported financially the organisation with personal donations in 1915 and 1916.

The connection between scouting and the state became evident also with the Royal Decree of 21 January 1915, which imposed the mandatory introduction of scouting into schools. However, as the abolition of the voluntary nature of scouting triggered a series of negative reactions, not only among the directors of the Scouts of Greece but across Greek society, the decree was withdrawn a month later (Isaias 1949:100).

The activities developed by the Scouts of Greece during this period can be summed up as follows: organisation of athletic games, demonstrations, parades, camping, tree planting, and so on. Furthermore, the contribution of the scouts was considerable during the Balkan Wars (1912-13) through the provision of nursing services to the wounded in the war (Kourkouris 2009:29).

The relations between scouting and the state became even more intimate in 1917 when the Venizelos Government introduced Law No. 1066/1917 whereby the Scouts of Greece were officially acknowledged as a state institution. This law was supplemented later on with the Royal Decree of 31 March 1919. More specifically, Article 3 of this particular decree stipulated that the Scouts of Greece was under the tutelage of the state, and that it was to be funded annually by the

state – that is, by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Military Affairs – while the composition of its board of directors was to be determined following the recommendations of the Minister for Education (Isaias 1949:156).

The Greek Guiding Association was established in 1932, in this overly positive climate for scouting. According to the charter of the organisation, its aim was “the moral and physical formation of the Greek woman and her preparation to become a good citizen and mother” (Isaias 1949:114). In this context, the organisation provided girls and young women with a series of services, mainly to do with practical help, entertainment and education (in the fields of hygiene, domestic economy, baby nursing, etc.).

In general, scouting resonated widely with Greek youth, constituting the most popular youth structure, at least until 1939. Its success lay in the fact that it managed to develop a flexible system of education and leisure activities which combined, at the same time, progress and tradition, service and entertainment.

→ The National Youth Organisation (EON)

It is worth recounting at this point an interesting story indicative of the ambivalent development of youth organisations. On 4 August 1936 the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas, an authoritarian regime that lasted for four years, began. This period witnessed the founding of the National Youth Organisation (EON), which came to play a significant role as an extra-curricular provider of education as well as source of propaganda, especially after November 1938 when the dictator himself assumed the position of Minister for Education. The goals of the organisation comprised the productive spending of free time by young people, “the promotion of physical and psychological well-being thereof, the cultivation of the national values and the faith, the creation of a military spirit” (Petridis 2000:33). Within two years from the first march of EON in Athens (1937), the organisation numbered almost 500 000 members (1939), making it one of the biggest youth organisations in Greek history. Some of the most prominent members of the organisation were Crown Prince Paul, who also served as the titular head of the organisation for a short time, as well as other members of the Greek royal family. Membership of the organisation was not mandatory, but there was widespread and successful campaigning by the Metaxas regime to include most young people in EON. In the founding document of the organisation, it is mentioned that “the inclusion of the entire Greek youth into EON is everyone’s responsibility” (Petridis 2000:88).

The organisation later took over the Scouts of Greece and other such organisations, although – officially – membership still remained voluntary. More specifically, with the introduction of Law No. 1798 of 1939 “On the national and moral education of youth”, Metaxas’ regime enforced the mandatory merger of all existing youth organisations into EON. Any organisation that would not comply would be considered illegal and dissolved (Petridis 2000:271; Machaira 1987:97).

It has been observed that schoolteachers were ordered to bring the youth to EON *en masse*, while workers in the public sector were forced to enlist their children (Petridis 2000:284; Varon-Vassard 2009:63). Some of the activities that EON members were involved in included military training, athletic events, imposing parades and marches, reforestation, trips, community service, and so on.

What is most striking is that the official educational process and school life would be fully subordinated to the needs and the objectives of EON (Machaira 1987:89, 93-4). It is characteristic that, according to a circular letter of the Ministry of Education in 1939, Wednesday was designated as “EON day” in schools (Petridis 2000:282).

Although enjoying a membership in the hundreds of thousands, EON did not really resonate with the youth. As Varon-Vassard states, “the framework it had invented stifled the adolescent, always interfering with his leisure time, from Sundays to his summer holidays” (Varon-Vassard 2009:66). It was not a proper school, it was not a Sunday religious school, it was not scouting: “It was a political organisation which levelled down everyone” (Margaritis in Varon-Vassard 2009:65). And exactly because it never functioned as a real ground for conviviality and emancipation of human relations – as happens in youth organisations with real voluntary membership – it did not exert any effective influence on the young people of that time. This is confirmed by the short life of the organisation, which was dissolved soon afterwards, during the German Occupation, in June 1941.

