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**Supporting young people in Europe Volume III: looking to the future**

**Substantive issues, methodological lessons, support measures, and youth  
policy standards: a reflection on the 'third seven' Council of Europe  
international reviews of national youth policy**

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**“There’s a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in”**

**(Leonard Cohen 1934-2016)**

## Executive Summary

The Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy have been running for over 20 years. Since 1997, when the first international review took place (of national youth policy in Finland), 21 countries have been reviewed. These reviews have produced a steep learning curve in relation both to the process of conducting them and to the content of 'youth policy'. Following the first seven international reviews, a synthesis report was produced that endeavoured to construct, from the material available, a framework for assisting the understanding of 'youth policy' (Williamson 2002). This was in keeping with the third of the three core objectives of the international reviews of national youth policy:

- To provide constructively critical feedback on a country's youth policy through the application of 'a stranger's eye'
- To disseminate 'best practice' from a country's youth policy to the other member States of the Council of Europe
- To develop a framework for thinking more creatively and purposefully about 'youth policy' throughout Europe

A similar 'synthesis' exercise took place after a further seven international reviews, reflecting both on the unfolding and evolving process of carrying out the reviews and on new themes and issues for 'youth policy' that had not emerged or been apparent within the initial framework (Williamson 2008). This inevitably produced a somewhat unwieldy range and depth of issues that, in turn, demanded adaptation to the process of conducting the reviews.

This book is therefore the third 'synthesis report', though it does not focus exclusively on the last seven international reviews. It also draws together some of the conclusions and challenges that have emerged throughout the two decades since the international reviews commenced, and considers some lessons for the future: not least, alternative models of engagement in the youth field between the Council of Europe and its member States and whether or not there is a case to strengthening a 'reviewing' contribution and capability through the use of more robust and agreed indicators and standards to determine the efficacy of 'youth policy' within the member States.

The social, political, cultural and economic situation in Europe has changed quite dramatically over the past 20 years, especially for young people. The international reviews of national youth policy have taken place at a time of the 'enlargement' of both the Council of Europe and the European Union. It has also been a time of economic crisis and political diversification, at both end of the political spectrum, to which young people have responded very differently, and whose needs have also been interpreted in very different ways. 'Youth policy' has also evolved in different ways, and indeed continues to evolve (new politicians responsible for youth are invariably keen to put their stamp on their tenure through backing new initiatives). In contrast, the international reviews of national youth policy that have taken place are inevitably cast in stone, in the sense that they are bound to a particular time. Nonetheless, they still produce

many ideas, messages, tensions and issues that transcend the time at which they emerged and continue to have resonance and relevance today. It is these that are highlighted in this text.

The book has five chapters. The first provides an overview of the last seven international reviews of national youth policy – of Latvia, Moldova, Albania, Belgium, Ukraine, Greece and Serbia. This overview is not, it must be emphasised, a regurgitation of the executive summaries of those respective international reports. Each of those international reports was revisited in order to draw out those issues that have greatest purchase and pertinence for *international* consideration and discussion, even though they have been drawn from specific national contexts.

Chapter II takes a different stance, drawing on issues that spanned more than one of these seven international reviews but which have had little or insufficient profile and prominence in previous synthesis reports. In that respect, they add even more flesh to the bones of the idea of ‘youth policy’ – where it comes from, how it is made and where it is executed. Some issues, such as definitions of ‘youth’ and the role of national youth councils, are far from new: here they are raised again, because the lessons from these last seven countries further elaborate on, reinforce or provide new insights into them.

Chapter III considers the process of discharging the international reviews of national youth policy over the entire 20 years – from the international review of youth policy in Finland that took little over six months to the international review of youth policy in Serbia that took around two years. The great strengths attached to many innovations to the process (a preliminary visit to determine priorities and negotiate a suitable programme, extra working days for the international review team, a national hearing, greater scrutiny of the text prior to publication) have also, simultaneously, been weaknesses in the sense of considerably extending the duration of an international review.

This has led to deliberation within the Council of Europe Youth Department over alternative models of engagement with member States. These are considered, relatively briefly, in Chapter IV. All have their ‘trade-offs’, of course, in the sense that, for example, narrower foci risks losing a more holistic perspective, but there is little doubt that a more flexible menu of options should be developed and made available. The international reviews of national youth policy offer a template, or launch pad, from which this can take place.

Chapter V addresses the controversial and often contentious subject of indicators and standards for youth policy. It seeks to set the scene and promote the case for further debate, without advancing any conclusive answers. It makes the important point that this is not a new debate; indeed it has been a slow burner, with some early work conducted at the turn of the millennium. The challenge, throughout and moving forward, lies in identifying meaningful and manageable indicators, though even the term ‘indicators’ is often challenged and other terms, such as ‘benchmarks’ or ‘standards’ are favoured. Where some consensus would appear to exist is in the need to distil a relatively small suite of

indicators for perusal and inquisition, with perhaps some essential components and other more elective (optional) elements. Further debate needs to be developed sensitively: despite advocacy, from some quarters, that such a step-change in the Youth Department's relations with member States is imperative (for a range of reasons), there is also suspicion and the prospect of resistance that will need to be handled with care.

The Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy have, over 20 years, produced a significant body of knowledge and a respected, innovative methodology. They have significantly enhanced understanding and the development of 'youth policy'. This synthesis of the last seven international reviews, coupled with more of an overview of the learning that has accrued from all 21 international reviews, hopefully provide some useful lessons for the future.

## Introduction

It was over 20 years ago (1995) that the Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy were envisioned and it is 20 years since the first review was enacted. The idea was to replicate the practice of the Council of Europe reviews of national cultural policies but, while 'cultural policy' was by then broadly understood, 'youth policy' – beyond some rather vague conceptualisations and rhetorical assertions – was not. The international reviews of national youth policy were a venture, and adventure, into the unknown.

Indeed, in the opening to the first international youth policy review, of Finland, there is a quotation from a book of poems penned by the then Minister for Culture (as well as Youth), Claus Andersen. It is worth repeating here:

There is a road no one has taken before you  
 Maybe it's yours  
 If you find it, it will be  
 It doesn't exist but comes into being when you walk it  
 When you turn around, it's gone  
 No one knows how you got here, least of all yourself  
 (*What Became Words* 1996, p.141, cited in Fremerey 1999, p.11)

There were no explicit terms of reference for that first international review of a national youth policy. Finland had produced a national report and arranged a first set of visits for the international review team. After that, the team was on its own, working out what to consider and how to react. It probably did this quite effectively, but produced no legacy for the second review, of The Netherlands in 1998. Each of the first few youth policy reviews, as a result, took their own course. There was little preparatory work, except for the expectation that the host country would produce a 'National Report'<sup>1</sup> on the state of its youth policy, and the final (international) report was shaped primarily through the thinking and priorities of the rapporteur, with some consultation and contribution from other members of the international review team, rather than any other influences.

For this reason, five years after the international reviews of national youth policy had been set in train and built up an initial body of knowledge, albeit *ad hoc* and inconsistent, a report was commissioned that sought to draw out the key messages and themes from the first seven countries to have been subjected to an 'international youth policy review' (Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Romania, Estonia and Luxembourg), as they came to be called, and to propose a framework that might guide the enquiries and deliberations of future reviews. This report was duly completed in 2002 (Williamson 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> These were commissioned and prepared in very different ways, with different contributors and the use of a wide variety of source material. Despite their diversity, they usually provided some baseline information, knowledge and understanding to help members of the international review team establish some orientation towards the country in question.

A similar exercise was commissioned six years later after seven more reviews (of Lithuania, Norway, Malta, Cyprus, Slovakia, Armenia and Hungary). Not only did this add substantively to the framework of issues that required attention in 'youth policy' reflections, but it also paid attention to the *process* of conducting an international youth policy review – considering staging posts such as a preliminary visit prior to the two standard visits by an international review team, and a national hearing prior to the concluding international hearing before the Joint Council of the statutory bodies of the Youth Directorate (now Youth Department) of the Council of Europe - the European Steering Group on Youth (the CDEJ), comprising senior civil servants, and the Advisory Council on Youth, comprising representatives of youth organisations.

This publication is therefore the third 'synthesis' review. It considers the lessons learned from the next seven countries to be reviewed (Latvia, Moldova, Albania, Belgium, Ukraine, Greece and Serbia), and, like the second synthesis review, it also pays attention both to content and to process. Though it adds substantively to our understanding of the issues confronted in the shaping and making of youth policy, and reflects critically on the methodologies that were invoked in conducting the international reviews of national youth policy, it also looks to the future in terms of other models of engagement between the Council of Europe and its member states, and discusses the merits (and drawbacks) of a framework of indicators and standards for youth policy in the context of some expectation that there should be more robust monitoring procedures of youth policy development and implementation in the member States of the Council of Europe.

Though substantively covering only one third of the international reviews that have been conducted, chronologically this synthesis report covers the past ten years, and so half of the period during which the reviews have taken place.

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Times have changed dramatically over the past two decades. It is not just that twenty years have elapsed since the first review. Europe has, in many ways, been transformed. The first international review of national youth policy took place when there were just 15 members of the European Union, though 38 members of the Council of Europe. However, of the current 47 member States of the Council of Europe, five had only joined the previous year (1995) and five others just three years before (in 1993). Andorra had joined the Council of Europe in 1994. The joining by the Russian Federation (in February 1996) and Croatia (in November 1996) flanked the international review of national youth policy in Finland, which took place between March and September 1996. It is perhaps striking to note, therefore, that there were fewer members of the Council of Europe in the mid-1990s than there are now Member States of the European Union, the 15 EU countries having grown to 25 in 2004, then to 27 with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 and to 28, with Croatia, in 2013.

The evolution of the Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy has therefore taken place concurrently with this dramatic enlargement of



both the European Union and the Council of Europe. Though this is not the place to debate those relationships in detail, it is useful to reflect on the place of youth policy within those developments. It was perhaps not coincidental that one of the great spurs to stimulating political attention to youth policy took place around the time of the EU White Paper on Youth (European Commission 2001) in those Council of Europe member States that were seeking accession to the European Union, such as Slovenia, Hungary, Latvia and Cyprus. It is arguably not just coincidence that the international youth policy review of Armenia was requested shortly after Armenia joined the Council of Europe.

The swift enlargement of 'Europe' (whether defined as the now 28 Member States of the European Union or the 47 member States of the Council of Europe) at the turn of the millennium therefore also acted as a catalyst for youth policy momentum, in part as countries sought to learn from and emulate lessons from other 'unfamiliar' countries and in part to invest positively in young people's promise and potential to pre-empt the 'brain drain' that was anticipated from some countries at least.

The promise for Europe's young people and the promise of the benefits of greater European integration stalled suddenly, however, with the financial crisis of 2008. Young people have been hit disproportionately hard by the crisis, in some countries in particular, with levels of youth unemployment that could hardly be foreseen. On the wider political stage, the crisis heralded the growth both of 'radical' parties and social action on the left and 'reactionary' parties and social retrenchment on the right, with fault lines appearing throughout Europe between and within countries. Economic, cultural and religious divisions have been exacerbated. Domestic and European challenges have, further, been added to by the migration challenges arising from the social and political upheavals in Africa and the Middle East. Globalisation, once held to present greater hope for a greater proportion of the next generation, now appeared to be reinforcing inequality both between and within generations. The social exclusion of growing numbers of young people, through heightened levels of unemployment, the pressures of the housing market and delays in family formation – despite dramatically improved educational achievement and civic engagement and participation – has produced significant political concern<sup>2</sup> and different reactions amongst young people (see Williamson 2013). While the Council of Europe and the Youth Partnership have retained a broad purview of the issues, with laudable attention to, for example, the barriers to social inclusion (see Markovic *et al.* 2015) or combating the rise of hate speech in Europe, others have narrowed their youth policy focus to the most pressing matters, such as the re-engagement of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and addressing violent extremism and radicalisation. Yet it is clear that focus needs to be retained on a wider canvas of youth policy, even if some issues will inevitably command the high ground at particular moments. The European

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<sup>2</sup> In 2012, for example, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe debated 'the young generation sacrificed', considering the social, economic and political consequences for young people of the financial crisis: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=18918&lang=EN>

Commission's youth guarantee<sup>3</sup>, for example, is an important policy initiative but it should not attract exclusive attention and divert consideration of wider measures in the youth policy domains of education, vocational training and employment.

It is plausible to suggest that in the rather 'heady' days for youth policy in the mid to late 1990s – the days of, *inter alia*, the first Council of Europe Youth Ministers statement on youth policy (Bucharest 1996) and the preparation of the European Commission's White Paper on Youth (*A new impetus for European Youth* 2001), as well as a significant number of Council of Europe member States seeking accession to the European Union – there was a real groundswell of political interest and commitment in establishing policy measures that fell broadly under the umbrella of 'youth policy'. There were arguments about what should be 'in' and what should be 'out' (family policy? youth justice policy?) but, as the first synthesis report illuminated (Williamson 2002), there was a common framework around which youth policy development in many countries throughout Europe was taking shape. Analysis of the first seven international reviews of national youth policy (both the national and international reports) suggested that challenges and developments could be positioned within a *framework* that was broadly the same, even if the scale of those challenges, the resources available and the political will were very different:

**The 'youth policy' framework that emerged from a synthesis of the first seven international reviews of national youth policy**

*Conceptualisations* – of 'youth' and 'youth policy'  
*Legislation and Budgets* – the 'enabling' context  
*Structures for delivery* – regional/local government; NGOs  
*Policy domains* – education, training & employment, health, housing, crime  
*Cross-cutting issues* – participation, information, social inclusion, equal opps  
*Foundations for development* – training, research, good practice dissemination  
*Mechanisms for review and evaluation*

Source: Williamson (2002)

There was never any intention to produce a blueprint for 'youth policy' from the international youth policy reviews. Rather, the idea was draw on the diverse understandings and initiatives being taken in different contexts in order to inform a European debate on what might constitute youth policy. Indeed, from the very start, the objectives of the international youth policy reviews were threefold:

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<sup>3</sup> The EU youth guarantee, established in 2013 as part of the Youth Employment Initiative, promises young people a guaranteed place in education, training or employment within four months of leaving education or becoming unemployed:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/youth-employment/youth-guarantee/>

- To provide an constructive external critique of (and support for) 'youth policy' within the country under review
- To provide the wider Europe with knowledge about 'youth policy' in that country
- To use the lessons and learning from each successive country reviewed to build a framework of understanding of what 'youth policy' might look like

During the early 2000s, therefore, considerable reference and cross-fertilisation of debate took place on the 'youth policy' question, to which the findings of the Council of Europe international youth policy reviews made a significant contribution. Across the central youth policy domains of formal and non-formal education, vocational training, labour market initiatives, health, housing and (sometimes) criminal justice, there was a sharing of experience and practice that produced support for measures such as, for example, youth work, personal and social education, youth-friendly clinics, youth information and, critically, platforms for youth participation and involvement in decision-making. Some of these were well-established policy initiatives in some places, while completely innovative in others.

At the end of the 'second seven' Council of Europe international youth policy reviews, one could say with some confidence that thinking around 'youth policy' was reaching some level of maturity, with countries considerably more clear about its purpose and processes, and with the international youth policy reviews clear about their role and contribution. The financial crisis, together with what has been termed 'the tyranny of policy momentum' (see Hyman 2008), has changed much of that.

Over the past seven years, 'youth policy' has been significantly on the back foot, certainly in some parts of Europe, vulnerable to cuts in public services and questioned once again about its merits and legitimacy. If 'youth' needs a dedicated policy framework, so surely do other age groups, including the elderly – who tend to command more respect, having earned their 'rights', and who, anyway, are more likely to vote! Young people and their protagonists do, of course, argue differently: it is the young who have disproportionately suffered from the effects of austerity, yet the least blame for the 'crisis' should be attached to them, and so there needs to be a re-doubling of effort to ensure they have opportunities for greater support, security, autonomy and participation. The arguments will ebb and flow. What is not in doubt is that the stability of any youth policy, in almost any corner of Europe, is constantly under threat. New governments, even new Ministers, are eager to do something new and, increasingly, they sweep out not only tried and tested practice but also recent practice that has been tried but not yet tested. They often experiment with new measures that have no provenance or evidence base simply because they capture the political imagination or comply with the ideology of the ruling party.

This makes things very difficult for procedures such as the Council of Europe international youth policy reviews. These take time – usually around 18 months, but sometimes up to two years, from the initial preliminary visit to the approval

and publication of the final report. There is also meant to be, according to the overall process agreed between the country requesting a review and the Council of Europe, a follow-up after around two years<sup>4</sup>, through which consideration is given to the extent to which a country took into account the thinking and recommendations of the youth policy review, or did not.

There have been other models of engagement:

- Youth Policy Advisory Missions (from 2003)
- A proposed but unexecuted Youth Policy Strategic Support Development Mission
- Expert responses to draft youth policy and strategy documentation

And there is no doubt now that there should be other ‘bespoke’ responses, built on both demand and a deal, though it is not always clear how exactly these should be constructed. The international reviews of national youth policy – now a respected methodological framework emulated by others – were originally proposed by governmental representatives of the first country to be reviewed. Now is the time for a more collective and collaborative debate about other models for moving forward in the future.

First, however, it is necessary to look at the most recent seven countries to have been reviewed, their internal material and the international conclusions, and to connect this information to the procedures and frameworks developed over the previous decade. Readers might ask why these seven countries. It would be a good question, but the simple answer is because they requested a review. One international review team member who was not particularly familiar with the process or the history once asked ‘does the Council of Europe only review small eastern European countries?’ He had a point, asserting that quite a number of countries reviewed were from that geographical location and often around three million in size. Where, others asked, were France, Germany or the UK? Again, these are reasonable questions, to which the only safe answer is that they have not asked. Equally, one can in fact point to considerable diversity in the countries reviewed, in terms of geographical position, demographic profile, and political and cultural histories. Whether or not that is convincing is actually irrelevant; we are working with the material we have.

The basis for this analysis is somewhat different from the two that have preceded it primarily because – unlikely previous review procedures – many countries in this most recent ‘seven’ did *not* produce a formal national youth policy report. This was often because they neither had the professional and economic resources nor the knowledge base to do so. Instead, and sometimes as a rather poor substitute, they offered existing material: collections of reports, a current national youth strategy or something else. This has meant that, rather than drawing clearly and comfortably on 14 documents (seven national reports and seven international reports), as the two previous ‘synthesis reviews’ were

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<sup>4</sup> These have hardly ever been activated, certainly not formally, although sometimes there have been more informal reflections on the contribution made by the international youth policy review and subsequent youth policy development in the country on the basis of its recommendations.

able to, an exploration of the lessons from the most recent seven international youth policy reviews has had to probe a rather more diverse set of material, at least from the national perspectives. Seven reports produced by the international review teams do, however, continue to constitute the bedrock of this analysis.

It is important to emphasise from the outset, however, that this synthesis review intends neither to attack nor to applaud the 'youth policy' of particular countries. Rather it is to make use of the state of their youth policies at the time of these reviews in order to consider, more broadly, the issues at play and at stake in the formulation and implementation of youth policy in Europe. Times may move on and, on re-reading the international reviews, it is clear that some facts are already dated. But, equally, many of the issues raised persist. Some of the problematics identified continue to present dilemmas in youth policy formulation, development and implementation. Classical challenges and prevailing concerns – such as defining 'youth', tackling unemployment, building sufficient knowledge and understanding of the youth 'question', or ensuring effective structures for delivery – have not gone away. Sometimes they are now more present and protracted than ever. Other issues, hardly mentioned in many earlier reviews – like migration, especially the negative impact of both internal and out migration, have become much more prominent within youth policy debate. So it is not quite a case of *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, but there is nevertheless a strong ring of truth close to that contention. It is just that the shape and balance of the issues under consideration have altered in response both to national and international political, social and economic circumstances.

What this report does is to address a range of these issues as they prevailed *at the time* of the reviews of those seven countries but considering their relevance beyond that time and beyond those contexts – for reflection and perspective in relation to youth policy making across the wider Europe.

## I The 'third seven' international youth policy reviews – an overview

Every review is fixed in time. Comments and critique can easily be refuted and rebutted on the grounds that 'that was then'. Policy, with few exceptions, quickly becomes dated. Ten year political plans for young people may be scrapped within a couple of years. New initiatives are often sprung upon an unsuspecting public, including young people. The evidence for 'evidence-based' policy and practice is scant and elusive, as political priorities and imperatives, or wider economic and political circumstances take their toll on even the best of intentions, and drive policy and practice, including in the youth field, in other directions.

Let us consider the seven countries that anchor the discussions in this book. Latvia was highly motivated to request a youth policy review and genuinely committed to respecting its recommendations. The Minister responsible for youth at the time, Ainars Bastiks, sat through the whole day of the national hearing, not only opening the event but also contributing comments and his political perspectives. Soon afterwards, however, Latvia faced a dramatic economic collapse, threatening many of the ideas for youth policy to which the Minister and his staff aspired.