→ The United Panhellenic Organisation of Youth

The Second World War and later the Greek Civil War (1944-49) cost Greece dearly, both in terms of human lives and in terms of material damage. At any rate, Greek youth played a prominent role in resistance efforts and in the liberation struggle that ensued, through the activity of a number of resistance youth organisations. The most well known of those was the United Panhellenic Organisation of Youth (EPON), the youth wing of the National Liberation Front, which was established on 23 February 1943 after the merger of 10 earlier political and resistance youth organisations.

EPON functioned as a youth organisation clearly associated with the political left, and yet it did achieve a very large social and geographical expansion, incorporating into its ranks the largest part of Greek youth, with up to 600 000 members after the end of the Second World War.

Although the main aim of the organisation was to resist the German Occupation and liberate the country, EPON wanted to focus on young people in various ways, not only in wartime but also in peacetime, and for this reason the organisation anticipated its post-liberation life from the beginning of its activities (Varon-Vassard 2009:271).

It is worth noting that, during the war, EPON did not confine its action solely to military engagements but was also involved in organising a variety of cultural events across Greece. These activities included the staging of theatrical performances, sport events, lectures and talks on literature, musical concerts, and so on. This practice of EPON had great impact because it initiated a large number of young people – mainly from lower social strata and geographically isolated regions of Greece – into the experience of a cultural event.

EPON’s contribution to the process of rebuilding the country immediately after the war was also considerable. Nevertheless, the organisation was dissolved in 1946 by the then right-wing government, although it would go underground and continue its activities until 1958, when it finally ceased its activities.

Following the war, and in order to deal with the enormous war damage, Greece received help from international organisations, like the United Nations, as well as from individual countries like the United States (within the scope of the Marshall Plan). At the same time the government tried to help the population through various programmes in order to overcome this emergency situation. In this context, the Royal National Foundation was founded in order to help deal with educational needs. However, the greatest amount of help in social welfare was provided by two other institutions: the National Welfare Organisation (initially Royal Welfare) and the Northern Provinces' Welfare. The National Welfare Organisation put initial emphasis on children who were vulnerable after the war. Around 40 000 children were reached through child centres of the organisation. In the 1950s the organisation maintained 263 institutions in northern Greece, the "Children's Homes" (Paidopoleis), which were later renamed "Social Centres" (Pantazis 2009). The same period – 1947, specifically – witnessed the establishment of the National Youth Foundation, whose main task was to provide accommodation and material support to poor students.

The following period, up until the establishment of the Colonels' Junta in April 1967, was a period of deep organisational shifts for the country, in which the new developments in trade unionism and the youth occupied centre stage. As far as the youth is concerned, we can observe the following.

A particularly active student movement developed, which fought in support of democracy, the increase of state spending on education to 15% of the GDP, the enshrinement of university asylum and, more generally, the defence of academic liberties.

New youth organisations were created, mainly political, the most important of which was the Democratic Youth Movement Grigoris Lambrakis set up in 1963. What set apart the Lambrakis Youth Movement was "the qualitative range of the actions" it undertook with "campaigns in the countryside, cultural clubs, the cultivation of alternative entertainment habits and patterns" (Seferiadis 2010:12-13). This organisation would play a vital part in the political affairs of the time, while later on it would provide the main pool for the recruitment of members for youth organisations against the dictatorship.

The second phase: further institutionalisation and integration of youth work – 1947-2000

Let me now make a historical jump to the mid-1970s and, more specifically, to the period after the fall of the dictatorship (1974) and the restoration of democracy in Greece.²⁶

26. The Greek military junta ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. During this period political oppression and censorship was at all times heavy-handed, especially in areas deemed sensitive by the junta, such as political activities and politically flavoured art, literature, film and music, as well as education. The youth work of this period served the propaganda aims of the regime and included mainly athletic events and the organisation of parades and marches.

A very important year in the development of youth work in Greece was 1975, when the Greek social security system acquired legal foundations in the new constitution. In this respect, at least two of its articles made direct or indirect reference to the duty of the state to protect youth (articles 16 and 21).²⁷ The next crucial step in this framework took place in 1983 when the National Health Service was established in order to guarantee free health care for all residents of Greece without any special conditions of entitlement.

However, the most important development in the field of youth work that year was the foundation of the General Secretariat for Youth by the new socialist government of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). For PASOK, in its first period in government, leisure time and its management acquired paramount importance as a crucial factor in the socialisation, identity construction and skill acquisition of young people. Hence, the main purpose behind the foundation of the General Secretariat for Youth was to monitor and co-ordinate several state policies for the younger generation, giving special emphasis on leisure time activities.

This first period of the General Secretariat for Youth has been generally positively evaluated as it was accompanied by a series of important provisions for young people, such as social tourism programmes, introduction of the discount youth card, and provision of free theatre tickets. During the same period, many youth clubs were set up all over Greece, in parallel with the establishment of a network of cultural youth associations (Giannaki 2010:78). Other initiatives by the General Secretariat for Youth included cultural educational programmes in schools, programmes for the support of young entrepreneurs and young farmers, information campaigns on issues of mental and body hygiene, the creation of a helpline for young people, and the introduction of the institution of “youth week” in the rural areas of Greece (Giannaki 2010:78). All these initiatives were accompanied by other governmental policies, such as the introduction of school councils for the promotion of democratic participation, special cultural and athletic activities for adolescents in correctional institutions, the increase of professional orientation programmes, the extension of a network of rehabilitation centres, and so on (Giannaki 2010:78).

The third phase: youth work today (2000 to present)

To conclude this historical overview, let us now examine the situation on the ground today (from 2000 onwards).²⁸

As far as the legal conditions of youth work in Greece are concerned, in addition to the constitution and the Presidential Decree No. 274 on the General

27. Article 16 concerns education and stipulates the role of the state in the intellectual, professional, ethical and physical development of young persons. It also sets out as an aim their transformation into “free and responsible citizens”. Article 21 pertains to the obligation of the state to take measures ensuring the good health of young people. See, in this respect, *To Syntagma tis Elladas* (2010) [The Greek Constitution].

28. In this section, I will be drawing on my contribution to the study *The Socio-economic Scope of Youth Work in Europe* (2007).

Secretariat for Youth,²⁹ existing national legislation in the youth field deals with the following issues:

- youth employment (e.g. protection of juvenile employees; special measures for young employees);
- sports (e.g. special measures for young athletes with outstanding performance, such as easier entrance to state universities);
- education (e.g. legislation regarding the structure and function of the educational system including the participation of students in the governing bodies of state universities; the right of pupils to set up youth societies in schools, the Mathitikes Koinotites);
- family (e.g. special legislation which determines and protects the rights of the child, as well as particular measures against children's abuse within the family);
- military service (e.g. exemption from military service through serving an alternative social service);
- deviant behaviour (e.g. special courts and treatment for juvenile delinquents);
- media (e.g. special legislation for the protection of minors; measures to ensure that television broadcasts do not include any programmes which might seriously impair the physical, mental or moral development of minors, such as programmes that involve pornography or gratuitous violence);
- participation (e.g. special legislation for the increase of youth participation at the local level within the framework of Local Youth Councils).³⁰

Despite the existence of the above legal provisions regarding youth issues, there is no official definition or legal framework concerning youth work. However, youth work does exist as a social practice; it constitutes an integral part of educational and welfare endeavours and plays a significant role in supporting young people's safe and healthy transition to adult life (Bohn and Stallmann 2007:16, 24). The range of activities that are self-consciously described as youth work is extensive, and includes health, social support, counselling, education and training, personal development, information, career services, and so on. However, it seems that youth work is mainly related to leisure time activity – that is, artistic and cultural programmes, outdoor recreation, sports, and so on – providing a space for youthful experimentation and cultural development.

Youth workers in Greece work primarily with young people aged between 15 and 25, but may in some cases extend this to those aged 13 to 15 or 25 to 30. Most youth services provide a mixture of "open" youth work, intended for all young people in the area, and youth work targeting particular groups of young people, usually those who are disadvantaged or socially excluded (Bohn and Stallmann 2007:24).

In Greece, there is no specific education and training for youth work (in other words, there are no nationally recognised qualifications). However, people who wish to work with young people or become youth workers can acquire some relevant professional qualifications. In particular, one can obtain a higher education degree in social work, social sciences (sociology, psychology, social policy, social administration, social anthropology, etc.), or educational sciences and pedagogy (primary education, early childhood education, special education, social pedagogy, etc.) (Bohn and Stallmann 2007:31).

29. Presidential Decree No. 274, O.J. No. 130/1989.

30. See the Database for International Youth Work (DIJA): www.dija.de/griechenland/impressum-gr, accessed 19 September 2013.