In Moldova, the Minister at the time of the youth policy review seemed to be oblivious of the Council of Europe advisory mission that had taken place just the year before. She was clearly acquiescing to a youth policy review that had been proposed by the previous political administration. The improving relations between the team and the Ministry then suffered a huge setback on account of a personal tragedy within the senior team serving the Minister for Education and Youth. Responsibility was heaped on a relatively junior official and, soon after the youth policy review was concluded, responsibility for 'youth' was transferred – along with the junior official – to the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Nobody from Moldova attended the international hearing and it fell to the co-ordinator of the youth policy reviews to 'represent' the Moldovan government by reading out a prepared written statement!

In Albania, the scant resources available to support the youth policy review were mitigated by assistance from the Council of Europe office in Tirana. The review was also helped by the fact that the Youth Department member of the Secretariat had previously worked in that office and so was well connected. Nonetheless, the review was conducted *after* a National Youth Strategy had been published, leaving the review to 'work around the edges' rather than make a central contribution to youth policy development, despite exceptional hospitality and a very positive welcome from the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports. Some years later, however, the Council of Europe remains connected to the youth agenda in Albania, which has now moved from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. Written responses have been provided for the more recent National Action Plan for Youth (2015-2020), collaborative training courses have been delivered and there are still discussions about the possible value of an advisory mission regarding the establishment of Regional Youth Centres across the country.

Belgium, with its three Communities and three rather different approaches to 'youth policy', is paradoxically a beacon of stability, or relative stability. However, because of its federal structure, a complex international review team was required, with its own form of stability to address the specificities of the different youth policies at play in Flanders, the French Community and the German-speaking Community, but also sufficient flexibility to be able to compare and contrast different responses to similar challenges throughout the country. This, in itself, was a logistical test and it produced some sharp methodological learning curves. Nevertheless, the review conveyed the need for different sensitivities to a country with a federal structure such as Belgium.

Ukraine posed different challenges. The enthusiasm for a review was tempered by an international review team's capacity to make sense of the scale of both the country and its population, before then considering the range, depth and effectiveness of its youth policies, even those identified as priority issues. The review team ended up working sixteen-hour days in order to travel (for three to four hours or more each way) to the north and west of the capital, Kiev, on its first visit, and then to the south and on to the autonomous republic of Crimea and its capital, Simferopol, on the second visit. The outcome was a phenomenally thorough and comprehensive review that was then overtaken by larger geopolitical events, leaving Ukraine in turmoil and divided. Youth policy was probably not at the top of the political agenda, though it has returned as a key issue, with Ukraine<sup>5</sup> asking once more for the support of the Council of Europe in delineating best practice in addressing the needs of its young people.

The crisis that affected Greece was of a different order but equally damaging in thinking about how youth policy might be taken forward. The economic predicament and regulation by the Troika<sup>6</sup> meant that the General Secretariat for Youth was required to ask the international review team for the return of its bus tickets, to provide evidence of their purchase. [The normal 'deal' for the reviews is that the Council of Europe funds all external costs, such as the flights and accommodation for the team, while the host country usually covers internal costs, such as transportation and translation. Ironically, in the case of Greece, on account of its particular economic circumstances, about the only thing it funded were the bus tickets!] With regard to looking at youth policy in Greece, the difficulty for the international review team was balancing a sense of 'realpolitik' (what *could* be done within the rigid constraints imposed on public policy) with some assertions of appropriate youth policy aspiration (what *should* be done, irrespective of contemporary conditions). The need to loosen up the institutional intransigence of the Greek public authorities had to be tempered by the rigidity of the regulations imposed by the troika. The youth policy review

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<sup>5</sup> Both Moldova and Ukraine have also, more recently, been part of a three-year EU-funded youth policy capacity building initiative across the Eastern Partnership: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. This project – developed through EPYRU (Eastern Partnership Youth Regional Unit) in Kiev – started just as the international youth policy review of Ukraine was concluded.

<sup>6</sup> The Troika was the name for the three institutions imposing conditions on Greece in return for essential 'bail out' funds: the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission.

was taking place within unprecedented circumstances and had to be tailored accordingly.

Serbia appeared to be rather different. Having established an impressive looking youth policy in 2008, the international review was meant to provide some external validation (as well as critique) of those developments as well as to inform the next steps and the next national youth strategy. But half way through the review, the economic situation of the country changed and so, correspondingly, did its politics. Though the government did not change, the same Minister responsible for youth and sports announced a much earlier formulation of the next youth strategy, apparently leaving the international review high and dry. Its isolation was compounded by a dedicated evaluation of the earlier youth strategy, funded by an international NGO. Various steps were taken, however, to harmonise these divergent developments as far as possible in the circumstances, culminating in a rather tense, but productive, meeting with the State Secretary for Youth. So, although the international review came too late to inform the strategic momentum, it remained able to assist operational thinking. Relationships had warmed sufficiently by the time of the international hearing that both the Minister and his State Secretary were in attendance, which was very much appreciated.

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Few of these eventualities could have been predicted in any detail, in terms of their impact on sustaining youth policy that prevailed and further developing youth policy in the light of the international review. But that does not negate the value of the reviews, either for the country concerned or for the wider Europe. Though over a much shorter time span, the learning allows us, as Geoff Pearson (1983) once put it in his historical study of youthful violence, to shed old light on new problems. Few of the youth policy challenges identified through the international reviews of national youth policy have gone away; hopefully the reviews point to the many different ways in which they may, in the future, conceivably be addressed. The reviews have generated a 'body of knowledge' that have contributed to the professionalization of the youth policy debate, providing a robust foundation stone for deliberating and reflecting on youth policy questions throughout Europe.

To bring us up to date, there follows some short synopses of the 'third seven' Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy.



## Latvia 2008

Latvia<sup>7</sup>, in 2008, as one of the countries that had only relatively recently joined the European Union, was eager to benefit from wider European experiences and perspectives on youth policy. Its young Director-General had previously been a very active leader of the National Youth Council and was familiar with the international youth policy reviews. He was no doubt at least partly instrumental in persuading colleagues within the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, and indeed the Minister himself, of the merits of seeking a youth policy review. The Minister was certainly very active in the preparatory discussions that took place in January 2008.

Latvia had undergone a 'radical transformation' since independence from the Soviet Union in 1989. Responsibility for youth had shifted constantly between Ministries and there had been frequent revisions of 'youth policy'. Definitions both of 'youth' and 'youth policy' had, it was argued, fuzzy boundaries. Yet there were strong attempts not to prematurely cast away some of the 'old' state socialist frameworks (in particular hobby and interest education) in some hurried embrace of 'new' European ideas (notably, at the time, the European Commission's 2001 White Paper on Youth). Latvia was engaged in a laudable effort to balance tradition and change.

Through its Council of Youth Policy Co-ordination, Latvia identified seven youth policy principles<sup>8</sup>, which the international review usefully classified into 'vertical', 'horizontal' and 'reflexive'. Vertical issues were concerned with the empowerment and participation of young people, horizontal ones with questions of welfare and social inclusion<sup>9</sup>. The reflexive dimension addresses issues of change and internationalism. [This theoretical model, developed by Herwig Reiter, is outlined below.] On the first of these, the international review team registered concerns about the uncertain and precarious status of the National Youth Council, which seemed to have to spend more of its time securing the resources to guarantee its own future than advocating for and collaborating on improvements in policy and practice for young people in Latvia.

The international review focused on a number of particular concerns:

- The growing proportions of young people remaining in academic education, thereby postponing often unfavourable or adverse labour market conditions, but also ignoring the possibilities of professional (vocational) education

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<sup>7</sup> Its neighbouring Baltic states, Estonia and Lithuania, had already been involved in the policy review process. Estonia was the sixth country to be reviewed, in 2000; Lithuania was reviewed in 2002, the first of the 'second seven' and therefore subject to new procedures, including a preliminary visit and a national hearing.

<sup>8</sup> In short: partnership, information, equal opportunities, youth interests, favourable social and economic conditions, mobility and international co-operation, youth integration facilitation.

<sup>9</sup> This distinction between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' issues is roughly paralleled in wider Council of Europe youth sector discussion that distinguishes 'opportunity-focused' from 'problem-oriented' youth policy.

- The marginalisation of the Russian language, despite the significant value of multilingualism in contemporary Europe, especially for countries with trade borders outside of the European Union
- The sustaining strength of hobby education and its traditions in content and delivery, thus stifling methodological and substantive innovation
- The challenge of youth unemployment and the dilemmas attending to careers guidance, work experience and labour market insertion initiatives
- The establishment and evolution of youth-friendly health services
- The lack of integration of youth policy
- The passivity rather than participation of a majority of Latvian youth
- The persistence of pronounced inequalities and disadvantage
- Relatively limited research on the social condition of young people
- A commitment to internationalism – and values of tolerance, diversity and equality – yet a stubborn retention of national and traditional positions

Youth policy in Latvia was held to be a ‘moving target’ that was steadily gathering momentum, despite many caveats. The international review reinforced some old considerations of youth policy and introduced new ones. In conjunction with material from the following six international reviews, these are discussed below (see Chapter III).

### Moldova

The international review of Moldova took place in 2008, a year designated as its ‘Year of Youth’. Despite an absence of any clear definition of youth policy in its national report, a national youth strategy identified four key priorities: access, participation, opportunity and capacity. This framework was not dissimilar to the EU youth strategy<sup>10</sup> that was published a year later (European Commission 2009), and equally broadly based! When asked to delineate more specifically the priorities for youth policy, the following issues were identified by the Ministry of Education and Youth:

- Vocational education
- Employment
- Non-formal education
- Voluntary work
- Capacity-building
- Access to information
- Participation

There were three paramount issues: the transition to the labour market; youth entrepreneurship; and non-formal education/learning. For the international review team, exploring youth policy in what has often been depicted as the poorest country in Europe, there were three foci of attention: the situation of

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<sup>10</sup> The EU youth strategy ‘Investing and Empowering’ had three broad aspirations: opportunity (in education and employment), access (to participation and sports) and solidarity (between the generations).

young people in Transnistria (the semi-autonomous, often described as separatist, Russian-speaking region in the east of Moldova); the internal and out-migration of young people; and the urban-rural divide. Of striking importance was securing some understanding of the one in three children and young people who had not seen either of their natural parents for over two years (UNICEF 2006), because they were working elsewhere and sending remittances home (one third of Moldova's income at the time came from these financial transfers). There was therefore double attention to migration, not just the departure of a well-educated stratum of Moldova's young people but "the huge number of abandoned children and young people left without parental care" (Vanhee *et al.* 2008, p.19).

Moldova was keen to become more closely aligned to European standards in relation to policy for individual young people, for young families and for youth NGOs. Committed to 'transversal' youth policy, a Youth Consultative Council had been established to guide the implementation of a National Youth Strategy 2009-13. Recognising the need for commitment from various line Ministries, the lead Ministry of Education and Youth sought to bring together not only these ministries but also relevant youth NGOs. It was a commendable vision, though seemingly less effective in practice, as the international review suggested:

The role of this council is to discuss the major issues regarding youth policy development and delivery. However, it only has advisory powers and can only recommend ideas to the Council of Ministers or the parliament. The whole structure for the delivery of youth policy is broad, and it is not always clear what are the relationships and hierarchies between its constituent parts (Vanhee *et al.* 2008, p.28)

Moldova had, nevertheless, commenced a laudable programme of youth policy implementation, through a National Youth Resource Centre and a number of regional and local youth resource centres, though they differed significantly in resources and reach, despite having the same common label. As in Latvia, the National Youth Council often struggled to maintain the baseline funding it needed to discharge its aspirations.

A further structural and strategic issue was the relationship between international NGOs and the government. Moldova was heavily dependant on the resource contribution of the former, but this also risked deviation from the direction of travel desired by the elected government. The international review noted that although "these donor organisations sometimes have much more experience in youth-related issues than officials from the MEY", it was also important that the Ministry "needs to retain its strategic leadership in accordance with its democratic political mandate" (Vanhee *et al.* 2008, p.31). The review was concerned that there was possibly too much latent friction in the youth field at different levels, as different interest groups struggled for influence and resources.

As elsewhere in Europe, though arguable with even more dramatic impact and consequences, Moldova is dealing with a generation of extremely well-educated young people who are unable to find employment commensurate with their

qualifications; in Moldova, graduates routinely get jobs at subsistence wages. Inevitably, this leads to many leaving, if they can. There is also an interminable drift from the countryside to the city. This raises the question about different kinds of 'incentive packages' (beyond labour market remuneration) that may slow down this internal migration; Moldova has been experimenting with a housing programme for young specialists (teachers and doctors) who are willing to remain in, or return to, rural areas.

For obvious reasons, a major focus of the international review of youth policy in Moldova was on the labour market, including the consideration of youth entrepreneurship and education for enterprise. Beyond that, the review explored health policy for young people in Moldova, deploring the fact that sexual health education – though desperately needed – was banned in schools. Youth health is an archetypically cross-sectoral policy issue, spanning health care, sport and education.

Particularly striking in Moldova were the huge divisions in access to information and services between the country and the city. Young people in Transnistria were excluded further not just by geography but also by language. Yet social exclusion remained viewed largely as a problem of individual pathology requiring social work and therapeutic intervention. This is clearly no longer the case, if ever it was. Young people face barriers to social inclusion on account of structural conditions and circumstances (see Markovic *et al.* 2015). Youth policy needs to address these both within and beyond so-called 'at risk' groups such as young people with disabilities or young offenders as well as, particularly for Moldova, young people at risk of negative migration (through trafficking) and those still living at home but without their parents.

The international review arguably helped the public authorities in Moldova to reflect somewhat differently on some of its core youth policy challenges. The resource base is thin but the vision is there. Most critical was the need to establish, or re-establish *trust* between governmental authority and civil society, so that civil society could increasingly play a part as a protagonist for more innovative youth policy, a partner in youth policy debate, and a provider of broader and better services to, for and with young people.

### Albania

Trust, or lack of it, featured prominently in the international youth policy review of Albania. Ten years prior to the review, Albania had faced economic and political meltdown, a 'spiral of woes': "the young wanted to get out at any cost and did not mind where" (Vickers 1999, p.233). At the time of the review, however, as a candidate country for membership of the European Union, Albania was being tipped as possibly the 28<sup>th</sup> accession state. It was, however, still struggling to reclaim positive aspects of a discredited past and continuing to undergo dramatic social, economic and political change, while promoting an open-minded position and approach within a National Youth Strategy led by its Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports. But resources were limited and

unpredictable. As the international review (Williamson *et al.* 2010, p.20) put it: “Resources remain very thin and the political wind shifts frequently, changing priorities and the allocation of resources that are available”.

Those priorities, for the government, were establishing an appropriate legislative framework, effective delivery mechanisms and youth participation. For the international review, central concerns lay around youth information, leisure-time activities and youth justice.

The international review first considered the broad ‘social condition’ of young people in Albania, where the big issues appeared to be having ‘nothing to do’ (though many were studying all the time!), the paucity of relevant and accessible jobs, and family relationships, especially in terms of housing. As elsewhere, there was the challenge of over-qualification: ‘everyone wants to go to university’ – but there were few graduate level jobs available. And though, unlike elsewhere, health (and especially sexual health) policy was not constrained or opposed by religious ideology, there appeared to be huge issues around the conversion of progressive health policy thinking into practice. Faith groups in Albania, indeed, appeared to play more of a social, rather than spiritual, role in their contribution to public policy<sup>11</sup>.

The international review also looked briefly at international mobility and migration, both positive and negative, the position of minorities, the place of volunteering in a country where this had once been a punishment, (un)equal opportunities and the growing awareness of, and commitment to, responsibility for the environment. Throughout, the international review team encountered many dynamic individuals, great ideas and impressive projects but concluded that these were, too often, ‘beacons of excellence’ rather than general practice. Their replication and sustainability was frequently in doubt.

Most youth field practitioners in Albania took governmental initiatives and intentions, pronouncements and developments ‘with a pinch of salt’. There was, in keeping with tradition<sup>12</sup>, only limited or partial respect for and trust in the law. The paradox here was that although stronger legislation was deemed to be needed to, literally, legitimate youth policy, to date this had not been ‘enabling’ but rather ‘disabling’: one respondent suggested that youth NGOs were “getting suffocated by the law”. No wonder then that the mechanisms for the delivery of youth policy were described as ‘bureaucratic’ and ‘sluggish’. There were weak links between the levels of policy implementation. Albania had no National Youth Council (though it resurfaced, and was re-launched around the time of the second visit of the international team). And a range of mythologies, allegations and half-truths surrounded an activist youth organisation called Mjaft, which had

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<sup>11</sup> In the distinctive case of ‘blood-feud’ traditions in Albania, religious leaders – through their social standing – played a central part in mitigating the worst excesses of such traditions (see Williamson *et al.* 2010, pp.44-46).

<sup>12</sup> This is why many in Albania (particularly northern Albania) have continued to be guided by the Kanun (Kanune i Lekë Dukagjinit), a comprehensive compilation of Albanian customary law: “a workable, indeed indispensable framework for village authority, filling a dangerous vacuum” (De Waal 2007, p.85).

initially been proclaimed as (and claimed to be) an attempt to rationalise and co-ordinate youth policy delivery and funding streams. The international review described the story of Mjaft as “a murky cocktail of many forces” (Williamson *et al.* 2010, p.73) that had left a ‘damaging legacy’ of suspicion and mistrust. New proposals for a National Youth Centre and twelve regional youth centres (still in development in 2016) held the promise to consign these perspectives to the past and build a more constructive future.

The jewel in the crown of Albania’s youth policy was unequivocally its framework for youth participation, initially developed through UNICEF, and consolidated by the re-launch of the National Youth Council in November 2009. It consists of a mosaic of children’s governments, youth parliaments and student councils, and is supported, in some places, by youth work initiatives to give young people a voice in relation to municipal planning and provision. As always, there are questions about representativeness, exclusion, tokenism and effectiveness. Youth participation in Albania did seem to be more about doing practical projects rather than ‘empowerment’ and rights.

For the international team, there were concerns about the nature of, and access to youth information, particularly in the light of the persisting digital divide in Albania. There were also concerns about the disappearance of much ‘associational space’ that had fallen into the hands of the private sector. The National Youth Strategy expressed its commitment to the

re-appropriation of public spaces usurped during the transition period and the creation of youth centres and community libraries throughout the country (see Williamson *et al.* 2010, p.97)

These are forceful words, but little was said later in the strategy about how these objectives might be achieved. Nor, throughout the international review, beyond ‘isolated glimpses’, was much mention made of non-formal learning. Establishing not only associational space for young people but also ways in which this would be used purposefully remained a key challenge for Albania.

More positively, a new focus on ways of dealing with youth offending was commended. Albania, according to the OSCE (2009) at the time, was making significant progress and steps towards conformity with international standards in the field of criminal justice generally. The international review team witnessed this in relation to youth justice, across the spectrum from a commitment to prevention and early intervention, to the new ‘re-integration’ centre (*de facto* custodial institution) for serious offenders under the age of 18.

The international review concluded that Albania held many positive visions for both young people and for a youth policy to support them, but that these were routinely and systematically undermined by an absence of public trust in state institutions and political promises. But this was not a recipe to give up, but an

obstacle to be overcome. As the newly re-born National Youth Council noted optimistically, 'hope dies last'<sup>13</sup>.

### Belgium

Belgium was the first federal state to engage with an international youth policy review. Though routinely and recurrently portrayed as 'complicated' in terms of its structures of governance and authority, much seems to work effectively. Youth policy is no exception, although the international review did raise a number of points of criticism and concern. Nevertheless, from the start, it is perhaps useful to reiterate the review's *concluding* words:

wherever you may be in Belgium, there remains a strong political will to serve young people well and there is a range of constructive and opportunity-focused youth provision. It is certainly diverse, and so does raise questions about the equity of service in different places, but – certainly if contrasted with the lives of young people elsewhere in Europe – any part of Belgium, if you are young, remains a good place to be (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.119)

'Wherever you may be' is an important point, for youth policy manifests itself – in philosophy, range and depth, and practical delivery – in quite different ways between the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community. This meant that, procedurally, the review had to find a strategy to consider youth policy for all young people in Belgium, wherever *they* may be, while also giving attention to the specificities of youth policy within each of the three Communities and indeed within the Brussels-Capital region, which clearly – because of the presence of the European institutions and a significant population from migrant backgrounds - has a very different demographic, ethnic and linguistic composition.

The review team was necessarily large to accommodate the task, but it was definitely *not* composed of three 'sub-teams' reviewing three youth policies in three locales of governance. Most members of the eleven-strong team had some contact with youth policy thinking and application in a Community other than the one on which they were primarily focused. However, given the different youth policy priorities and concerns expressed by the three Communities, to which they wished the review to give particular attention, the final document does present three substantive chapters covering each Community in turn. But it also has one chapter that attempts to illustrate the complexities of youth policy formulation and delivery when responsibilities are shared between federal, regional and community levels. This chapter dedicates its attention to the pressing issue of youth unemployment and the chapter considers policy responses across the country and between different levels of governance.

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<sup>13</sup> An apposite turn of phrase, given the superb book of the same name by the legendary oral historian Studs Terkel (2004). The subtitle to the book is 'Making a Difference in an Indifferent World'.