Training in youth work-related subjects – for example social care/pedagogy, counselling and special education, leisure time management, organisation and management of youth camps – is also provided by public and private vocational training institutes (IEK), private vocational training centres (KEK), centres for adult education (KEE) and the General Secretariat for Youth. Trainees who manage to complete their studies are entitled to receive different types of certificates depending on their training, such as a vocational training diploma, a further education certificate, a lifelong learning certificate, a certificate of attendance, and so on (Bohn and Stallmann 2007:31).

Finally, non-governmental voluntary organisations and associations offer training courses and special seminars for volunteers in the youth sector but without any overall co-ordination in terms of administration, theory or approach. It should be noted that none of these training courses leads to an officially recognised qualification.

In terms of structures and institutions, youth work in Greece today involves a complex network of providers (community groups, NGOs and local authorities) supported by a large number of adults, working as full-time or part-time paid staff or as unpaid volunteers (Bohn and Stallmann 2007:24). Unfortunately, due to lack of official data it is impossible to provide precise figures for the number of youth workers in the country. Overall, the different organisations share a more or less common set of youth work values. These include working with young people because they are young people, and not because they have been labelled or are considered deviant; starting with young people's view of the world; helping young people develop stronger relationships and collective identities; respecting and valuing difference; and promoting the voice of young people (Bohn and Stallmann 2007:25). The main actors in the field are described below.

– The General Secretariat for Youth, which is attached to the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs and is responsible for the implementation of the government's youth policy. It works for the mainstreaming of the youth dimension in other governmental policies given that all governmental organisations may develop policies that ultimately touch upon some needs of the younger generation. In this respect, the General Secretariat for Youth comprises departments covering employment and development, culture and leisure, education and social participation, international co-operation and information, and its main role is to promote intersectoral youth policy taking also into consideration all the relevant developments in the youth sector at the European and international level. It also implements every year a special programme supporting youth initiatives. More specifically, with an open invitation to the public, interested youth NGOs and other agencies are invited to submit their proposals for any kind of youth activity. These proposals are evaluated and a certain number of plans proposed by young people (and their organisations) are financed throughout Greece.

– The Institute for Youth: This institute, which works under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, provides technical and scientific support to the General Secretariat for Youth and is responsible for the management of EU programmes for youth and the European Youth Card in Greece.

– The National Youth Foundation (NYF): This foundation is a private law legal body functioning under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs. The main mission of the NYF is to support young persons in secondary and higher education, as well as to develop a series of cultural, social and educational activities. For over 60 years, this institution has offered services to a large number of young students from Greece and other countries (exceeding 12 000 yearly), in high schools, technological education institutes and universities.

– Second Level of Local Government (Regions or Peripheries): After a fundamental reform of the local government system introduced by a recently enacted Greek law on a new architecture of local and decentralised administration (code name *Kallikrates*), the second level of local government in Greece is now constituted by 13 regions, called “peripheries”. Regions are grouped into seven decentralised administrations, which are financially and administratively autonomous. They are concerned with the socio-economic and cultural development of their constituencies, as well as the running of services for the local authorities (municipalities) which are members of the regions/peripheries. Among their responsibilities are the development of initiatives, measures and programmes of interest to young people and the support of their activities, at local and regional level. To this effect, regions seek co-operation with relevant governmental bodies.

– First Level of Local Government (Municipalities): In Greece, there are 325 municipalities (replacing the 1 033 pre-existing municipalities and communities) which constitute the first level of local government. They are entrusted with a wide range of responsibilities concerning children and young people, including equipment and maintenance of nursery, primary and secondary school buildings, family and youth welfare services, leisure (such as sport) and out-of-school provisions for young people.

– Non-governmental organisations: The role of the non-governmental sector in the domain of youth work has become increasingly significant in the last few years. According to a relatively recent survey, in 2007 there were around 270 NGOs in the field of children and youth work (Bohn and Stallmann 2007:40). However, the real number must be substantially larger if we consider the existence of many more NGOs, which although not specialising in youth work, do offer certain services to children and young people. It is worth noting that the institutional umbrella of non-governmental youth organisations in Greece is the National Youth Council, which was established in 1998 and comprises 59 youth organisations.

Finally, one could suggest that although all categories of youth work do exist in the country, the main fields of action lie in the following: career/employment services, youth information, programmes for disadvantaged and socially excluded young people, cultural education and cultural programmes, social care, sports, and international youth work programmes.