As the review notes at the start, Belgium lies at the heart of Europe, with its national capital, Brussels, also the headquarters of the European Union. Yet no-one who knows anything about Belgium can escape the paradox that the unifying and integrating aspirations of Europe, through the EU, take place within a country that is itself 'split' in a variety of ways. The review team made the point that, however controversial and undiplomatic it might be, it may take a 'stranger's eye' to highlight some of the inconsistencies, and perhaps inequalities, for young people that arise from living in one part of Belgium rather than another. To that end, the review team requested that Belgium should

fold up some of its traditional and established political umbrellas in order to view various professional and practical issues for young people through our lens, even if, for political necessity if not professional rationality, those umbrellas have then to be extended once again (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.11)

The international team endeavoured to get to grips with a strikingly complex picture of diversity and difference, which was sometimes better conceived of as separation and parallel lives. The demographic profile of young people across the country was as mixed as the youth policy responses. But slowly some sense was made of the situation; the team was indeed congratulated by its hosts for managing so well to make sense of the 'maze' that epitomised youth policy in Belgium.

In Flanders, the Flemish Youth Policy Plan 2011-14 had adopted a framework drawn heavily from the 2009 EU Youth Strategy (European Commission 2009). It contained the same eight thematic components<sup>14</sup>. Its vision, premised on the belief that every child has talent, was to ensure equal opportunities, increase opportunities for young people, give young people space to develop, and promote their participation. Youth policy in Flanders is anchored firmly in youth work, considered to be the third milieu or pillar of socialisation (the others being family and school). Youth policy legislation<sup>15</sup> corroborates this perspective.

Youth work has a long, and strong, history in the Flemish Community, though this is essentially to do with powerful youth *movements*, enabling youth participation and led by young people themselves. More recently, new forms of youth work have emerged that appear to be more concerned with the professional delivery of youth work to more vulnerable, marginalised and challenging groups of young people. Moreover, while the review commended the central focus on Flemish youth policy on 'neighbourhood' and local affiliation and identity, it did raise questions as to whether this simultaneously risked 'trapping' young people inside tightly framed geographical boundaries. [This issue is an important one more generally for youth policy and is discussed further below.]

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<sup>14</sup> Participation and information; education (formal, non-formal and informal); health and sport; social inclusion; employment; creativity and entrepreneurship; youth and the world; volunteering.

<sup>15</sup> There are five relevant acts/decrees, concerned with municipal youth work, accommodation for young people, equipment for activities, participation, and – critically – children's rights.



Flanders has a range of structures for the development and delivery of youth work and youth policy through municipal provision, youth information, internationalism and mobility, youth research, and financial support for national youth associations. As the review notes positively (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.31), “Evidently, the youth work system has been fully developed”, though it also proposes the caveat or concern that provision is so tightly bounded by formal regulation that, arguably, it stifles space for creativity, risk-taking and innovation.

Consideration of youth policy in Flanders then takes on the Council of Europe position on youth policy, which incorporates all policy fields affecting the lives of young people. There is discussion of education and schooling, particularly early school leaving and ‘drop-outs’. Responses to youth unemployment are described, as well as wider concerns about social inclusion. And despite the Flemish government’s aspiration to promote an ‘innovative, lasting and warm society’, the recurrent issue for the international review team was the limited connections between young people of Flemish origin and the growing population of young people from migrant backgrounds. Not that there was intentional segregation. Indeed, the position was quite the opposite but integration was not actively promoted; as one respondent from a ‘traditional’ Flemish youth movement put it, “we are open to it, but not actively seeking it” (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.40).

This key conclusion, compounded and indeed reinforced by differential forms of youth work that seemingly conveyed few common points of reference, was the foundation for a number of challenges identified by the international review team. These included a funding dependency on the government that produced caution and compliance, when perhaps more innovation was required; an arguably over-segmented youth sector where youth work remained stubbornly detached from other youth policy areas, despite proclamations of co-operation and co-ordination; and a multiculturalism too often characterised by a reality of ‘living apart together’.

The French Community had already faced similar challenges. Suffering from dramatic industrial decline over the past few decades, Wallonia, or the Walloon Region – of which the French Community is a part - has experienced what has been described as the ‘diversification of European diversity’, which has included polarising opportunities for young people. Young people have faced what might be called a ‘triple whammy’: a declining labour market, a reluctance to move (in stark contrast to the position in eastern Europe), and decreasing civic engagement. This has exposed what the international review team described as the fragility of social networks and bonds, and the vulnerability of conceptions of ‘citizenship’ within the French Community. This perspective on citizenship is captured by the acronym CRACS, Citizens who are Responsible, Active, Critical and Solidary. As a result, the public authorities have embarked on a comprehensive reform of youth policy, notably bringing together universal services and more specialist support provision concerned with welfare and protection. Nonetheless, like its Flemish counterpart, the heart of youth policy

remained within a socio-cultural framework, though more attention was now also focused on economic and 'employability' issues.

The international review highlighted a number of ambiguities and contradictions, dilemmas and tensions that flowed from an ethos of subsidiarity and the resultant autonomy of municipalities to shape their own provision. Were they in fact 'free', or rather, isolated? Freedoms tend to also bring fragmentation and inconsistencies in provision. Big tasks for youth policy were often left to small projects, which sometimes struggled to 'join the dots'. It was not always clear where 'youth' provision stopped and wider forms of social or educational provision kicked off.

Such tensions are not necessarily a bad thing. The French Community was imbued with multi-professional initiatives, reflecting a deeply held commitment to cross-sectoral practice and the parallel achievement of multiple goals. As the international review observed, "These kinds of mixed-method approaches to promote transversal values are courageous" (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.57). But they also generate challenges, not least as to how to conceptualise young people in relation to youth policy – "as individual clients of the services, as youth cultural groups or as community actors" (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.57).

The international review went on to explore other policy fields affecting young people, primarily education and the labour market. Here, as with Flanders, a key issue revolved around discrimination against immigrants and a lack of integration as educational underachievement and early drop out, and youth unemployment disproportionately affected young people of migrant origin. The international review team concluded that the French Community had to confront four key issues – 'political cornerstones', as they were described - in the formulation of its youth policy:

- Acknowledging and addressing the downside of its 'community' philosophy, though there was much to commend it
- Balancing unity with diversity, recognising that open doors and equal access will often still lead to unequal outcomes
- Ensuring meaningful and far-reaching youth engagement
- Dealing with the 'serious shortage' of comprehensive data on young people in the French Community, and reflecting further on what should count as meaningful 'evidence'.

With regard to the emergent 'Youth Plan' in the French Community, the international team welcomed the combining of youth policy and youth welfare policy within

"a new transversal dynamic to overcome existing tensions, particularly in terms of gaps and overlaps in vertical and horizontal arrangements" (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.66)

The conceptual framework, the international review concluded, was eminently sound, focusing on preventative intervention, the development of identity and

employability, thereby enabling young people both to be young and to become adult, and providing both forums (space) for self-expression and transition zones (bridges) for taking the next steps on the journey to adulthood<sup>16</sup>. The international review team also commended the preparatory process for not shying away from the inevitable conflicts that can derive from more ‘transversal’ and ‘holistic’ policy aspirations, though it did raise questions about levels of competence and the assignment of responsibility, as well as the extent to which the feedback from consultations genuinely contributed to the final decision-making. The issues to be addressed by the Youth Plan that was finally agreed, though the Plan was still not concluded when the international review ended, were as follows: young people’s capacity, their skills, inequalities, choices, transitions, sustainable development, and locality and mobility. It was a well-constructed agenda for action, if action ultimately followed.

Youth policy in the German-speaking Community (Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft - DG) of Belgium was classically viewed as concerned with socio-cultural education and the social development of young people, particularly with regard to participation, outside school. More recently, it has been reconceptualised in the Regional Development Concept as

“a cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary task including – besides youth work – themes such as employment, voluntarism and the media” (Pudar et al. 2013, p.83)

Youth work remains, however, the main instrument of youth policy and is delivered to the small youth population (under 25,000 are aged between 5 and 29), through associations, clubs, mobility programmes, youth information and an active volunteer Youth Council. According to the international review, young people

experience a combination of different – seemingly oppositional – influences, in that they reflect globalisation and localisation at the same time (Pudar et al. 2013, p.77)

By this is meant that, though strongly attached to and affected by tradition and organisation in their villages, young people are also routinely exposed to influences from many sides<sup>17</sup>. The public authorities are conscientious of the value of this strategic geographical location and wish to ensure that young people maximise their benefit from it. Though the social condition of young people remains broadly favourable in the German-speaking Community, arguably because of the continuing effectiveness of the ‘dual system’ in facilitating labour market insertion and participation as well a purposeful structure of support for young people having more difficulty in making the

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<sup>16</sup> This approach is very much in keeping with the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Declaration: [http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8529155/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration\\_FINAL.pdf/cc602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85](http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8529155/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration_FINAL.pdf/cc602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85)

<sup>17</sup> The rest of the Walloon Region, Germany, the Netherlands and Luxembourg are all reasonably close by, including the big cities of Namur, Liège, Maastricht and Aachen.

transition from education to work, wide-ranging consultations concluded correctly that a deeper and wider conception of youth policy was required. At the time of the international review, it had been decided that a decree would be established to require five-year youth policy plans covering pre-determined ground but allowing space for a 'concentrated fussilade' on particular issues and innovation where required.

The international review of youth policy in Belgium, in an attempt to put empirical flesh on the theoretical bones joining up vertical and horizontal dimensions of youth policy and practice into some form of workable and corporate whole, concluded with a case study of one specific youth policy area, youth (un)employment:

Though it took some time to absorb the details, the international review team gradually came to understand how the different parts of what might broadly be called 'employment policy' for young people linked together. There may be questions as to whether even greater synchronicity would produce better results, and there are ubiquitous questions about issues such as qualification inflation, sanctions, and the efficacy of measures such as job subsidies, but there appeared to be general consensus – with which the international team would largely concur – that the Federal and Regional levels, and indeed the Community level, all play a complementary part within a purposefully overlapping framework (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.101)

Though there were predictable tensions around resourcing and controlling aspects of the labour market context, the international review concluded that within that context different levels of policy and practice did connect reasonably well together. In other words, insertion programmes, guidance provision, benefit payments, and sanction imposition, *inter alia*, even though these were delivered by different authorities, tended to work in relative, if often uneasy, harmony. Even then, it was difficult to establish sustained connections. What was the significant problem, however, was that it was almost impossible to establish useful connections beyond the terrain of the labour market and job preparation. Links between education and work were described as 'ruptured'. Local NGOs and specialist bodies working with particular groups of young people at greatest risk of labour market exclusion appeared to be detached from institutional partnerships. All in all, greater coherence was imperative and, as the international review asserted,

For the growing population of young people already on the margins of the labour market or at risk of becoming so, greater coherence cannot come soon enough (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.109).

This was a tough conclusion on a central youth policy challenge for a country that generally commits very positively to young people in so many aspects of their lives.

## Ukraine

Ukraine was by far the largest country to be reviewed by the Council of Europe. In the eyes of some, the international youth policy review was the 'youth dimension' of the Council of Europe's 2011-2014 Action Plan for Ukraine (Council of Europe 2011). In order to gain a sense of its scale (and concomitant challenges), the team explored regional youth policy delivery as well as the national picture across six locations in eight days, from the north to the south of the country. Ukraine is characterised by considerable diversity on many fronts: demography, geography, ethnicity, economy, politics and religion. As the international review confirmed,

Ukraine is a country where regional differences are very significant – regions are not only marked by different cultural traditions, languages and architecture, but also by different economic conditions, access to resources and political attitudes (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.23).

The unstable political situation was registered before the turmoil that has afflicted the country in recent years.

Young people are equally diverse, especially given a definition of 'youth' in Ukraine that ranges from 14-35. This broad range sub-divides into three groups: those largely of school age still living at home; a young adult population of whom a significant number are students; and an older group of working age, though many may not be in employment. There is a strong sense of normativity in Ukraine, of what young people *should* be doing; those who are not on 'prescribed or presumed pathways' (as the international report put it) are often and too easily overlooked. Youth policy in Ukraine was also considered by the international review team to be very 'paternalistic', guided and governed largely by adults, with limited engagement by young people. Strengthening young people's role and voice was, indeed, a major policy recommendation of the review. Moreover, the international review expressed concern at the apparent neglect in youth policy of (the majority of) young people who are neither viewed as 'trouble' nor viewed as a 'resource'. A (differential) youth policy focus only on either talented or troublesome youth meant that

limited, indeed little, attention is paid to the vast number of young people in the middle of the spectrum whose situation was much less debated and to whom much less investment is directed (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.34).

Shortly before the review, Ukraine had had a restructuring of political responsibility for youth policy, moving it – as a State Service for Youth and Sports – to a Ministry in which, according to many respondents, it had been seriously relegated as a policy priority. Moreover, there appeared to be no established mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration between ministries that had other responsibilities for young people. The international review examined the rather disconnected mosaic of activity that endeavoured to deliver a framework of services and opportunities to young people. Youth organisations seemed to be quite actively engaged in discharging projects but less involved in activism to influence the youth policy framework or to introduce new items to

the youth policy agenda. That latter task fell to international NGOs, though their promotion of sensitive issues (notably around health and human rights relating to discrimination, gender equality and support for those who are HIV positive) tended to remain separate from the governmental agenda. International NGOs were also most committed, according to one respondent, to “engaging youth as active citizens: infecting them with a ‘can do’ attitude” (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.46). On some issues, business and private donors also help to resource provision, thereby plugging some policy gaps, but also leaving unpopular issues still unaddressed.

Despite strong assertion by the State Service of its three youth policy priorities, it was not easy to detect much consensus on the key issues of concern for those across the youth field. The State Service asked the international review to give paramount attention to youth unemployment, health and healthy lifestyles, and patriotic education, but respondents to the international review identified a host of other important youth policy challenges, including housing, domestic and public violence, European integration, international mobility, Internet access, and volunteering. The ‘package’ of priorities was somewhat different in the different regions visited by the team. The international review team itself considered two further issues in some depth – youth engagement and participation, and vulnerability, risk and exclusion – as well as commenting more briefly on a wider canvas of themes raised during its fieldwork visits. It should be noted that there was widespread scepticism about political initiatives in the youth field, captured crisply by one respondent:

Most political initiatives are more about seeking votes than making sense – great ideas but no substance or operational possibility (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.58).

Legislation rarely produced the funding conditions that could enhance practical action. As a result, the *delivery* of youth policy was often critically dependent on the motivation and commitment of inspiring individuals who had forged partnerships and enlisted civil society actors to make things happen at the local level, often seemingly against the odds.

Ukraine faced a raft of health challenges, including life expectancy and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Generally poor health conditions prevail and this is compounded by low expenditure on health policy. This helps to explain the importance of trying to cultivate healthy lifestyles amongst young people. Commendably, Ukraine has shifted its policy stance from the legislative prevention (*de facto* unsuccessful prohibition) of negative health behaviour to the promotion of individual responsibility for positive health. To that end, the State Service had developed a ten-point guide outlining the ‘constitution of a healthy person’. There were further illustrations of innovation and development in youth health policy, though the international review concluded that there was still insufficient attention paid to strengthening access to general health (and sports) services, and that more non-formal and participatory learning approaches were needed if information provided was to be successfully converted into lifestyle change.

Youth unemployment is a major concern in Ukraine, particularly because – unlike many other parts of Europe and especially eastern Europe – parents are rarely able to provide some level of financial ‘cushion’ against the impact of unemployment. This leaves young people desperate, destitute and despondent. Various state initiatives have been put in place and many new measures have been announced, though their implementation at the time of the international review was questionable. It was certainly recognised, however, that reform and development of policy to address youth unemployment was essential. There was a need for closer attention to matching skills with labour market needs, establishing ‘lifelong learning’ for employment and improving professional orientation and careers guidance. The immediate challenge was to know the population who needed such attention: for a number of reasons, many unemployed young people simply did not register with the State Employment Service. Further issues included endeavouring to foster enterprise and an entrepreneurial spirit in young people (especially to encourage self-employment), and seeking to counter the ‘brain drain’, for although there is a relative absence of mobility in Ukraine, there are still significant risks of more able young people leaving the country.

What is ‘patriotic education’? The international review team debated long and hard to secure a perspective and understanding of what this term meant and conveyed. Some were positive, maintaining that it was akin to the practices of ‘learning for citizenship’ familiar in other parts of Europe; others were more sceptical, expressing concern that it reflected a resurgence of nationalism and a celebration of victory and conquest. Citizenship itself is a highly contested concept, in relation both to national and European debates (see, for example, European Commission 1998). It has been described by Heater (1999) as having been invested with so much meaning that it has become meaningless. What is not in doubt, though, is that the idea of citizenship is essentially connected to broader ideas around affiliation, belonging and identity [indeed, the original idea of citizenship was based on national identity, represented through a passport]. Hall and Williamson (1999), in their short pamphlet on the subject, make the critical point that citizenship cannot exist without the idea community: it is about belonging to a community of one sort or another. And in Ukraine, the many separations, secessions and segregations that have affected the country over many years have, arguably, produced a desire to construct an educational curriculum that celebrates ‘being Ukrainian’ in a variety of different ways, some certainly attached to military history and traditions, but others more connected to inter-generational connection and communication, and to local community involvement.

It is worth quoting at some length from the international review, because the debate is an important one:

The term ‘patriotic’ allows for a striking diversity of activities to be conducted under its name. It seemed that almost any type of activity can be provided under the label of patriotic education, yet it is not promoted as a horizontal theme but as a specific strand of youth activities.

The quotation below illustrates the embracing character of patriotic education with its linkages to leisure activities, civic engagement and militarism:

Youth development is framed around patriotic effort – camping, discos, hiking, military drills; building playgrounds for children, clearing waste from the territories, integration, healthy lifestyles.

This mixture of activities frequently referred to as ‘patriotic education’ at times created a repertoire of slogans that seemed, taking a step back, *difficult to hold together*: tolerance, militarism, nationality, volunteering, unity, cultural diversity, European integration – these are references to very different traditions and discourses. Furthermore, it needs to be acknowledged that while some of these slogans may be very effective in engaging (some groups of) young people, others may be less popular with (other groups of) young people and produce resistance to or dismissal of the whole concept (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.113, emphasis added)

The international review team was not dismissive of the idea of ‘patriotic education’. Rather it argued the case for ensuring a suitable philosophical base to inform its further development – one embedded in being open for change, committed to inclusivity, and enacted through participatory methodologies.

Indeed, it was the striking absence, generally, of youth engagement and participation that exercised the minds of the international review team. Far too much youth policy and practice in Ukraine was still determined, almost exclusively, by adults. The international review points to various ways of strengthening youth participation and engagement, in diverse forms and with diverse aims, including through stronger support for youth organisations, greater recognition of non-formal learning and an acceptance that creative youth cultures are an important space for young people’s expression, self-organisation and development. The international review team was also deeply concerned about the limitations to, and nature of, provision of support available to the many vulnerable groups of young people in Ukraine. It applauded many of the efforts being made but questioned the efficacy of many current strategies and practices. Access to services was unpredictable and tightly regulated. Overall, the review concluded that both within and beyond the three pressing youth policy concerns articulated by the State Service on Youth and Sports, there needed to be more robust strategic planning and capacity building, and greater attention to generic youth policy development though with a more fluid and flexible focus on supporting more vulnerable groups of young people. And the most urgent issue was the promotion of more active community and societal engagement by young people through greater commitment to youth participation.



## Greece

The approach to the international review of youth policy in Greece adopted a rather different format for a number of reasons. The methodology was the same, in terms of team composition and the nature of the two visits, but the focus was very firmly pitched on the 'crisis' – the economic crisis that has afflicted much of Europe since 2008 and has affected Greece in particular. By the time of the review, Greece had already been subjected to some years of draconian austerity measures imposed, in return for 'bailout' finance, by the 'Troika': the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Young people's labour market opportunities in Greece have been dramatically diminished, and youth unemployment in Greece has taken on gargantuan levels. The international review team had been asked to explore the 'leisure and culture' dimensions of young people's lives, but drew the conclusion that:

While engagement in leisure and cultural activities still represents an important form of informal youth participation providing some sense of identity, hope and even job opportunity, the international review team concluded that special attention should be placed on youth transitions marked by destandardisation and diversification of transitional trajectories. This is in line with European and global trends, although the uncertainty, inequality and increased exclusion of young people in Greece, which has negatively influenced their autonomy, has resulted in more extreme manifestations (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.56)

As a result, the review did not 'spread its wings' as much as previous ones had done, and remained very concentrated on questions of youth unemployment, forms of 'engagement' by what many would have predicted to be a dispirited, discouraged and detached youth population in Greece, and the extent to which the structure of the public services that remained continued to hinder or had the capacity to promote some level of opportunity for young people in Greece.

The effects of the crisis on many young people in Greece was portrayed as 'shocking', despite contrary images and observations of young people still occupying the bars and cafés of Athens and Thessaloniki. Young people had been subjected both to drastic austerity measures and the sharp curtailing of their development opportunities. No wonder, perhaps, in the context of disproportionate experience of unemployment, their lives were described in the national report as 'not so good' and that they felt disappointment, disbelief, fear, fatigue and pessimism with regard to the future. At the time of the international review, such feelings were still increasing, as over two-thirds of young people felt the "worst is yet to come" (GSY 2012, p.52). The situation was clearly exacerbated by the lack of trust expressed by young people towards the institutions in Greece that potentially might do something about their plight. If things were to change for the better for them, they believed it would largely be a result of their own volition, not youth policy development.

In some senses, that was also the implicit view of the public authorities, for many recent measures introduced – in relation to both youth unemployment and youth participation – were very much about enabling young people to stand on their

own two feet (as if they were not having to already). The reality, of course, was that young people were already navigating and juggling various combinations of education, training, employment, unpaid work experience, and both traditional and new forms of 'volunteering'. Youth policy in Greece proclaimed to be lending a helping hand, drawing on EU measures such as the 2011 Youth Opportunities Initiative and the 2012 Youth Employment Package that includes the Youth Guarantee. It was anticipated that Greece's Presidency of the EU in 2014 (immediately following the international youth policy review) would take such measures forward, not least in relation to strengthening opportunities for apprenticeships and promoting the value of youth mobility for employment.

Of particular note were the diverse approaches to supporting entrepreneurship, established across a number of Ministries and General Secretariats. It was not clear how much co-ordination lay behind such initiatives (an ubiquitous issue in Greece, the international review incrementally concluded) and there were concerns about duplication. There was also a drive to encourage innovation and diversification in rural areas, including training for young people wishing to become farmers, though existing young farmers were adamant that such policy was "not sustainable and not to be recommended" (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.28).

What was clear was that, within the strict constraints of the Troika conditions, various strands of government were endeavouring to construct new approaches to youth employment and labour market insertion, though how meaningful and relevant these were to young people, or how likely they were to be effective, was a matter for debate. The international review team was also especially interested in the role of compulsory military (or civilian) service in providing a bridge to work and supporting wider transitions to adulthood. Young people generally accepted that such enforced activity was broadly 'honourable'; critics alleged that it put 'life on hold'. It was agreed, however, that for many young people, facing current circumstances, military service did produce a sense of belonging and offered a stepping-stone to work.

Youth policy in Greece is also centrally concerned with supporting the development of a more active generation of young people, and there is a range of formal and less formal structures for youth participation. Thessaloniki, in particular, as (at the time) the upcoming 2014 European Youth Capital, had already pioneered some progressive good practice and trust-building with youth organisations, though this 'exercise in democracy' had been viewed by existing structures as an 'excess of democracy'. More widely, there was evidence of the emergence of new forms of informal organisation and youth expression, strengthening voluntary participation and social solidarity. At a more formal level,

One of the GSY's objectives is to support existing structures that give an impetus to youth activities and strengthen the participation of youth representative bodies and NGOs in the formulation and implementation of youth-related policies in general (GSY 2012, p.18)

Yet the participative track record of Greece is rather weak. Young people have limited awareness of, and participation in European youth programmes. There is only a vague grasp of the idea of 'youth work', although there does seem to be a reasonably thriving social practice of youth work, operating in diverse ways but sharing common values. Youth information is conveyed mainly through the Internet and social media, but there are also Youth Information Centres that appear, sometimes at least, to be more like more generic youth centres or youth clubs. Beyond the youth field, Greece still provides a range of leisure and cultural possibilities in which young people can take part. And, as one respondent put it, "Culture is the only way to be positive in Greece" (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.43).

Despite this more positive take on youth policy in Greece, the international review team remained concerned about the exclusion of some groups of young people. Social and ethnic minorities appeared to be left out or, worse, ignored by youth policy orientations and priorities. There were, for sure, a range of actions at national level focused on groups such as Roma, Muslims, school drop-outs, refugees or offenders, but these did not seem to be taken forward at local level, remaining 'surface' responses rather than embedded in a commitment to equal opportunities and human rights: "the team could not detect a real sense of ownership and political championship of the promotion of minority/human rights issues at the local level" (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.46).

The third, and final, territory explored by the international review team was the governance of youth policy in Greece. Though there had been major reforms of the administration in 2010, establishing three levels of self-government, youth policy still seemed to lack any integration or shared vision, and remained fragmented and piecemeal. The job of the General Secretariat for Youth, apparently, was not to forge such a vision but instead

to make the diverse institutional provisions and programmes for youth more visible and recognisable to ordinary young people, and to the wider public (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.48)

The GSY considered itself, and was considered to be the institutional guardian and 'compass' for young people, guiding them through and to the numerous structures that affected their lives. There were some attempts to ensure some level of co-ordination and 'cross-sectoral' co-operation, but too many overlaps persisted and it was often unclear exactly who (or what) was responsible and accountable for particular initiatives. Indeed, one major concern of the international review team was that while legislation carefully regulated how things should be done, and what could *not* be done, in any often very disabling and discouraging way, there was often very erratic and unpredictable implementation of youth policy that might have enabled and facilitated youth engagement and opportunity.

The impact of the crisis on young people in Greece cannot be underestimated. It has severely disadvantaged a substantial *majority* of Greek youth. The stringent expenditure rules imposed by the Troika, coupled with the weak connections

and relationships in the governance of youth policy that have produced a “fragmented mosaic of programmes and actions” (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.65), and compounded the situation in a very negative direction. The ‘legal formalism’ that prevails in Greece privileges detailed administrative processes over substantive policy and those eager to strengthen youth policy have had to work between the lines and between the cracks. There is now more coherence than in the past, and there are glimpses of an improving balance of youth perspectives, political decision-making and international support, but as the international review asserted,

The key youth policy challenge for Greece in the short term, therefore, is to establish mechanisms that can release the entrepreneurial and participatory spirit of its youth, in order to restore to them hope and belief in their future and their country, but also in their regional and local administrations, youth organisations, and local youth councils, by enabling these in providing timely and purposeful interventions appropriate to local needs and circumstances (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.57)

Without that prospect, more young people will depart with no intention to return.

### Serbia

With a slight change in approach, Serbia was the last of the ‘third seven’ countries to be reviewed. Instead of a ‘3+3’ framework for prioritising youth policy issues, the international team held a lengthy debate with the Serbian governmental authorities and agreed to focus on seven priority areas. Furthermore, the team had an additional member, following a request from ERYICA to experience a policy review process, though this was not to hold any precedent regarding the future composition of prospective international review teams.

Serbia had established an impressive framework for ‘youth policy’ just under ten years before the review took place. This was described on the back cover to the international review (Potočnik and Williamson 2015) as a perfect storm – a constructive and productive partnership and consultative process led by a dynamic new Minister for Youth and Sports that established a National Youth Strategy (2008), an Action Plan derived from it (2009) and a Law on Youth (2011). This was supported through an evaluation framework that contained no less than some 700 indicators! In many respects, Serbia took a strikingly impressive path on the road to youth policy development, but despite applauding considerable progress and ‘success’, the international review team concluded that there were ‘serious obstacles’ ahead.

Critically, however, the reforms effected through the processes to date had created conditions for young people

to escape the invisibility engendered by the paternalistic attitudes of the former structures that dealt with youth affairs (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.5).

The international review drew substantially from the comprehensive study of youth in Serbia by Tomanović *et al.* (2012) which painted a painfully negative picture of blocked perspectives and opportunities, little scope for autonomy and self-determination, dependency on parents and often living in the parental home well into young adulthood, technological exclusion, low life satisfaction and a general cycle of despondency that often produced a desire to leave their communities or the country, even if many did or could not.

The National Youth Strategy of 2007 had necessarily defined a very broad framework with ambitious goals and this was also reflected in the Law on Youth:

These two pivotal documents marked a new era of youth policy in Serbia by requiring the establishment of local youth offices (LYOs) across the country and committing significant human and financial resources to the realisation of numerous youth policy initiatives. As a result, the entire youth field gained greater recognition, especially with regard to the recognition of youth work and setting quality standards (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.14)

The local youth offices to be established in every municipality did, indeed, lie at the heart of the aspiration and 'promise' elaborated through a broad-based participatory process and subsequently embodied within the National Youth Strategy. They were to be pivotal for both local strategy and implementation. There were also to be regional youth offices, serving as a 'communication-bridge' between the national structures and local contexts.

These were heady days for youth policy in Serbia and significant steps were made in a relatively short time. By the time of the international review, however, there was a sense that

the initial momentum and trajectory, characterised by an inclusive approach and an aspiration to implement a co-management approach to decision making, have steadily diminished, resulting in an inability to establish effective inter-sectoral communication and co-operation, and the persistence of a top-down approach in the implementation of new policy directives (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.31)

This was especially the case across the policy areas given special attention by the international review: education; employment; information, access to rights and visibility; participation; social inclusion; health and safety/security; and mobility.

With regard to education, the paramount concern was the weak relation and connection between the formal educational curriculum and labour market prospects and destinations. Beyond formal education, there were some positive features in the realm of vocational education and training, glimpses of progress in Roma education, some development of much-needed sexual and health education in schools, though continuing concerns about the fact that civic

education in schools was a option to be chosen instead of religious education. However, it was noted that 'significant milestones' had been achieved in the context of non-formal education, both for personal development and to enhance 'employability' skills for the labour market.

Young people remain the most disadvantaged group in the labour market. Though a range of measures have been put in place to improve the skills of young people, these have met with limited success in terms of actual labour market insertion. At the time of the international review, the EU Youth Guarantee was in its infancy but, in Serbia, it was to be developed – unusually, perhaps - by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (rather than Ministries of Education, Labour or Employment), which was already envisioning a 'One stop service for youth'. Significant hope was also being invested in the promotion, largely through the National Employment Service, of youth entrepreneurship, though the international review raised concerns about the absence of entrepreneurial education in schools.

Throughout Europe (and, indeed, globally) it has been recognised increasingly that young people need access to – and perhaps support in interpreting – reliable and quality information. The review of Serbia makes the point that this

is a pre-requisite for the autonomous and productive life of young people, and it cannot be achieved without the close co-operation of governmental and non-governmental sectors (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.47)

The international review observed that the paucity of information available to young people in Serbia is a matter for significant concern, not least insofar as it affects their (lack of) capacity to make informed choices and decisions. The international review team was also concerned at the apparent 'fall away' in youth participation, especially given the recent past, when youth participation and activism had been 'vibrant' and acknowledged across Europe. But pervasive mistrust in institutions had set in, together with an almost fatalistic acceptance that attachment to party politics had little more than an 'instrumental' value for those concerned. [One ubiquitous criticism of youth policy in Serbia concerned appointments to the position of local youth office co-ordinators, a job that was often in the gift of political patronage.] Domestically, then, youth participation was at a low ebb, despite efforts by international NGOs to continue to promote it.

The international review team was deeply struck by the all too obvious inequalities in Serbia, not least between the country and the city, between ethnic groups, and with regard to disability. Many issues appear to be given limited attention, even when there is lip service commitment, and provision is patchy, often dependent on local or philanthropic resources. It was a similar story in the context of health promotion where the strong consensus on the key challenges (substance misuse, mental health and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV) was not reflected in any coherent framework of provision, despite the expressed commitment to improving preventive measures and cementing the role of youth-friendly clinics. Beyond often very poor health conditions, young people in Serbia also often live in unsafe and violent public and private

environments. Domestic violence is rife and, according to UNICEF<sup>18</sup>, as many as 40% of young people have been exposed to peer violence at least once. Policy has at least been repositioned, from more punitive to more holistic preventive approaches.

There have been major efforts to develop and co-ordinate youth policy in Serbia since the National Youth Strategy. Long before that, Serbia was preoccupied with encouraging more talented young people to remain 'at home' – in their home country. Mobility is a double-edged sword in Serbia. Less talented young people may move internally, for study and/or work for time, but often return to the family home. More talented young people often endeavour to leave, sometimes forever. This perhaps conveys the limitations to the current youth strategies, however commended they may be from the outside. As the international review concluded its coverage of the seven policy domains considered of paramount importance for inquiry by the team:

The question is whether the brain can be reversed into a brain gain in the near future, since current prospects promise little in the way of brighter futures for those young people who remain in Serbia (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.65)

Why did the international review team arrive at such a bleak conclusion, given the seemingly much more optimistic context for young people less than a decade before? Like many policies, the greatest hopes rarely covert smoothly into operational realities, let alone real impact on the young people they are aimed at. In Serbia, youth policy has remained too centralised and politicised. It continues to lack transparency. It remains trapped by traditional structures and controls. There is still too little horizontal and vertical communication. There are (predictable) weaknesses in inter-sectoral co-operation. The youth field, once united in some kind of 'opposition', has become fragmented and competes within itself for scarce resources. And there are concerns that the many commendable initiatives lack sustainability, for both political and economic reasons.

None of this is particularly unique to Serbia but it is, arguably, particularly pronounced. It was somewhat dispiriting for the international review team to draw such conclusions, for it also noted that

Serbia has taken several important steps towards the realisation of a coherent and inclusive youth policy, *aiming high* at establishing a participatory process, through co-management, for its formulation, development and implementation (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.73)

But in a number of recommendations both to government and to civil society connected to the youth sector, the team notes significant shortfalls in those high aspirations and the need to bite the bullet that policy rhetoric needs firmer mechanisms to take root in the ground. The local youth offices remain an important locus for development, so hope is not yet lost.

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<sup>18</sup> [www.unicef.rs/files/nasilje-u-skolama-za-web.pdf](http://www.unicef.rs/files/nasilje-u-skolama-za-web.pdf)

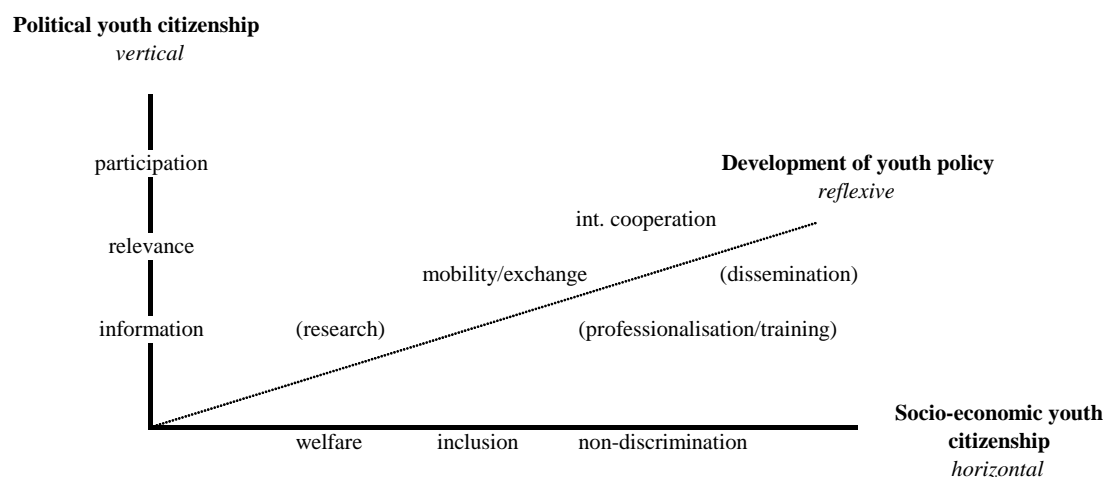
## II Critical substantive issues for future consideration

This chapter draws out and draws on some more generic ‘youth policy’ issues that have emerged from the ‘third seven’ international reviews of national youth policy. In this respect, the chapter follows the practice of both of the previous synthesis reviews (Williamson 2002, Williamson 2008) in seeking to detect elements of youth policy that may assist in providing a framework for thinking about youth policy at a European level.

### The value of theoretical models?

Some of the earlier international reviews of national youth policy were subjected to the criticism that they said more, perhaps, about the academic interests and theoretical perspectives of the researchers involved (notably the rapporteur) than about the country being reviewed. This is a harsh critique, but it was not without some justification. The allegation was not, however, a swipe at theory *per se*. Much depends on the source of the theoretical perspectives invoked. In the most recent reviews, two (of Latvia and Ukraine) certainly sought to build, from their *grounded* knowledge, some form of analytical reflection derived from the material to hand.

Reiter *et al.* (2008, pp.27-29) produced a three-way conceptualisation of youth policy. They ‘interpreted’ the seven guiding principles of Latvia’s youth policy – the objectives of which were “to improve youth life quality by promoting youth initiatives, partnership and support” (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs 2007, p.11) – into a framework that could inject an element of ‘internal assessment’ into an external youth policy review exercise. It was argued that two defining elements of youth policy were political youth citizenship (on a vertical axis, with themes such as participation, relevance, and information) and socio-economic youth citizenship (on a horizontal axis, with themes such as welfare, inclusion and non-discrimination). Cutting through and across these two dimensions was a ‘reflexive’ developmental pathway for youth policy, covering research, mobility, training and international co-operation.



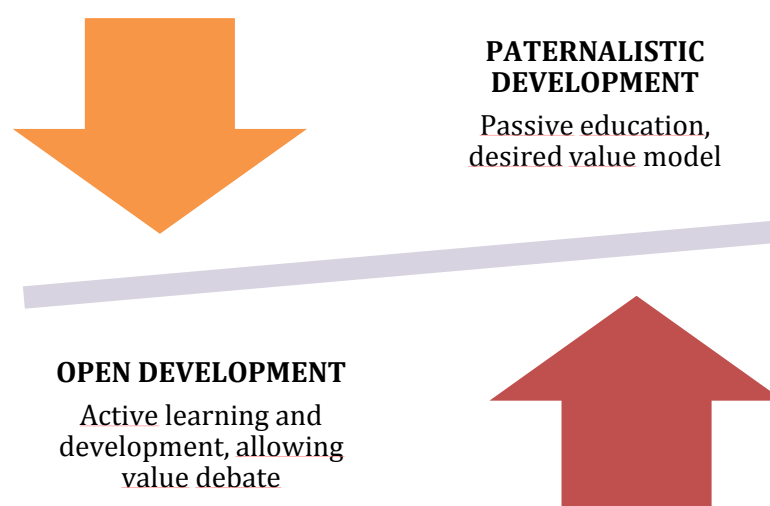
Source: Reiter *et al.* 2008, p.29



Academics and researchers are sometimes rather too good at constructing models that bear limited or little relation to reality, but this would appear to be a useful one for reflecting on the multi-dimensional features that constitute 'youth policy'.

In the context of Ukraine, Krzaklewska and Williamson (2013, pp.29-30) advanced and elaborated on the balance (and tension) between *paternalistic* and more *open* approaches to youth policy.

### Two models of youth development



Source: Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.29

The first model links with the concept of youth development decided on and steered fully by adults who hold a very clear vision as to who and what young people should be - what they should do, what ambitions they should have and what values they should commit to. In this model, young people should relate to adults (or even a selected group of adults). The contrasting model understands development as an open process supported by adults who stimulate the potential of young people and allow young people space for initiative and decision-making. This more open model aims to support young people learning to be active in their own personal life, asking themselves questions concerning their ambitions and values, and being critical and engaged. While in the first model, the answers and values are given and transmitted to young persons (we tell you how to be), in the second model, the young person searches for the answers and critically analyses the values (we support you in finding out who you want to be).

The second model was articulated well by a representative of a higher education institution, who stressed a guiding rather than imposing role of the institution:

[The role of academic education is] paying a lot of attention to guiding young people towards their desired futures. Our core objective is to help the student to formulate their public/civic position as a citizen and to be able to fully integrate into their personal, community, working and public lives.

The international youth policy review of Ukraine went on to elaborate on these contrasting theoretical models for describing and explaining the development of young people:

### Two theoretical models of development of young people

	<b>Open development (active learning and empowerment)</b>	<b>Paternalistic development (passive education)</b>
Traits	Support for initiative and critical engagement Good of the society/good life as a topic for debate Youth engagement and participation Relations to different groups in society, also other young people	Support and praise for following the designated tracks for development Clear model of desired values Youth passivity (or engagement only by chosen ones behaving according to expectations) Benchmarking towards adult groups and being evaluated by them
Tools	Grants for small local youth projects Competitions supporting creativity and debate (for example: What would I do if I were the mayor of this town, best project realised in a community) Student council as co-creating change and embedded in decision-making structures Promotional activities as discussions, activities realised with and by young people	Grants for youth projects but supporting only these who fit into the prescribed model Competitions <sup>19</sup> not directed at open debate Student council as decoration (in the structure but with no real impact) Passive character of promotional activities

Source: Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.30

Having drawn the model from the Ukraine context and then re-applied it to it, the conclusion of the international review team was that Ukraine was at a crossroads in its formulation and application of youth policy:

<sup>19</sup>. We do not mean here subject competitions (for example, mathematics) or checking specific knowledge, but rather competitions relevant to and open to all young persons.