A new future for youth work in Greece?

Studying the history of youth work in Greece, there is no doubt that the role of youth work was, and still is, of great social value. Due to recent economic developments in the country this role may substantially increase. The youth work sector may be called on to undertake functions substituting the welfare state, which

is currently being downsized and marginalised. It may have to provide services reminiscent of the distant past, such as the provision of housing and subsistence for large numbers of disadvantaged youth. This is far from inconceivable given that the basic salary for newcomers in the labour market has been set by law at much lower than the existing basic salary and the youth unemployment rate climbed from 38.5% in July 2011³¹ to 48% in March 2012³² and then to 62.9% in May 2013³³

This new reality requires a new strategy as far as youth policy in Greece is concerned. It will certainly require a new role for the General Secretariat for Youth by shifting the epicentre of its activities from the management of leisure time to the real problems and needs of youth today and, more specifically, to issues such as youth unemployment, intergenerational justice, social inclusion, human rights and respect of diversity, lifelong learning opportunities, provision of targeted welfare services (for example, housing), and so on.

The current situation will also demand a series of other initiatives, including:

- the formulation of a comprehensive institutional framework for youth work and youth workers;
- setting up national standards for youth work and the development of a professionally accredited youth worker training scheme;
- drawing up a national action plan for youth work and effective co-ordination between public authorities and other relevant agents in the field;
- essential promotion of research on youth work issues through a closer dialogue and contact between policy makers and Greek academia/youth researchers.

All this would make absolute sense under normal circumstances. Regrettably, Greece is currently going through a period that, in political science terms, can only be described a virtual “state of exception” or “state of emergency” (Agamben 2005). Within this framework, enforcing the drastic downsizing of the public sector, the troika³⁴ has demanded from the Greek Government the dismantling of many public institutions. The first victims of this policy were the National Youth Foundation and the Institute for Youth, which – since November 2011 – together with the Institute of Continuing Adult Education have been dissolved and merged into a single body, the Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation,³⁵ with uncertain implications for the youth sector (both in terms of policy orientation and budget). And that was only the start: the Greek Government is now considering the dissolution of the General Secretariat for Youth itself and its downgrading into a directorate within the Ministry of Education. It is ironic that after more than 100 years, youth policy in Greece is in grave danger of returning to its starting point: philanthropy.

31. This data refers to young people aged 15 to 24. See “Youth Unemployment: A lost generation”, *The Economist*, www.economist.com/blogs/freexchange/2011/07/youth-unemployment, accessed 19 September 2013.

32. See “Greek unemployment passes 20 Percent, 48 for youth”, *H Kathimerini*, www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsite2_1_09/02/2012_426909, accessed 19 September 2013.

33. See “Euro area unemployment rate at 12.1%”, *EUROSTAT*, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-30082013-AP/EN/3-30082013-AP-EN.PDF, accessed 20 October 2013.

34. Representatives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Union (EU).

35. Joint Ministerial Decision 127175/ H (O.J. B2508 / 4.11.2011).

In a period marked by the dramatic increase of youth unemployment and, with it, of social exclusion of young people, violent incidents and acting-outs like the ones witnessed in the UK in August 2011 will, no doubt, be an increasing experience in many European countries.

Indeed, it is often the case that few other reactions are left to young people to protest their exclusion from “normal” social life (from education and work up to consumption). How else can they show their despair and anger at the barriers regulating access to higher education – such as the increase in tuition fees in UK universities imposed by the coalition government – and working life, especially in countries of the European periphery where youth unemployment is skyrocketing? As Bauman has pointed out in a recent article, in our post-modern societies, consumption also functions as a means of social inclusion. Hence by stealing mobile phones and trendy sneakers, UK rioters found a way to demand their inclusion from a society denying them any access to dominant consumption patterns (Bauman 2011). Greek riots (in 2008, 2011 and 2012) cannot be understood without taking into account the rapid deterioration of living conditions and expectations affecting youth on all these levels in times of crisis.

This alleged or assumed resistance and radicalisation of youth will inevitably lead to a return to the classic debate affecting the design of youth policy from time immemorial. On the one hand, we find policies premised on the idea that youth constitutes an ever-present social risk, with young people considered victims and bearers of all sorts of social pathologies (Demertzis et al. 2008:41, 48). On the other hand, we have policies that discern in youth the hope for a better social system, that place youth at the forefront of social experimentation and creativity. Today, more than ever, we need to take sides in this debate – the side of youth.

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