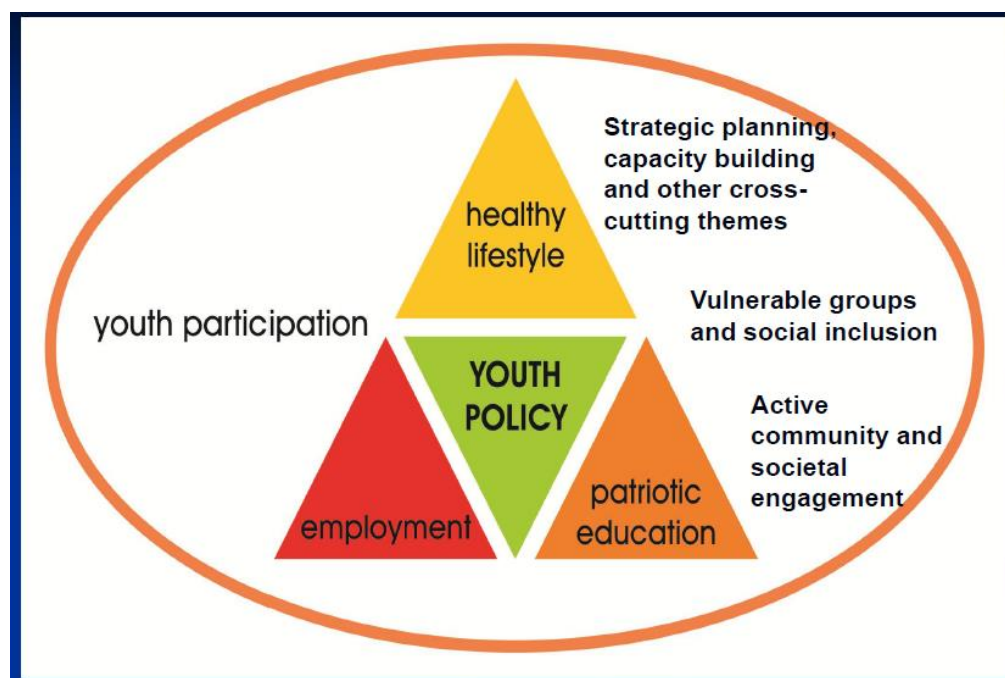
moving away from the paternalistic model to a more open model where young people have to be proactive and involved in their lives and the society. This attitude of self-agency and taking responsibility for their own actions was often mentioned as an important quality for young Ukrainians to learn, as the attitudes in Soviet times were not based on this principle but rather on conformity and passivity (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.31).

Such progression is in line with the framework of youth policy objectives expressed by the Council of Europe well over a decade ago:

To enable young people to be active citizens socially, as well as in the work life. To be an active citizen requires the autonomy to develop and express one's ideas and identity. This is why youth policy should promote young people's access to autonomy, and help young people to be autonomous, responsible, creative, committed and caring for others (Council of Europe 2003a; cited in Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.13).

The international youth policy review of Ukraine had been asked to focus on three priority policy domains: employment, healthy lifestyles and patriotic education. One critical, indeed paramount, recommendation made by the review was that “within existing programmes it is important to allow and indeed encourage the youth participation dimension to embrace youth policy as a whole, and not just be tied to some specific initiatives” (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.56). Indeed, as a last word to the review, it was suggested that youth policy in Ukraine in the future should be depicted as follows:

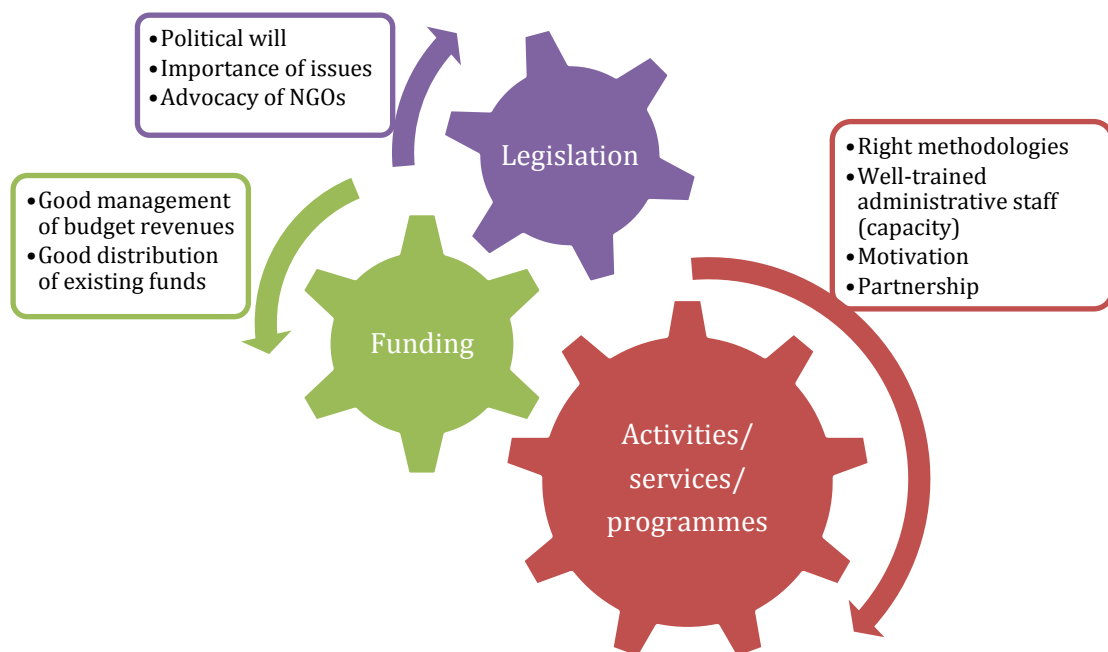
#### **The vision of youth policy of Ukraine with elements added by the IRT**



Source: Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.162

Finally, and again diagrammatically, the youth policy review of Ukraine endeavoured to capture the ‘machinery’ that drives youth policy formulation, development and implementation (legislation, funding, and activities, services and programmes), and those factors that “could allow the machinery to move faster and smoother” (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.57):

### Machinery of youth policy



Source: Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.57

‘Youth policy’ can be a rather amorphous topic, embracing many different issues, procedural, substantive and methodological. It encapsulates its *making* (through politics and administration), its *focus* (narrowly conceived or broadly framed policy domains), and its *application* (the ways in which it is developed and delivered for young people). Theoretical models that seek to delineate the disparate elements of youth policy can be helpful in making sense of it, though it is always important to remember that these are almost always over-simplifications of what are often very complex realities.

### Defining and classifying ‘youth’

It may seem almost incredible that, given so many other forms of convergence and harmonisation across Europe, there is still no commonly, even crudely agreed definition of ‘youth’, if only in terms of age boundaries. There continue to be attempts both to broaden and to narrow the age range, and it can be reasonable to consider the separation of what I depicted, over thirty years ago, as the distinction between the ‘acute anxieties of adolescence’ (the early to mid teenage years) and the ‘chronic crisis of young adulthood’ (the late teenage and

early adult years) (Williamson 1985). Countries themselves remain ambivalent and inconsistent:

According to available data, the concept of 'youth' is not clearly defined in Greece. While the national report (GSY 2012) states that, in line with EU standards, youth represents that part of the Greek population aged between 15 and 29, the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy country sheet (EKCYP 2012) emphasises that 'youth policy' in Greece targets young people aged 15-35. In some cases, such as 'young farmers', the age limit extends up to 40, while statistical definitions of 'youth' vary between 15-24 and 15-30 (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.10)

In contrast, Ukraine is more precise, though the age range has altered in recent years:

[t]he definition of 'youth' is clearly based on age.... youth is defined as young people between 14 and 35 years old. In 2003-04, the age range was 15-28, which was close to the United Nations definition of youth as between the ages of 15 and 24. The Ukrainian perspective mirrors the broader European trends for widening the range of the youth category in policies (this is also noted in the international review of Spain) and programmes (such as the European Union's Youth in Action programme), due to the postponement of adulthood and related thresholds and stages in transition (longer time in education, delay in family formation and childbearing, and a longer stay in the parental home) (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.25)

It is interesting that Ukraine altered its age range for 'youth' around 2003. This was exactly the time when Ukraine hosted a Council of Europe initiated seminar on the connections between childhood policy (and the need for children's safety and development), policies for young people (helping to keep them 'in good shape' by avoiding school drop-out, early pregnancy or substance misuse) and policies for young adulthood (focusing on employment and housing). However, such a linear, if partially overlapping, conception of 'youth' and relevant youth policy has already become problematic given the increasingly hybrid circumstances, profiles and activities of the young – not least the challenge around some young people seemingly doing everything (studying, working, volunteering and playing) and others doing apparently very little at all. It may be that the constant re-visiting of the idea of 'youth', whether on the grounds of age or other criteria, is essential, if youth policies are to be tailored accordingly. Certainly from a more commercial and marketing perspective, an understanding of the multiple 'niches' into which young people slot is imperative if they are to be 'targeted' effectively (see, for example, Trendwolves 2014).

### The shifting sands of political responsibility and policy priority

Making youth policy, indeed any policy, is interminably difficult as it becomes subjected, more and more, to what Hyman (2008) has referred to as the 'tyranny of policy momentum'. Not only are there frequently changes in Ministers responsible for youth, there are often shifts in responsibility for 'youth' to different ministries (though Youth and Sports, Children and Families, or

Education remain the most common locations for the ‘youth’ portfolio), and sometimes governmental priorities shift, affecting the youth agenda, even when the same government and the same minister remains in place. And none of this factors in the most significant influence on the direction and importance of ‘youth policy’: a change of government.

Over the long course of an international youth policy review – that is, from inception to the rather mythical ‘follow-up’ two years on – the departmental location for youth changed in Latvia (from Children and Families, to Education), Moldova (from Education and Youth, to Youth and Sports) and Albania (from Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports, to Social Welfare and Youth). In Greece, the Secretary-General for Youth (a political role) who agreed the youth policy review was different from the Secretary-General who oversaw it. In Serbia, though the Minister (for Youth and Sports) remained the same, the political hierarchy was in turmoil during the time of the youth policy review, producing decisions and change that significantly affected the likely influence of the conclusions of the international review (which had originally been anticipated would contribute to the thinking for a new national youth strategy).

No wonder, therefore, that many countries have sought to establish various forms of inter-ministerial consensus or arms-length agency in an attempt to vitiate the negative effects of constant change and to secure some level of consistency and continuity. This was evident in, for example, the Flemish Youth Support Centre and Serbia’s ‘National Youth Council’<sup>20</sup>. There were also concerted efforts to cement youth policy aspirations closer to the ground where they might – just ‘might’ – be less affected by changes in the political and organisational wind. In both Latvia and Serbia, for example, commendable efforts have been made to ensure regional and municipal co-ordination of youth policy, through youth affairs co-ordinators and local youth office co-ordinators respectively. The youth resource centres that thread through Moldova and the regional youth centres envisioned for Albania are further ideas of hubs for co-ordination, development and implementation of youth policy initiatives. Both personnel and physical bases (however modest) are important symbols that there is some possibility, if often limited capacity to turn youth policy rhetoric into more grounded realities. As Evans (1998) has noted, youth policy has to be subjected to checks and scrutiny at three points: when it is ‘Espoused’ by politicians, ‘Enacted’ by officials and then ‘Experienced’ by young people themselves. Young people spoken with during the international reviews of national youth policy invariably slated public authorities for inaction and inertia, yet the international reviews saw useful foundations for youth policy implementation in many countries, even though the dangers of whimsical political decisions were rarely far away.

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<sup>20</sup> **Not** KOMS, the national youth council of Serbia. The ‘National Youth Council’ brings together representatives of government and civil society responsible for and in the youth field. Strangely, at the time of the youth policy review, KOMS were not directly represented, though some members of the National Youth Council were also affiliated to KOMS.

### Legacies of the past

Sustaining positive, opportunity-focused and wide-ranging youth policy in the present in the face of shifting political sands is certainly a challenge, but youth policy in many countries is also challenged by the legacies of their past. A number of international reviews have advised strongly that the 'hobby education' provided by state socialist societies in former times – and which continue in various forms today – should not be abandoned entirely but re-cast through the use of more participative methodologies and adapted focus on more relevant contemporary issues and projects. In Moldova, for example, the international review team was treated to a dance performance by a group of young people who had clearly been choreographed through didactic rather than active teaching methods (though a small sign of certainly unwanted 'youth participation' was the choice of music that underpinned the dance – the lyrics, in American English, were 'colourful' to say the least).

More significantly in terms of the evolution of youth policy today and an increasing focus on youth volunteering<sup>21</sup> is the challenge this brings to countries where this was, *de facto*, compulsory in the past. Hoskins *et al.* (2006) noted a decade ago that the concept of volunteering carries many different interpretations in different parts of Europe. As Gjeka (2009, p.17) notes, "it was the first punishment in the black list of consequences for dissidents of the regime", a point reinforced by one respondent to the international review of Albania: "Talk of voluntarism has particular meanings here, because in the past people were forced to do voluntarism. It is a dirty word". Yet there is a far more positive take on volunteering embedded in Albanian traditional culture, and, as the international review asserts (Williamson *et al.* 2010, p.55) this is "an important contributor to the development of citizenship and civic engagement and the formation of social bonds and networks". As the European Youth Forum (2007) observed following a study visit to Albania, volunteering is also a means of bringing young people together. The dearth of 'associational space' for young people in Albania was something deplored by the international review, and volunteering provided some purposeful response to this. It is important to be reminded that at times the same terminology (in this case, 'volunteering') may be used, but it carries very different meanings, understanding and purpose.

Indeed, the international review teams spend significant time fathoming out and unravelling, more precisely, the meaning of words that may initially seem self-evident, either positively or otherwise. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in dealing with the concept of 'patriotic education', a key youth policy issue for inquiry and exploration in Ukraine. Presented to the international review team as a form of 'citizenship' education but then described in terms of celebrating war heroes, maintaining graveyards and visiting military museums,

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<sup>21</sup> In his state of the Union speech in September 2016, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission reported that the Commission "is proposing today to set up a European Solidarity Corps. Young people across the EU will be able to volunteer their help where it is needed most..... I want this European Solidarity Corps up and running by the end of the year. And by 2020, to see the first 100,000 young Europeans taking part. By voluntarily joining the European Solidarity Corps, these young people will be able to develop their skills and get not only work but also invaluable human experience".

the international review team became very split on what to make of it. There were certainly glimpses, from other information gleaned, of community involvement and volunteering but there were also more critical perspectives deriving from commemorating conflict, death and victory. The international review team reserved 'judgment' but learned not to jump too hastily to conclusions. As the Youth Partnership's History of Youth Work in Europe series<sup>22</sup> shows very clearly, it is important to grapple with the past if we are to make sense of the present. Some countries will struggle with the idea of non-formal learning as out-of-school education, the promotion of volunteering, or the construction of a citizenship curriculum more than others. But that should not be a recipe or a licence to reject either the past or the present:

Traditional forms of out-of-school education need to be complemented by open youth activities, following the principles of non-formality..... Through its traditional hobby education approach, Latvian youth policy has a powerful tool for providing a huge number of young people with an important and comprehensive baseline offer of leisure-time activities that many western European countries can only dream of. Thus, the IRT encourages progressive forces in youth policy to consider some of the possible consequences of excessively radical modernisation. Destroying established structures is by far easier than building alternatives from scratch; the ideal approach will combine the consolidation of the present structures with internal, as well as complementary, modernisation of youth work (Reiter et al. 2008, p.51)

In this spirit, Albania, too, has become more adept at retrieving good things from a discredited past.

### Legislation and administrative structures

The significance of formal legislation and administrative capacity to 'enact' the youth policy aspirations of politicians (and, indeed, other stakeholders in the process) varies from country to country. However, in many countries, even those that require the bones of youth policy to be legally enshrined, it is the flesh – the detail – on those bones that determines whether or not things stand or fall, progress or stall, develop or stagnate. Legislation may set the framework and direction for certain goals of youth policy, but it can also stifle wider possibilities. The international review of youth policy in Latvia suggests that it is important to 'be careful what you wish for':

From the meetings and discussions with the National Youth Council and other youth NGO representatives, the IRT had the impression that the Youth Act,

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<sup>22</sup> There are, currently, five published volumes of the History of Youth Work in Europe, with a sixth volume in preparation. These cover both country histories of youth work and the relationship between youth work and other policy sectors, including youth work's two closest neighbours: formal education and social work. The series is available through the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth:

[https://www.google.co.uk/?gws\\_rd=ssl#q=coe+youth+partnership](https://www.google.co.uk/?gws_rd=ssl#q=coe+youth+partnership)



which has been a major priority for many years, has the status of an all-inclusive solution to the main problems identified above [broadly the recognition and funding of non-formal education and of those who deliver it]. The IRT agrees that legislation is about to do away with many basic misunderstandings and can, in fact, facilitate the recognition of responsibilities and the means necessary for implementation. The IRT would, however, urge those involved not to overestimate the remedial capacity of legislation, for its purpose is to establish selective perspectives on complex social realities. *While it is true that it can, at best, define and stimulate the youth policy agenda, consolidate the status of certain actors, distribute responsibilities and budgets among institutions, and co-ordinate and standardise patterns of response, it might ultimately permanently exclude certain important matters.* (Reiter et al. 2008, p.36; emphasis added)

In many contexts, youth field actors seemingly cry out constantly for legislation but that does not in fact necessarily guarantee very much at all, even if without it even less may take place. Sometimes a more promising approach is to establish an 'arms-length' national youth agency which, and this is the critical issue, so long as it has clear (cross-party) political support, can work towards a *professional* framework for youth policy. As the international review of youth policy in Albania argued, the idea of a National Youth Centre presented significant possibilities for the development and implementation of youth policy:

No-one is in fact very clear what the role and responsibilities of the 'agency' (now 'centre') will be..... But it does have enormous potential. If it is to take the lead in youth policy in Albania, strategically and operationally, it could co-ordinate at least the following: training, information and youth information, international work, youth participation and empowerment, relations between government and the NGO sector (and within the NGO sector), central administration and local government. *This would constitute both an overarching and an underpinning role.* It would demand cross-party support from the parliament, would need to be quasi-independent, and be accountable to the relevant youth minister. (Williamson 2010, p.77; emphasis added)

The balance, therefore, between formal legislation that enables policy development, sanctioned administrative structures that can secure coherent policy transfer to appropriate structures for delivery, and more spontaneous and creative initiatives in practice, is a delicate one. Arguably, they need to operate in tandem; none, on their own, is likely to produce effective youth policy and practice.

### Youth participation and the role of National Youth Councils

Like their predecessors, the most recent international reviews of national youth policy paid particular attention to youth participation and young people's involvement in decision-making, especially the role, position and contribution of National Youth Councils.

National Youth Councils, with few exceptions, frequently undulate between positions of stability and engagement, and circumstances of uncertainty and marginality. The stories told by the National Youth Councils of Latvia and Serbia,

in particular, confirmed this perspective. But the pendulum swings in further complex ways. The National Youth Council of Moldova appeared to be composed of (self-admittedly) elite and incorporated young people; the Flemish Youth Council could be described either as grounded and independent, or voluntarily co-opted – or both. National Youth Councils themselves invariably have to struggle to position themselves between a rubber-stamping function and a voice so distant and critical that it has no influence or effect. National Youth Councils also have to strike a balance between responding to and serving the needs of their membership or operating in a more campaigning and advocacy role – put simply, looking in or looking out.

Some National Youth Councils clearly had their own explicit youth policy agendas. The National Youth Council of Latvia, for example, was committed to the promotion of non-formal education, which was conceived by them very differently from the ‘non-standard’ education favoured by the public authorities. KOMS, the National Youth Council of Serbia, was critical of the fact that it did not have a place on the ‘National Youth Council’, the advisory body to the implementation of the national youth strategy (although some members of KOMS had a place on the Council through different means).

Aside from the representative bodies themselves, and their often precarious financial situation, there is the question of the status, funding and function of individual youth organisations. In Moldova, the international review took place at a time when some of the more independent and autonomous youth organisations were experiencing particular difficulty with the public authorities. Elsewhere, concerns were expressed about the process of registration, recognition and representation.

Recurrent concerns expressed by both National Youth Councils and individual youth NGOs rested on the twin issues of registration and funding. Whatever the commitments, especially in former state socialist societies, to ‘non-governmentalism’ and the strengthening of civil society, anxiety was often felt that there was still too much space for ‘political manipulation’. The sub-text within this remark was that if youth organisations were too critical or oppositional, they could easily be closed down (de-registered) through having their funding withdrawn. One insightful remark made by a respondent in Albania is certainly worth recording:

The state is not here to create NGOs. That has to be bottom up, but the government has to establish an enabling legal framework. This needs to have four key elements. First of all the tax regime treats the NGO sector as a for-profit business sector. It needs to recognise a not-for-profit sector. Second, there needs to be support for philanthropy through the tax system. We could emulate the Hungarian model<sup>23</sup>. Only sport, art and printing are supported here. Third, there is the issue of reporting relations with the government: frequency and

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<sup>23</sup> The tax system in Hungary allows taxpayers to dedicate 2% of their taxes to a named NGO or, if they do not do this, automatically allocates 1% of their taxes to a civic fund that distributes resources to NGOs through a tendering process. It is a commendable, though far from ideal system. Though it appears to produce a strong resource base for NGOs, its distribution system is highly bureaucratic.

clarity. Fourth, there needs to be simplification and unification of NGO fiscal treatment. And then we need the consolidation of a model and not constant and complex change. Regulations and requirements also need to be tailored according to the size of an organisation<sup>24</sup> (at the moment, we have to report in the same way as big business).

Youth participation was, in fact, a particular success story in Albania, where an incremental set of structures, from junior schools to universities and across municipalities, had been put in place and supported by UNICEF. This was a significant focus of the international youth policy review of Albania.

In Greece, during the economic crisis that has disproportionately affected and afflicted young people, there has been a proliferation of youth organisations (GSY 2012):

These organisations promote volunteering and job mobility for young people, provide social services, facilitate networking, and raise awareness and disseminate information among young people on various issues. New forms of informal organisation and youth expression have also emerged, such as informal groups based on spontaneous initiatives and aiming to promote creativity and youth innovation. These endeavours are based primarily on voluntary participation and social solidarity. Organisations operating via the Internet also play an important role with respect to information, training, education, networking, and raising awareness and the engagement of young people. Although the content of these websites and blogs does not always target the youth population specifically, it often touches on their interests to a significant extent (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.37)

The international review of youth policy in Greece reports that one of the central objectives of the General Secretariat for Youth is “to support existing structures that give an impetus to youth activities and strengthen the participation of youth representative bodies and NGOs in the formulation and implementation of youth-related policies in general” (GSY 2012, p.18).

The campaigns, challenges (and criticisms) around youth participation and representation have now been around for a generation. Not that things have stood still, though the guiding documentation is now well over a decade old (see Council of Europe 2003b). The youth policy reviews did not particularly advance the debate though arguably some of their findings contributed to more recent developments in that territory. Of note here is the Erasmus + project reflecting on the work of national youth councils (‘Better Strategies for Youth, Youth for Better Strategies’ - see Holtom *et al* 2016) and the current work conducted within the Youth Department of the Council of Europe on new and innovative approaches to youth participation.

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<sup>24</sup> Proportionality is in fact a critical youth policy issue, relating to reporting generally and not just to accountability for finance

### Issues from specific youth policy domains

Given the strong focus in many international reviews on specific policy domains (such as education, training and employment, health and justice), it would be surprising if most issues had not already been covered in earlier synthesis reports. Nevertheless, there are some items that merit further attention and discussion.

Within schooling, the international review of youth policy in Belgium really threw into relief the wider repercussions of parental choice in terms of ethnic segregation and the social exclusion of young people from migrant backgrounds. It has long been known from educational research that if the societal aspiration is for social integration and ethnic balance – and the school is the tool for that social engineering – then there has to be some control of choice. Otherwise, as would be predicted, self-selection produces more affluent ‘white’ schools that contrast starkly with schools with many more disadvantaged students, particularly from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The international reviews of national youth policy – throwing into relief, as they do, the striking levels of educational attainment but lack of commensurate opportunity in the labour market – suggest a need to radically re-appraise the European rhetoric around the ‘knowledge society’ and the classic idea of the educational contract for a better future. As Ainley (2016) has recently put it in a damning critique of contemporary education, over just two generations there has been a move from jobs without education, to education without jobs. He accuses the English education system, certainly, of ‘dumbing down’ rather than ‘wising up’. Ainley celebrates, though not uncritically, the German dual-system that prepares young people for more diverse futures. There is clearly an argument for strengthening vocational pathways; too many young people, it can be argued, are under-skilled and over-qualified.

Within educational curricula, given the increasingly prevalence of ‘ordinary’ health problems such as obesity, and a growing concern about young people’s mental health, as well as more classical sexual health and substance misuse challenges, there is an almost incontestable case for robust Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) in schools. Arguably this should be supplemented with learning for financial capability – thereby covering Personal, Health, Social and Economic education. Equivocation and back-tracking (reversing innovative practice pioneered by UNICEF, as was done in Moldova, after opposition from the church) can no longer be defended, whatever interventions and obstructions are favoured by faith groups and other opponents; there is no evidence that such learning precipitates earlier risk behaviour. On the contrary, there is considerable evidence that it postpones it, reduces it, or prevents it entirely.

In terms of wider youth health policy, a number of the countries reviewed had developed ‘youth-friendly clinics’, yet the different reviews invariably expressed some concerns about them. In and of themselves, they are no bad thing, and indeed there probably was a time when visibility and issues of confidentiality were a significant deterrent to young people making full and appropriate use of

mainstream health services. But, for their own sake, there is a question mark. In Latvia, despite the Minister's gushing enthusiasm for them, the international review expressed concern about the training of the staff who serviced them. In Serbia, where considerable attention was paid to psychological counselling services, the treatment of addictions and preventative check-ups, it was noted that paradoxically

All these measures are clearly beneficial to youth health status, although many do not appear to be particularly tailored to the needs of young people. This is especially evident in the functioning of the 'youth-friendly clinics', which in fact do not provide open, constant, individualised and anonymous access for young people. Rather, they work on an appointment system and with larger groups of youth, resulting in the strong probability that many youth may feel reluctant to seek help this way (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.61)

These issues suggest that this particular approach to youth policy within the domain of health may need to be re-visited.

In the context of youth (un)employment policy, a key lesson from the past seven international reviews was the criticality of keeping unemployed young people visible and 'connected'. In Belgium, the point was made that "not all will get jobs, but we have to try to get them closer to the labour market". To that end, young people who have had no previous job can access what are known as 'waiting allowances', a special differential allowance according to circumstances. They become eligible for the allowance nine months after leaving their studies:

The advantage of this system, which is very particular to Belgium, is that they [young people] are immediately registered with the regional employment service. If there was no allowance, they could easily become lost to the system. Young people register straight away, so that they can get the waiting allowance at the earliest opportunity, and so there can be engagement with the right from the start (Pudar *et al.* 2013, pp.103-104)

In contrast, unemployed young people in Ukraine are, for a variety of reasons, often eligible only for very meagre state benefits and "so it may not be worth turning up", particularly as they would then be required to do training and take up job offers that might be unappealing to them. The international review of youth policy in Ukraine observed:

The fact that many young people do not register in the system means that they also lack access to support from the state and this situation, arguably, is likely to result in the labour-market inactivity of those young people for a longer period of time than might necessarily have been the case had support been available earlier (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.101)

As the international review continues,

There are dilemmas here, but elsewhere in Europe it is recognised that effective incentives (not just financial payments) are required if support at the earliest opportunity is to be delivered to young people to facilitate their re-engagement with the labour market (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.101)

The message is unequivocal. Carrots work better than sticks (which can drive at least some of the target group underground) and, as one of the arguments behind the EU's Youth Guarantee forcefully acknowledges, the 'scarring effects' of long-term youth unemployment can have negative lifetime consequences (Bell and Blanchflower 2009, Bell and Blanchflower 2010).

### Positive action?

Throughout these most recent international reviews of national youth policy, there were recurrent debates – particularly through contrasting approaches in the three Communities of Belgium – about the balances to be struck between fixed and more flexible provision, known entitlements or more responsive services. Youth provision that is more tailored to particular circumstances can also easily come to be criticised for its 'inconsistencies'. Experimental youth practice is also, obviously, unpredictable.

These issues are thrown into sharp relief when considering political commitment to 'equal opportunities'. What exactly does this really mean?

The policy frames emphasising equal opportunities may lead to unequal outcomes and differentiated opportunity structures if there is not sufficient awareness in terms of the overall stratification of society, together with the political will for targeted practices and positive action (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.62).

The French Community of Belgium, for example, operated much of its youth provision on an 'open door philosophy' on the grounds that services are available to all young people, regardless of their background, though it was conceded (or accepted) that if priorities were adopted, they would be for those most 'at risk'.

But it is not just those at risk who might merit additional attention. In Ukraine, it appeared that 'ordinary kids' – famously defined by Brown (1987) as those whose names are neither inscribed on the honours' boards of their schools nor scratched into the desks – were completely overlooked. Youth policy appeared quite disinterested in those who were neither troublesome nor talented:

## The spectrum of youth policy targets in Ukraine

Youth as a trouble		Youth as a resource
“Problematic” Youth (HIV, single mothers, offenders, street children)	Group in the middle (students, mothers, unemployed, young families, rural youth)	“Talented” youth (chess, waltz, student unions, political leaders, sport champions)
Intervention (social protection)	Information/ prevention	Competitions, grants
Controlling and punishing	Little interest	Praising and giving awards

Source: Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.34

The international review team for Ukraine expressed concern that

limited, indeed little, attention is paid to the vast number of young people in the middle of the spectrum whose situation was much less debated and to whom much less investment is directed. These are so-called ‘regular’ or ‘ordinary’ young people who face everyday problems of growing up and who struggle with difficult social situations and the challenges of the labour market, but display neither further pathologies nor special aptitudes (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.34)

This was a view shared both by young people themselves and by many NGO representatives.

These tensions invariably raise classical social policy questions concerning universality versus selectivity as well as contemporary youth policy questions about how best to distribute scarce resources. However hard it may be to establish exactly how much is spent on young people, it remains imperative to consider where resources in the youth sector come from, where they are allocated and on what basis this is done<sup>25</sup>. Huge resources may, for example, be spent on young people, but for punitive and regulatory purposes rather than purposeful and inclusive goals. Similarly, stable and sustainable programmes, with reasonably assured funding, need to be squared with what might be called ‘managed volatility’ – innovation and experimentation constructed on calculated risks.

Regrettably, in line with earlier international reviews of national youth policy, little of this was forthcoming in the more recent international reviews; governments and foundations appear (perhaps understandably) reluctant and

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<sup>25</sup> See Smith *et al.* (1996)

reticent about revealing the precise detail of budgets and their allocations, or even to paint a partial picture which might provide some grounds for a rather more informed debate.

### Youth work

Youth work, in a variety of forms and interpretations, was prominent in a number of the international reviews. Particularly in Latvia, there appeared to be “two distinct interpretations of non-formal education that do not seem to be compatible” (Reiter *et al.* 2008, p.51). The historical legacy was rather formalised provision of ‘out-of-school education’, which the international review suggested now needed to be “complemented by open youth activities, following the principles of non-formality”. In Latvia, a wide range of youth practitioners qualified for the label of ‘youth worker’ and, though applauding their commitment and capabilities, the youth policy review suggested that:

While this is certainly an indispensable and necessary source of providing competent youth work, professionalised and sustainable youth work structures require more. For that, common sense and learning on the job needs to be complemented with certain common standards, with regard to the understanding of youth work and the relevant training, working conditions and tasks (Reiter *et al.* 2008, p.85)

Threading through many of the international reviews was the observation that while high expectations were attached to youth work, youth workers invariably had low status and pay. For example, in Moldova,

The issue of ‘non-formal education’ (NFE) was raised almost everywhere, as formal education is no longer enough to prepare young people for the challenges of modern market societies (Vanhee *et al.*, 2009, p.45)

In similar vein to the situation in Latvia, the review of Moldova found a diversity of practitioners working in ‘non-formal education’: “the staff are often close in profile to the specialists providing formal education; the difference is little more than that ‘NFE’ activities are extra-curricular” (Vanhee *et al.* 2009, p.46). It was argued, therefore, that effort needed to be invested in

understanding that NFE is more of an approach to planning and organising youth activities. It can take place in many contexts, but it is the *methodology* of youth participation, experimentation, and experience that defines the context (Vanhee *et al.* 2009, p.47; emphasis added)

Far from the idea of youth work being about *how* different kinds of youth activities might be planned and organised, the international review of youth policy in Belgium highlighted –in the context of Flanders, with its strong history of a particular form of ‘youth work’ – how youth work might take shape for different groups of young people. Indeed, as some definitional understanding of youth work has evolved in Flanders, there is clearly a view that there are both ‘regulatory’ and ‘emancipatory’ forms of youth work. The first has more of a



social work (protective) orientation towards more vulnerable, 'at risk' and excluded groups of young people; the latter more of an empowering framework of opportunity for more assured and included young people.

There are, of course, many forms of youth work – from the activities it provides and the issues it addresses, though the contexts in which it takes place and the type of young people it engages (purposefully or by chance), to the methodologies it invokes. This is why the idea of youth work can be embraced, *inter alia*, by self-governed youth organisations, municipal provision of general youth programmes, dedicated and time-limited projects dealing with a host of issues, and the 'casual' encounters that take place in street-based and detached work. It is also why there continue to be robust debates about the parameters, function and purpose of youth work, and interest in its value and contribution to wider youth policy agendas. The 'third seven' countries discussed here are but some of the many seeking to resolve and clarify their own direction of travel with regard to 'youth work' while, at the European level, there are on-going efforts to find the common ground<sup>26</sup> on which all reasonable definitions of 'youth work' should be able to stand.

### Families and Communities

Youth work has often been described as the 'third pillar' or 'third milieu' – after family and school - of socialisation. Much has been made of its relationship with, and distinction from, formal education as epitomised by schooling. Rather less attention has been given to its relationship with the family, though the Council of Europe was, in 2003, at the forefront of initiating a debate about the relationships between childhood, youth and family policy. It was noted in an earlier synthesis report (Williamson 2008) that "this domain seems to systematically escape the attention of youth policy reviews" (Reiter *et al.* 2008, p.62) and more recent international reviews of national youth policy – even when, as in Latvia at the time, 'youth' was under the remit of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs – have done little better. Many have, however, reported the considerable, and probably growing, number of young people living without parental supervision and care, or who live with grandparents or relatives because their parents have left the country to work abroad. This issue was particularly striking in Moldova, but it was also prevalent in Latvia and Albania, though somewhat less prominent in Ukraine. Apart from observing the phenomenon, however, little attention appeared to be directed towards it within the framework of youth policy.

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<sup>26</sup> See the preparatory document for the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention, held in Belgium in April 2015 ([http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8529155/FINDING+COMMON+GROUND\\_Final+with+poster.pdf/91d8f10d-7568-46f3-a36e-96bf716419be](http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8529155/FINDING+COMMON+GROUND_Final+with+poster.pdf/91d8f10d-7568-46f3-a36e-96bf716419be)) and the Convention's Final Declaration ([http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8529155/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration\\_FINAL.pdf/cc602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85](http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8529155/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration_FINAL.pdf/cc602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85))

Beyond youth work, there is also the question of 'community' and the wider neighbourhood in which young people live. The youth policy review of Belgium highlighted some important tensions and contradictions with regard to young people attachment to their local environments. It was suggested that, certainly within the French Community, there was an understanding of public space that required attention to young people's engagement to their neighbourhoods, "contributing also to a broad sense of moral belonging to the community, regardless of the individual's formal status as immigrant, unemployed, or something else" (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.63).

Yet observations from the Flemish Community suggest that the efforts of youth workers to strengthen young people's attachment to 'community' may be a hindrance as well as a help:

Youth work in the neighbourhood that is focused on engaging young people and building connections inside the neighbourhood does carry the risk of preventing young people from 'going out', arguably producing certain kinds of parallel communities within Flemish society (Pudar *et al.* 2013, p.26)

The point here is that the social capital (networks and relationships) engendered through strong community links can become too 'bonding', rather than 'bridging' young people's connections to a wider world (and sets of opportunities): attachment can also produce entrapment. Strong community bonds can be both comforting and constraining, a point made long ago in a study of young people not in education, employment or training (Istance and Williamson 1996). Strengthening ties and confirming identity may be important features of youth policy concerned with social inclusion and social integration, but youth policy also needs to consider how it can broaden young people's horizons and thereby strengthen their 'identity capital'.

### Too big for youth policy?

A recurrent feature within the international reviews of national youth policy is, indeed, the question of social inclusion/exclusion, especially in relation to geographical inequalities and the divide between urban and rural contexts. Youth policy can often play out well where there is a critical mass of population and appropriate infrastructure (buildings, transport links and so forth) but even the best constructed youth policy can struggle to meet the needs of young people in more isolated settings.

An earlier international review of youth policy in Norway (Wolf 2004) had demonstrated the potential significance of youth policy as one mechanism for strengthening the attraction of isolated areas to young people and somewhat mitigating the occurrence of outward migration, including 'brain drain' (see below). Nordland, a municipality towards the north of Norway, had been voted Europe's most youth-friendly local government around the time of the international review.

But that is rarely enough and even more rarely attempted. In Latvia, the international review noted, in relation to young people living in rural areas:

One of the main concerns of policy makers is related to emigration. Young people, leaving their families earlier, also leave the place where they grew up for education, higher salaries and better life chances in Riga or abroad. Municipalities cannot offer housing for young people and are not competitive in terms of higher education or employment. In fact, *regional youth policy seems to have little to offer to young people* beyond the age of secondary schooling, when activities like hobby education will probably have lost some of its attraction (Reiter *et al.* 2008, p.82; emphasis added)

Seemingly small youth policy initiatives can certainly help. There were useful glimpses in Albania about different approach to social inclusion, including encouraging the return of students from abroad and seeking to retain young people in more remote areas (see Williamson 2010, p.59). But the broad conclusion of the international reviews of national youth policy was that youth strategies are simply not enough, particularly in countries like Albania, which have experienced a 'dramatic exodus' of people, especially young people, from rural areas. Regional development in Albania, or rather its absence, has been a 'major obstacle' to economic progress (De Waal 2007). The international review of youth policy in Albania noted, commendably, that one region (see Bushat Commune 2008) was now committed to

a broad-based, co-financed social and environmental development plan, incorporating attention to infrastructure such as the management of waste, the provision of piped water, the cleaning up of rivers, and the conservation of flora and fauna, but also very pertinent youth-related issues such as schooling and leisure-time provision.... Attention has been paid to the high schools and to the provision of sports fields, supported by the municipal budget and additional funding from donors and the state education budget.... Prospective population retention was being supported by improved use of agricultural land and more collective enterprise.... (Williamson 2010, pp.48-49)

In recognition that such challenges are hardly limited to Albania, Recommendation 10 of the international review of youth policy in Albania was as follows:

The international review team had serious concerns about the apparent absence of any regional economic development strategy in Albania. The out-migration of young people from more remote and rural communities is a common feature of many countries, but it is possible to think about 'growth centre' strategies, in the interests of social, cultural and economic 'rescue', if rural communities are not to suffer from demographic imbalance and ultimately die out (Williamson 2010, p.51)

In short, the issues relating to young people in such locales demand the embedding of any youth policy thinking within a much wider strategy for employment creation, environmental protection, infrastructure development and population retention.

### Brain drain, brain gain and brain circulation

The most striking aspect of the out-migration of young people from both communities and countries lies around the concept of 'brain drain' – as the most talented young people leave and contexts are deprived of professional practitioners, leadership and innovation. This has been an issue that has been of particular concern to the EU's Committee of the Regions, in terms of not restricting young people's capacity for mobility within or beyond their native countries (for study or wider work experience) but considering methods of encouraging their return, not just to the major cities but also to more isolated areas. Their term employed for this aspirational process is 'brain circulation'!

The situation is stark and striking, especially beyond the European Union. And it is not just the most talented who seek to leave; at virtually all levels of educational achievement and occupational aspiration, young people in some countries are looking for better opportunities elsewhere. In Moldova, for example, the international review observed:

One of the main concerns of policy makers is migration, both the massive out-migration from the country and the internal migration from rural areas to the cities. Young people are leaving their families and going abroad in the hope of finding better jobs and earning more money. As they cannot get satisfactory jobs and housing in their communities, their options if they stay at home are limited. In one region, 50% of recent university graduates were out of work, only one third found employment in their region, and the rest left home and went abroad. Regional and local municipalities cannot offer decent jobs and housing for young people. They are not competitive in terms of employment opportunities, even compared with young people in Chişinău, let alone Italy, Romania or Russia (which are typical destinations for young migrants) (Vanhee *et al.* 2009, p.75)

Young people do, sometimes, however, have no option but to return 'home'. In Serbia, it was noted that

even though young people may move to urban centres for studies or employment, many fail to obtain the jobs they want and return to their rural homes, triggering a kind of vicious circle of unrealised life goals (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.12)

The international review of youth policy in Serbia goes on to state that low levels of satisfaction motivates, many young people to consider leaving the country, and Serbia "therefore faces serious challenges related to brain drain" (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.13). It is not alone, and Latvia, Moldova, Albania, Ukraine and Greece faced similar issues, though sometimes for different reasons. They also had different strategies within their youth policies to promote the retention or return of young people.

Albania, for example, had established a 'brain gain' programme. This is a "major plank of youth policy" (see Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports 2006,

pp.19-25), encouraging young people to return from abroad through improving information concerning job opportunities and the provision of internships in both the public and private sectors. The support and advice of the Albanian Students Abroad Network (AS@N) has been enlisted (see Williamson 2010, pp.32-33). The Bushat Commune environmental plan, referred to above, is also pertinent here:

Young people will stay [or return] if they have leisure and employment opportunities, but they will also be concerned that they and their future families can live in a safe and healthy climate (Williamson 2010, p.76)

Both Moldova and Ukraine have adopted modest incentives to encourage some groups of workers to work back in their home, or equivalent, contexts – namely villages in rural areas. At the time of the international review of youth policy in Ukraine, there were new employment policy proposals that included starter payments to young employees who agree to work in villages, though these had yet to take effect (Krzaklewska and Williamson 2013, p.94). Moldova had incentives for teachers and doctors to return to work in such communities.

The international review of youth policy in Moldova made the important observation that youth policy responses to the challenges of migration had to be differentiated:

Different approaches are needed in relation to talented youth going abroad, to 'basic workers' seeking any job abroad and to children abandoned at home but whose parents have left to work abroad (Vanhee *et al.* 2009, p.75)

By and large, there has been limited effective youth policy attention to these issues, though it is also very difficult to know what can be done. In Greece, since its particular economic crisis, it is suggested that some three-quarters of young people between the ages of 21 and 35 are looking for a job opportunity abroad (see Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.30); the public authorities are searching desperately for innovative methods – particularly through better co-operation between the Ministries in the government, and embassies and consulates abroad – to help young people to remain and to connect effectively, and entrepreneurially, with its diaspora:

The international review team was interested in prospects for the development of business links between the Greek diaspora and the state economy, and the development of investment initiatives, including online mentoring programmes for young people in Greece. In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is trying to co-ordinate efforts and strengthen the links between businesses in Greece and Greek entrepreneurs abroad, based on existing measures, although these entrepreneurial activities with the diaspora are often not youth-oriented. The ministry also plans to develop an investment fund but, due to the financial crisis, there is a current lack of trust among those with the capacity to invest in the country (Petkovic and Williamson 2015, p.31)

Indeed, in Greece, there is an almost desperate attempt to release young people from the shackles of traditional dependency (on both family and state, both of

which are now ill-equipped and ill-resourced to support them) and to promote enterprise and entrepreneurship, particularly through the encouragement of business innovation in rural contexts, as measures are taken to persuade well-educated young people to depart from the cities (primarily Athens and Thessaloniki) and to return to the localities of their origin. Relevant business expertise within the diaspora might also be addressed to this policy goal.

### Rhetoric or Reality?

The final issue to emerge strongly in the most recent international reviews of national youth policy was the recurrent assertion that ‘not much has changed, despite warm words and good intentions’. This is a version of a remark made specifically in relation to youth justice during the international review of youth policy review in Latvia (see Reiter *et al.* 2008, p.63), but it is often applicable across time, countries and policy domains. The point has been noted before, but perhaps in earlier reviews greater belief was attached to youth policy initiatives presented, in terms of their implementation and actual effect. International review teams have perhaps become more discerning (or suspicious) about the distinction between policy impact as opposed to policy intention, though those differences are sometimes hard to unravel. On many policy fronts, international review teams are informed that it is ‘early days’, with good ideas articulated but limited illustration of concrete consequences. It was sometimes only at national hearings that the presentation of policy was exposed as little more than electioneering promises or paper exercises rather than material programmes.

Needless to say, it would be invidious to pick out, somewhat speculatively, those countries where much youth policy was arguably more rhetorical than reality. But it is important to remain attentive to this possibility. Countries acknowledge the need for many measures across a spectrum of youth policy challenges (housing has, relatively recently, joined an ever-lengthening list), and they draw considerable inspiration from the European youth policy agenda, both that of the European Union and that of the Council of Europe. Whether or not they have the political will and the economic resources to convert such aspirations into practical initiatives that reach out and are relevant to different groups of young people – whatever the ‘talk’ in friendly meetings – is quite another matter.

### III Methodological lessons

This chapter explores some of the issues that have arisen in pursuit of effective mechanisms for discharging the international reviews of national youth policy. In the very early reviews, co-ordination was the responsibility of a middle-ranking member of the secretariat within the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe. That co-ordination was largely to do with liaising with the host country (over the programme and accommodation for the team), sending invitations to a team (and alternatives if first choices were unavailable), arranging travel reimbursement, and ensuring adherence to a timetable that allowed for a presentation of the international report at the autumn meeting of the CDEJ. The programme was largely arranged by the host country, with the first visit limited to the capital city and a second visit exploring some of the more regional and local realities. There was no 'extra day' to review perceptions and conclusions or to feed back preliminary thoughts to hosting officials. Rapporteurs were largely on their own<sup>27</sup> to produce the final draft report once the second visit was over.

By the time of the 'third seven' international reviews of national youth policy, the co-ordinator's role was considerably more protracted and demanding. Greater responsibility had been assumed during the 'second seven' reviews, when a more senior member of the secretariat of the Youth Directorate had decided a 'stronger steer' was needed. He introduced the preliminary visit, the extra day to review provisional conclusions, a national hearing and a more collaborative approach to the production of a final report. All of this lengthened the time needed for the international review, made greater demands on members of the international review team, and produced significantly more work for the co-ordinator (though it also raised questions about the role of the formally designated chair of the international review, beyond a symbolic, almost decorative function). These issues were explored to a considerable extent in the second synthesis report (Williamson 2008), and various proposals were made for further development – and role clarification – in the co-ordination of the international reviews. Here, through the lessons acquired from the 'third seven' international reviews, additional observations can be made.

#### The pivotal relationship in planning and executing an international review of national youth policy: Collaboration, communication, criticism, concerns

It may be almost self-evident but nonetheless it needs reinforcement and emphasis: an open, honest and forthright relationship between the two individuals at the interface of an international review (the co-ordinator on behalf of the Council of Europe and usually a middle to senior ranking civil servant from the hosting country) is absolutely critical. This establishes the culture for the youth policy review and spills over into the wider relationships that come 'on stream' as an international review unfolds.

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<sup>27</sup> It is important to register that the first seven international reviews of national youth policy took place before email and the internet were routinely in use. Communication was still largely by 'snail mail'.

A great deal of private, usually invisible, hard preparatory work is required long before formal planning ensues. The co-ordinator will have been endeavouring to cajole and persuade relevant researchers/experts to become involved, within the imperative of striking a suitable balance within the international review team, including the nominations of the statutory organs (the CDEJ and the Advisory Council for Youth).

In a mirror image, the hosting official will have been seeking to cajole those within their department or ministry, and – more critically – colleagues across government, at national level and in the regions and localities, *and* more broadly in the youth field, to make their contribution both to preliminary reporting in anticipation of the youth policy review and to the programme of visits when the international review eventually takes place.

These can be convoluted or concertina'd tasks, sometimes with plenty of time, sometimes with no time at all. Both the co-ordinator and the hosting official have to be able to vent their frustrations on each other as well as to engage in instantaneous reflection, situation analysis and decision-making in order to troubleshoot presenting issues during the visits themselves. Discussions can become heated and need cooling down. Individuals can dominate debate and need 'cooling out'. Time is often squeezed, especially during second visits when the international review team ventures further afield beyond the capital city, and decisions to cancel or abandon planned visits sometimes have to be made, however hurtful this may be to those who have prepared for it. Pragmatism may need to trump protocol; only strong and trusting relationships between the co-ordinator and the hosting official can ensure the smooth running of a review and appropriate briefing of those charged with the more diplomatic end of the process (the CDEJ chair of the review, ministers and senior officials).

### Time frame

The time frame for the international reviews of national youth policy has expanded over the years. The following grid provides a rough indicative guide to the duration of the reviews:

		<b>The first review</b>	<b>The second seven</b>	<b>The third seven</b>
<b>Year before the review</b>	Oct			Exploratory conversations
	Nov			Email communication
	Dec			
<b>The review year</b>	Jan		Preliminary visit	Preliminary visit
	Feb		Structured around framework of	Structured around three priority issues
	March	1 <sup>st</sup> visit	Synthesis I report	



	April			1 <sup>st</sup> team visit – 5 working days,
	May	2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	1 <sup>st</sup> team visit – 4 working days	Questions to Ministry
	June			
	July			
	Aug	Writing of report		
	Sept	Presentation of report to CDEJ	2 <sup>nd</sup> team visit – 4 working days	2 <sup>nd</sup> team visit – 5 working days including shaping content of report and provisional feedback
	Oct		Preparation of draft report based on the framework proposed in Synthesis I report	Internal preparation of draft report Anchored by three internal priorities and three issues identified by team
	Nov			
	Dec			
<b>Year after the review</b>	Jan		National hearing	Consultation with Ministry National Hearing
	Feb			
	March		International hearing	
	April			International hearing and ratification by Joint Council
	Aug - Sept			Production of final report Proof reading and corrections
	Nov - Dec			Publication

In fact the first two of the 'third seven' reviews also set out to follow the framework established after the 'first seven' reviews and proposed in the first synthesis report (Williamson 2002). This framework was largely adhered to by the 'second seven' reviews. The first two of the 'third seven' did, however, take some account of those issues raised in the second synthesis report (Williamson 2008). However, even in the case of the international review of youth policy in Latvia (the first of the 'third seven'), it became clear that endeavouring to cover such a plethora of issue was cumbersome, potentially unrealistic and almost certainly too superficial at times. This was confirmed during the international review of youth policy in Moldova (the second of the 'third seven'), which became something of a 'hybrid', still covering most issues in the earlier framework but also attempting to address, in more depth, some of the more pressing youth-related issues facing Moldova at the time. This led to a recommendation by the co-ordinator that a different approach was now needed.

As a result, Albania became the first country where a '3+3' approach was adopted. This did not rule out discussion of wider issues, but it was agreed that the international review should focus, first, on up to three items identified as priority issues for the host government and then on up to three items held to be of particular significance by the visiting international review team. This, broadly, was the model subsequently followed. The themes covered are presented in Appendix 1.

### Team composition

Unlike the repeated revision of the time frame and the addition of many new components, the composition of international review teams has largely remained the same. The typical team is composed of two nominations by the statutory bodies of the Youth Department (the CDEJ, the European Steering Committee for Youth, comprising senior civil servants, and the Advisory Council for Youth, composed of representatives of youth organisations). The international reviews of national youth policy were initiated by the CDEJ and its nominee is the formal chair of the international review team (though, in the spirit of the co-management principle that governs the work of the Youth Department, much of the leadership is shared with the nominee of the Advisory Council for Youth). There is then a nominee of the Secretariat, and up to three researchers or 'experts'. This produces a team of six. The 'co-ordinator' of the last seven international reviews, as a youth researcher and youth 'expert' himself, has sometimes been one of these six, sometimes supplementary to them. Occasionally, for a variety of reasons, other individuals have joined the team. And the Belgium team was, for specific reasons, rather larger than any other. In contrast, the team for Moldova was just five, on account of the unavoidable withdrawal of one expert.

Few individuals have been involved in more than one international review. The co-ordinator has been an exception to this 'rule', as have some nominees of the Secretariat. One CDEJ member has, over the years, chaired two international reviews and been the chair of part of the international review of youth policy in

Belgium. One researcher/expert was also involved in a part of the Belgium review, having already participated in an earlier international review.

Each team is composed of individuals from different countries. In forming every team, there is a concerted effort to construct various forms of balance: in particular by geography, gender, age, experience and expertise. This has not always been either easy or possible. Participation in the reviews is unpaid and demands considerable time commitment. The nominees of the statutory bodies, ideally known first in order to provide 'markers' on at least gender and geography, are in fact not always known until later in the process of team formation. This is particular the case with regard to nominations by the Advisory Council for Youth. The mandate for Advisory Council members is two years; unless former members who have expressed an interest in a particular international review remain for a second term, the Advisory Council struggles to make its nomination before February or March in the year an international review takes place, by which time other prospective members of the international review team have already been 'recruited'. Only once<sup>28</sup>, however, has this issue produced a scenario when two individuals from the same country have been members of the same international review team.

Recruitment to an international review team is a challenging and time-consuming process. Many individuals are interested in taking part but few can guarantee the level of commitment required, which can amount to around 25 working days across the whole process. Building teams for this 'third seven' was often very difficult, in the sense of not only identifying a suitable balance of individuals but also confirming their availability; many possible and desirable 'candidates' had to decline for personal and professional reasons once precise dates and demands were clarified with them. Engagement with the process may be part of their expected role for members of the European Steering Committee on Youth (the CDEJ) or the Advisory Council on Youth – both of whom can express an interest in taking part before a final selection/nomination is made – and it is part of the job for a member of the Secretariat. But securing the engagement of youth researchers/experts has always been tricky; it rests on the promise of a unique experience and, indeed, in retrospect, all those who have taken part will testify to this. In prospect, however, there does not always appear to be huge value in taking part, especially for researchers under pressure to build their teaching and publications profile rather than allegedly 'disappearing on a jolly'. Taking part is, of course, far from being on a 'jolly'; it is incredibly hard work, demanding background research, careful preparation and relentless concentration on ideas and issues that are not necessarily familiar, or at least not presented in a familiar way. Language issues – translation and interpretation – are always present, within and beyond the team. And paradoxically perhaps, unlike the domestic ethnographer whose role is to render the familiar strange, the job of the researchers in an international review team, guided by its other members, is to make the strange familiar – to detect the commonalities affecting young people wherever they may be, regarding work

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<sup>28</sup> In one earlier review, two team members were from the UK for the first visit, but then one of them had to drop out for personal reasons. She is now a UK Member of Parliament.

and health and leisure and mobility, and to consider the forms of relevant ‘youth policy’ that might respond best in the country concerned.

### The stepping stones of an international review

Each international review of national youth policy, certainly over the past seven international reviews, has contained the following elements:

Preliminary discussion  
 Visit and planning  
 Team formation  
 Liaison on the first visit programme  
 Submission of a ‘national report’ [see remarks below]  
 The first visit – usually focused on the capital city and *national* youth policy development  
 Provisional conclusions, issues for further exploration, interim questions  
 Liaison on the second visit programme  
 The second visit – usually focused on regions and municipalities and *regional* and *local* youth policy development and delivery  
 Framing the final report during the last internal meeting of the team  
 Preparing a draft report  
 Consultation with the team  
 Revision of report – substantive / presentational  
 Consultation with the Ministry  
 National Hearing  
 Revision of report and preparation of final draft  
 International hearing  
 Production of final report  
 Proof reading and corrections following copy editor’s feedback  
 Preparation of ‘cover blurb’  
 Publication on-line and in print

During the passage of the ‘third seven’ international reviews of national youth policy the co-ordinator has routinely produced a ‘complete’, almost verbatim, protocol of both external and internal meetings, usually running to some 40,000 words. As a native English speaker as well as competent keyboard operator, this was the additional voluntary duty he performed (while others focused on language and interaction) and these ‘notes’ served as the pivotal evidence base for a final report, even if the different rapporteurs also elected to draw material from other disparate sources.

The other point to note here is that few countries amongst the ‘third seven’ produced a national report, which had hitherto been one of the expectations of the host country within the process. There were many reasons for this, and the consequence was both advantageous and problematic. It had always been maintained that an international review was not about interrogating the national report (and the usually positive claims made within it), though that was always a temptation. This clearly could not be done when one did not exist. But without

one, the international review team had no reference point from which to start, and on which to base, its deliberations. It had to search elsewhere. Sometimes the host country provided alternatives. Albania, for example, offered its National Youth Strategy. Otherwise the international review team, and particularly the researchers within it, had to dig deep to find alternative sources of information about young people and youth policy in the country concerned. At least these international reviews were spared the ignominy that had occasionally prevailed in the past – where the host country prevaricated on its presentation of its national report, often publishing it in a final form after having sight of the international report thereby, rather predictably, pre-empting the criticisms within the latter by already having an answer to them! This was certainly a less than satisfactory state of affairs.

In terms of writing up, all of the ‘third seven’ international reviews of national youth policy had not only a chief rapporteur but also the helping hand of the native English speaking co-ordinator. The process may have taken longer but it was undoubtedly a significant improvement on earlier practice. The whole international review team dedicated their last working day together (at the end of the second visit) agreeing the shape and broad content of a final report. Key lines of argument were discussed and there was always room for dissent when different team members advanced different perspectives on the same issue. The drafting of a first full report was then left to the rapporteur, with the co-ordinator in the wings, to help only if requested to do so. By the end of the year of the international review, the report was circulated to all team members for comment on substance. Early in the following year, the rapporteur and the co-ordinator worked both on the presentation of substance and on the quality of that presentation in terms of the English language. This latter aspect of the writing was described within the international review team as ‘polishing’. A relatively final draft and polished document was then sent to the hosting authorities for criticism, correction and clarification. Some two weeks were allowed for this ‘private’ process before the ideas within the report (but not the report itself<sup>29</sup>) were presented to the national hearing. Responses at the national hearing, and indeed at the international hearing that took place some six weeks later at the Joint Council on Youth<sup>30</sup>, were subsequently woven into the fabric of the review or at least acknowledged in footnotes. The last step, prior to publication, was to deal with queries and corrections made by the copy editors at the Council of Europe.

The late Peter Lauritzen<sup>31</sup> once talked of the ‘critical complicity’ of the international review process. There is never any intention to undermine youth

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<sup>29</sup> The circulation of a ‘not quite finished’ international reports had accidentally taken place during one of these international reviews; to the chagrin both of the team and the Ministry, it became ‘the’ international report long before a modified and amended report should have become public.

<sup>30</sup> The Joint Council on Youth comprises the CDEJ and the Advisory Council on Youth. The Joint Council formally approves an international report.

<sup>31</sup> Peter was a good friend and head of research and youth policy in the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe. His speeches, writings and reflections can be found in Ohana and Rothmund (2008) and a published tribute to him in Ohana *et al.* (2008).

policy development in any country, however deficient it may appear to the external gaze. On the contrary, the desire is to contribute to strengthening youth policy and its capacity to deliver effectively, purposefully and positively to the diversity of young people who need its support. That is not, however, a recipe for collusion. International reviews of national youth policy can be tough and critical. Inevitably, therefore, they are at their most confrontational during the national hearing, when the host country is subjected to robust, though hopefully constructive, criticism in front of a diversity of youth field actors, some supportive of youth policy development in their country, others often very critical<sup>32</sup>. That is a difficult moment in the international review process. But once alternative perspectives are taken on board, modifications possibly made, or concerns substantiated, the international review team and national officials from the host country collaborate and stand side by side during the international hearing, presenting their knowledge and understanding of that country's youth policy from their two perspectives. By then, there is more convergence than divergence, as they have worked together to present even the criticisms in the most constructive way.

Yet the recurrent criticism lingers – that the 'foreign' composition of the international review teams can never connect sufficiently with the cultural, political and economic realities of the country under review. In the past, there have been some difficult moments when criticism by the international review team was met with quite overt hostility from participants at the national hearing, on the grounds that the international review team simply did not 'understand'. There is some truth in the allegation, but it is also a dreadful mistruth. There will always be members of the international review team whose experience is dramatically divorced from what prevails in the host country, but, equally, there are also always members of the team who can recognise and empathise immediately with what is under discussion, precisely because they come from 'similar' places and contexts. That, indeed, is one of the criteria that inform 'recruitment' planning – at least one member of the international review team should have knowledge and experience that resonates with that of the host country. But they should not be from the host country<sup>33</sup>, because that denies the international review team the possibility of exploring issues and interpreting ideas for itself, sometimes in harmony with the explanations proffered, sometimes at odds with them. Inevitably, that has sometimes led to a clash of perspectives and accusations that the *international* perspective is uselessly detached from national (cultural, historical, political, or economic) realities. International reviews of national youth policy are clearly not infallible and such mistakes and errors of judgment are certainly sometimes made. But, in

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<sup>32</sup> It has become an established principle that all those from the host country who have contributed to the international review should be invited to the international hearing, alongside any others whom the host country chooses to invite. This has not always happened and the international review process can only depend on the host country to fulfill this 'obligation'.

<sup>33</sup> Only once has a team member been from the host country. This was not at all helpful, because that individual constantly sought to tell the rest of the team *how* something worked, or *why* it mattered, when a core task for any international review team was – from a critical distance of partial ignorance – to work those things out for itself, through probing questions and requests for clarification.

recognition of this, many international reviews of national youth policy have ended with the plea: 'forgive the mistakes but please consider the issues'.

The international reviews of national youth policy have evolved over time. Their methodology is distinctive and illuminative, using documentary analysis and wider literature as back-up material but essentially making use of perspectives from the diversity of stakeholders who are involved in the formulation, execution and experience of youth policy. But they do take time; their depth and duration come at a price. There is still certainly a case for sustaining the model on occasions when it is requested but there is also a case for having a more varied and flexible menu of options available when member States seek 'youth policy' assistance from the Council of Europe. The following chapter considers alternative models of engagement.

#### **IV Models of engagement between the Council of Europe and its member states**

Within the youth field, over the past twenty years, there have essentially been just two modes of response on ‘youth policy’ issues by the Council of Europe Youth Directorate (latterly Youth Department) to requests by individual member states. The most prominent of these have been the *international reviews of national youth policy*, which are discussed in depth both here and in previous ‘synthesis’ reports (Williamson 2002; Williamson 2008). The process that has informed these reviews, and which has evolved over time, is described and discussed in Chapter III.

There has also been a mechanism depicted as *youth policy advisory missions*. These were established in 2003 in response to a request by Slovenia for support in framing a national youth strategy. Though, by then, the international reviews of national youth policy were well known (usually as ‘the youth policy reviews’, though such a shorthand can be misleading for an outsider), this was not what Slovenia wanted. Instead, the government wanted a ‘quick and dirty’ (short and practical) external perspective on one specific issue. To that end, the Council of Europe Youth Directorate put together a small team (of four) to pay a single visit to Ljubljana, discuss key issues with relevant stakeholders, and compose a relatively short report within a tight timescale. The report, it was agreed, would remain confidential to the Slovenian authorities.

This model has been followed, occasionally, ever since, though there have been variations on the core theme. The issues addressed have varied considerably (for example, they have included youth worker training, youth unemployment, out-of-school learning and other things). The youth policy advisory missions have sometimes had a strong political flavour – making good use of international expertise to advance a particular cause or case in a timely fashion within the internal processes of governmental machinery. The most recent youth policy advisory mission (in 2015) provided Finland with the opportunity to consider revisions to its Youth Act within the context of international knowledge and experience. The subsequent report (produced within one month of the two-day visit) was published on the website of Finland’s Ministry of Education, but that decision was theirs; the principle of confidentiality remains, although the Council of Europe Youth Department would encourage transparency whenever possible.

A rather abortive effort to produce a third model of engagement between the Council of Europe and its member states in the field of youth policy has taken place more recently. Indeed, the process drifts on, with some level of uncertainty on both sides. Initially, Romania requested an international review of its youth policy but, following a preliminary visit, this appeared to be inappropriate and probably unnecessary. At the time (2013), Romania was still finalising a new national youth strategy. This was subsequently completed but the informal advice within the Council of Europe Youth Department, supported by the CDEJ, was that a more suitable contribution by the Youth Department would be an ‘enabling’ team to support implementation of the youth strategy with perhaps a concluding ‘review’ – at an unspecified point later in the implementation – to



reflect on the extent to which the vision of the strategy had been successfully put into practice. The provisional name attached to this proposed methodology was a *youth policy strategic development support mission*. The core idea was to attach one international expert to each of the four core themes of the youth strategy, advising and supporting policy development and implementation through drawing on knowledge and experience from elsewhere. Every country clearly has unique and distinctive challenges around youth policy making and embedding suitable practice, but ideas from similar experiences elsewhere rarely do any harm:

The whole process – the false starts, frustrations, adaptations, the successive recasting of intentions, the detours and conflicts – needs to be comprehended. Only then can we understand what has been achieved, and learn from that experience. Even though no one ever again will make exactly the same journey, to follow the adventures of the projects offers a general guide to the dangers and discoveries of their field of action (Marris and Rein 1972, p.260)

The proposal for Romania was that the expert team would be ‘overseen’ by colleagues from the CDEJ and the Advisory Council, in keeping with the co-management principles of the Youth Department. In effect, the team composition would look very similar those composed for an international review of national youth policy, but its function and contribution would be different.

The different relationship with Romania was never put to the test. Discussions at both ministerial and official level have continued, with particular requests and the provision of some informal advice, but no distinctively different structure has yet been put in place.

However, the proposition that there might be further, alternative models by which the Council of Europe Youth Department provided value-added support to youth policy development in member states, coinciding as it did with the appointment of a new Head of the Youth Department who was eager to explore the possibility of new approaches, led to discussion on this front within the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ). First mooted at a meeting of the CDEJ in April 2015, to further the debate, a framework of ‘support measures’ was elaborated in a paper prepared by the Secretariat a year later (Council of Europe 2016).

The paper is very much focused on the additional benefits that may accrue to individual member states as a result of Council of Europe Youth Department support, rather than the wider ‘youth policy’ questions that may emerge from such processes, though the two are inevitably intertwined (and, indeed, both have always been an integral part of the objectives of the international reviews of national youth policy). The paper also considers some of the infrastructure support measures that may also be invoked: the conversion of the traditional Summer University of the CDEJ to a University on European Youth Policies; the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres; and the pathways towards

quality youth information services (through the work of not only the Council of Europe Youth Department, but also ERYICA<sup>34</sup>).

Here, however, it is sufficient to report on possibilities for member State youth policy support beyond the arguably ‘heavy hand’ of the international reviews of national youth policy and the ‘light touch’ of the advisory missions. The paper proposed that there could also be *international reviews on specific youth policy topics*, similar to an advisory mission but in more depth, following a prescribed methodology and engaging with a wider range of stakeholders<sup>35</sup>. It also suggested *further attention to youth policy development in federal states*, where clearly a ‘national’ framework for youth policy would be inappropriate and probably unwelcome. Belgium was the first federal state to invite an international review of its youth policy and, as the paper notes, the international review methodology ‘had to be significantly adapted’ for that context. It would not be stretching the point too much to say that addressing the situation of Belgium (with three communities, three regions and three levels of governance) was something of a logistical nightmare, with the co-ordinator endeavouring not to produce three quite separate reviews while at the same time seeking to ensure proper respect and engagement with the distinctive characteristics, traditions and aspirations of different parts of the country.

The paper also considers whether there could be ‘*youth policy reviews*’ *beyond one single country*, either through a ‘*sub-regional*’ focus (on, for example, the Baltic or Balkan states, the Caucasus region, or the Benelux or Nordic countries) or – though the paper does not discuss this explicitly – through *thematic comparative* reviews (of, for example, health policy for young people across countries where so-called ‘youth-friendly clinics’ are all the rage).

Framework models for supporting member states are relatively easy to conjure up; like youth policy itself, however, the challenge lies in implementation. The paper considers different approaches that might be adopted, not just visiting teams of ‘experts’, but also desk-based responses that could provide a *rapid-response* to specific administrative or procedural questions, offering experiential knowledge and good practice from elsewhere, and a similar form of *peer advice* (or even peer coaching) from a number of other countries in relation to the formulation, development and activation of policy in a particular youth policy area. In both instances, the Council of Europe Youth Department could assist by drawing on its extensive network of contacts and expertise to identify and co-ordinate suitable connections.

Around these core proposals there are obviously other possibilities, some more ‘arms-length’, with a critical distance that allows for review and ‘evaluation’,

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<sup>34</sup> ERYICA is the European Youth Information and Counseling Agency

<sup>35</sup> In 2009, The Council of Europe established a policy review process on child and youth participation: see [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG\\_Coop/Fmwk\\_policy\\_reviews\\_participation\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG_Coop/Fmwk_policy_reviews_participation_en.pdf). This could be a model to emulate, just as the international reviews of national youth policy initially followed the format of the Council of Europe international reviews of national cultural policy.

some more 'hands-on' that provide for practical guidance and support. The rather thorny and contentious question of monitoring, evaluation, benchmarking, standards and indicators – words that hitherto have been studiously avoided in the international **reviews** of national youth policy – is addressed below.

## V Indicators and standards for youth policy development – a call for a debate

In the paper cited above (Council of Europe 2016), a short section is dedicated to 'Measuring progress in youth policy development'. The first of the three paragraphs within this section reads as follows:

As the Council of Europe's youth sector lacks monitoring mechanisms to follow-up (*sic*) on its work there is an increasing demand from the member states governments to develop "measurement" criteria and methods to measure progress over time. Therefore, it might be considered to development a set of (quality) *benchmarks* on youth policy, based on texts adopted by conferences of ministers responsible for youth, Committee of Ministers (or where appropriate other Council of Europe relevant bodies), as well as documents drafted by youth researchers and youth policy experts for the CDEJ (i.e. reports of international reviews of national youth policies) (Council of Europe 2016, p.5; emphasis added)

The increasing demand for such steps, as proclaimed in the paper, is, however, paralleled by a similar level of resistance or concern. By no means everyone is in favour. But it has always been so. There is no shortage of historical debate about the scrutiny of public policy, its efficiency and effectiveness, its impact and outcomes, but there is also a commensurate shortage of consensus on how this should be done, on what criteria and to what ends? Indeed, the debate is often encapsulated within concerns about control versus freedom, ensuring versus enabling, and performance management versus professional development: in short, iron fists versus velvet gloves.

The Council of Europe Youth Department should be unequivocal about its purpose in moving in this direction. It is in the interests of strengthening the enabling environments that support the positive development and direction of young people's lives<sup>36</sup>. The Youth Directorate/Department has, in fact, been deliberating on the question of 'indicators' for some time. Indeed, three meetings were held in 2002-2003 involving 'Experts on Youth Policy Indicators' and a final report was produced (Council of Europe 2003c). The expert group, though acknowledging the limited database available *at a European level*<sup>37</sup>, had considered material from a range of sources and was eager to construct a framework for 'non-formal' learning that might sit in parallel with the indicators used for formal education in the PISA<sup>38</sup> process followed by the OECD. Working

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<sup>36</sup> The Youth Department has already moved down this path, very recently (2014-15) through the co-operation with the children's rights divisions of the Council of Europe, with the development of a self-assessment tool on child and youth participation, based on 10 key indicators. This was first 'road tested' in three member states. There is now a guidebook to support member states in making use of it:  
<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900016806482da>

<sup>37</sup> The brief report of the first consultative meeting on youth policy indicators noted some of information available, but concluded "All this is not much, but at European level this is all there is" (Council of Europe 2002, p.3).

<sup>38</sup> The Programme of International Student Assessment; it takes place every three years.

in the groundswell following the launch of the European Union's White Paper on Youth (European Commission 2001), the expert group decided to frame its deliberations around the chapters of the White Paper: participation and active citizenship; information; greater understanding of youth; education (formal/non-formal); lifelong learning; employment; social integration; and values such as anti-racism and autonomy:

The White Paper on Youth is about to become a cornerstone in European youth policy development. Much of its content overlaps with previous work of the Council of Europe and it can also be understood as a joint youth policy agenda. This is why the participants of the consultative meeting propose to use the policy chapters of the White Paper as a structure for working with indicators and, at the same time, to use indicators within the monitoring process around these chapters (Council of Europe 2002, p.2)

This first report complimented the first synthesis report of the international reviews of national youth policy (Williamson 2002) as representing a 'real step forward' that 'may very well mark the moment where the Council of Europe will move from national reporting to entering a European dimension' (Council of Europe 2002, p.5). With the benefit of hindsight fourteen years on, the report's conclusions are somewhat taunting:

It looked like a good time to call for a meeting on youth policy indicators, aiming at getting researchers, NGO representatives and experts from European and international organisations around the table and to prepare the ground for a working group of specialists [...] to develop a workable proposal on how to work with youth policy indicators in the youth field of the Council of Europe as from 2004 (Council of Europe 2002, p.6)

Such confidence was tempered by a recognition of the limits of the 'indicators concept', not least because of a continuing lack of clarity as to what 'youth policy' was actually about – a debate that continues to rage today. This notwithstanding, the final report of the expert group, drawing heavily on both the first synthesis report on the international reviews of national youth policy and the CDEJ's working paper *Towards a European standard for youth policy development* (CDEJ 2002), which was later elaborated further (CDEJ 2003), did articulate what it considered 'youth policy' to be about, which provided the basis for its perspectives on indicators. Building from, but significantly adapting, the framework used by the OECD at the time (OECD 1999)<sup>39</sup>, it was suggested that any sets of indicators, however balanced quantitatively and qualitatively, would need to pay attention to three of the key areas addressed in the international reviews of national youth policy:

- Infrastructure and governance
- Policy domains (and questions of access and rights)
- Cross-cutting issues (such as information and participation)

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<sup>39</sup> These were **autonomy, equity, health and cohesion**

However, the expert group continued to struggle with ‘pinning down’ youth policy in order to attach indicators to them. Distinctive and dedicated youth policy was not too much of a problem but youth policy incorporated within broader policy frameworks and aspirations was rather more of a challenge. Moreover, whatever the structural arrangements delineating youth policy, there was also the critical question of how policies actually reached young people (if they did at all) in a meaningful and connected way.

The final report of the expert group advanced an extensive and arguably over-complex list of possible indicators, underpinned by some sophisticated but also arguably off-putting argument and analysis. It made 24 recommendations, covering the aims and objectives of youth policy (14), the necessary contribution of youth research (3) and youth policy indicators themselves (7). Of more significance, perhaps, were the various Annexes to the report, which revealed starkly just how complex the challenge of identifying and agreeing a manageable suite of indicators in the realm of youth policy is likely to be. Annexe 3 presents a grid of issues facing young people, the policy domain(s) where these are likely to be addressed, the concepts that inform such provision (participation, equity, cohesion), and the specific measures taken in order to implement provision (objectives, structures, methods). Only then are potential indicators suggested, and then only at a very general level. Eleven key issues are listed; just one example is presented below:

ISSUES (Themes)	DOMAINS (Adminstration)	INTERPRET ATION (Concepts)	IMP LEMENT (Process)	ATION	
			Objectives	Method	<b>Indicators</b>
LEARNING (Lifelong: formal and non-formal) Education and Training	Education and Training Employment Health and well-being Leisure and cultural policy Youth justice Environment	Participation  Equity  Cohesion	To be defined and developed (in conjunction with indicators) in a participatory process involving all stakeholders/ beneficiaries at a national level	Such as: Financial and human resources Structures Legislation Research (qualitative and quantitative)	Such as: Attendance Enrolment rate Success rate On-going evaluation results

Source: Council of Europe 2003c, Annexe 3

Annexe 4 of the final report of the expert group seeks to set out some ‘crude indicators’ as a basis for further dialogue. It has three columns for nine policy areas that most would agree comprise elements of ‘youth policy’. These include learning, training and employment; access to new technologies; and advice and access to health, housing and social protection. As above, just one example will be provided:

<b>System framework 1</b>	<b>Participation/access levels 2</b>	<b>Differential engagement 3</b>
Learning, Training and Employment System/structure for vocational training and labour market entry	% achieving a recognised (academic or vocational) qualification <u>beyond</u> compulsory schooling (PISA) (OECD) (Eurobarometer)	% drop-out before end of compulsory schooling  proportion of youth unemployment to all unemployment  % who get jobs after training

Source: Council of Europe 2003c, Annexe 4

Even more detailed propositions for indicators were provided in relation to specific policy domains, such as Access to the Labour Market (Annexe 5), Access to Information (Annexe 6) and Access to Leisure-Time Opportunities (Annexe 7). But the final document was perhaps so overwhelming that, until very recently, little progressed from it. Its most useful contribution was to kick-start the debate on indicators within the youth sector and subsequently to reveal the complexity of the challenge. Where the report is most concrete is where prior indicators exist elsewhere (in areas such as formal education, vocational training and the labour market). Where there are gaps or rather more vague proposals are presented is where the territory has, historically, been largely unexplored (in areas such as non-formal learning, youth information and youth participation). Not that it is impossible to develop indicators for these areas of policy but it is much tougher to develop *meaningful and manageable* indicators, bringing to mind the old adage that ‘not everything that can be counted is important, and not everything that is important can be counted’. Moreover, this pioneering report on youth policy indicators does provide glimpses of the possibility of a more simple matrix of indicators that might be ‘good enough’ to capture both the strengths of youth policy where it produces a positive effect on the ‘social condition’ of (a greater or growing proportion of) young people, and the weaknesses of youth policy where it does not.

Over a decade further on, in early 2015, the Council of Europe Youth Department prepared a list of indicators for youth policy based on principles and values, as follows:

- Youth policy should be anchored in the universal values of pluralist democracy and human rights and pursue objectives such as justice, respect for identities, access to one's own culture, equal opportunities, including therein men and women, and social cohesion
- Youth policy should integrate the educational dimension in a long term perspective, taking into consideration young people's aspirations
- Youth policy should pursue the objective of ensuring young people's access to quality education and training, to decent work and living conditions, as well as developing the conditions to enable them to contribute to the development of society
- Youth policy should promote young people's autonomy as well as their sense of responsibility and commitment, through, notably, voluntary youth work
- Youth policy should facilitate young people's access to human and social rights
- Youth policy should facilitate active participation of young people in decisions which concern them, and encourage them to commit themselves in their community life
- Youth policy should facilitate the access of young people, notably from disadvantaged groups, to information which concerns them, and in particular, to the new communication technologies
- Youth policy should promote youth mobility by reducing administrative and financial obstacles and encouraging the development of quality projects
- Youth policy should promote non-formal education/learning of young people as well as the development of appropriate forms of recognition of experiences and skills acquired notably within the framework of associations and other forms of voluntary involvement, at local, national and European levels
- Youth policy should facilitate the access of young people to employment, by means of appropriate projects and training schemes which are likely to increase their professional opportunities

At the same time, in response to a request from the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, the Youth Department produced a matrix setting out 'Benchmarks for Youth Policy'. It prefaced its list of benchmarks by a pithy statement:

The Council of Europe aims at promoting youth policies which provide young people with opportunities and experiences that are likely to improve their successful integration into society and to enable them to be agents of changes. Youth policy should be transversal and seek to support young people's well-being (physical and mental), providing them with learning (in particular non-formal), facilitating young people's social inclusion and enabling them to play an active role in society

The benchmarks themselves, divided into those that are qualitative and those that are quantitative, invite a response indicating the extent to which they can be plausibly applied in a particular country. They deal with anchoring principles such as human rights and justice, policy 'offers' ranging from education and employment to information and mobility, and access to autonomy and rights. They also deal with structural youth policy arrangements, from legislation and



financial support for youth NGOs, to the establishment of local, national and European dimensions.

This is a much more ‘user-friendly’ (and less threatening!) approach to re-starting and strengthening the indicators debate, permitting reflection and discussion without the need to name and shame or celebrate pole position.

So the debate, even within the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, is not starting with a blank sheet of paper. Moreover, there is no shortage of wider relevant material. This would include documents from both national social policies and the benchmarking work of transnational organisations, as well as occasional glimpses within the international reviews of national youth policy themselves. What follows are some examples from that material.

There is actually very little reference to ‘indicators’ or ‘benchmarks’ within the international reviews of national youth policy. Cross-references do exist to the two earlier ‘synthesis reports’ (Williamson 2002, Williamson 2008), notably in relation to the five ‘C’s<sup>40</sup> (components) and eight ‘D’s<sup>41</sup> (dynamics) that relate to youth policy development and implementation. As Reiter *et al.* (2008, p.95) suggest:

Both strategies of assessment will lead to valuable starting points for further development and useful criteria for cross-national youth policy evaluation.

Only Serbia appeared to be deeply preoccupied with indicators. Indeed, the National Youth Strategy of 2006 contained within it some 700 indicators, though quite how these were going to be judged was never really fathomed by the international review team. And too much attention to detail can prove to be a hostage to fortune. The international review concluded that Serbia had made some impressive progress in youth policy over the past decade, yet its vast landscape of aspirations had left it open to serious allegations of failure:

An open panel with youth organisations during the IRT’s second visit concluded that only 20% to 30% of the NYS has been implemented satisfactorily. Respondents asserted that the Local Action Plans, on which the concrete delivery of the strategic goals have largely hinged, have been implemented to an even lesser degree, mainly due to the inadequate adaptation of these plans to the needs of young people and the lack of financial and infrastructural prerequisites for operationalization at the local level (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, p.5)

Elsewhere in the international review of youth policy in Serbia, attention is drawn to the 12 indicators developed by ERYICA over ten years ago (see ERYICA 2005). These were designed to address the basic prerequisites that every youth information centre should fulfil, but the international review concluded that they

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<sup>40</sup> Coverage (geographical and social groups), Capacity, Competence, Co-ordination and Cost

<sup>41</sup> Decision/Drive, decentralization, Delivery, difficulties, Debate, dissent, Development, direction, and back to Decision/Drive – operating in a cyclical fashion, and starting and stopping at any point.

were still a 'work in progress' in Serbia (Potočnik and Williamson 2015, pp.49-50).

There are two key points arising from this modest contribution to the indicators debate from the international reviews of national youth policy. The first is that it is probably unhelpful to be bombarded with a long list and perhaps preferable to identify a small suite of indicators or some core 'essential' benchmarks supplemented perhaps by some 'elective' ones. The second is that time really is of the essence, insofar as countries, as well as the projects and programmes within them, are at very different stages of decision and development in terms of 'youth policy'. It would therefore be invidious to consider that simple and easy comparisons might be made between countries; in the vernacular, it would be like comparing apples and pears.

This advances a third point, concerning the rigidity of any single indicator or group of indicators. The youth sector is characterised not only by extensive diversity but also by methodological innovation in which process can be as important as product. The call by funders and politicians for 'hard' evidence of impact and outcomes may be misplaced for these reasons, though this may not be a reason for rejecting such demands out of hand. It may, however, be a basis for arguing that more qualitative, interpreted approaches to indicators are more appropriate.

The youth field has, indeed, not been inattentive to such demands, even if they have not (yet) been at the forefront of deliberations by the Council of Europe Youth Department. Both the European Commission and the European Youth Forum have, quite recently, been engaged in developing indicators and 'quality standards' for youth policy. There has also been a very recent Erasmus + project concerned with identifying European standards for the development of constructive, coherent and co-ordinated youth policy (see Holtom *et al.* 2016).

Following the launch of the EU youth strategy in 2009 (European Commission 2009), it was proposed to

set up a working group to discuss, in consultation with relevant policy areas, existing data on the situation of young people and the possible need for the development of indicators in fields where they do not exist, or where no youth perspective is apparent. The results of this work and proposals for potential new indicators should be submitted for consideration by the Council no later than December 2010 (European Commission 2011, p.2)

A dashboard of indicators was subsequently produced in order to "enable non-experts in the youth field to get a quick yet comprehensive overview of the situation of young people in the EU" (European Commission 2011, p.3). The dashboard proposed four 'contextual indicators', 21 indicators drawn from those already in use within some key youth policy domains (such as education and training, and health and well-being), and 15 new indicators across a range of policy domains that hitherto had none agreed at EU level (these were in the fields of culture and creativity, youth participation, voluntary activities, and youth and the world). In total, then, the EU has produced 40 indicators for the

youth field, the data for which can be sourced largely through Eurostat, though in some cases through the ‘upcoming DG EAC Flash Barometer on youth’<sup>42</sup>.

It would be easy to be critical of the dashboard. It is unequivocally a statistical exercise, revealing much about the proportion of young people in various situations, and those engaged socially and politically in a variety of ways, but – precisely because of the sources of data – revealing very little about the nuances and rationales that lie behind such data. It is very likely that the Council of Europe Youth Department would be more interested in those (more qualitative) features of youth policy and its differential effects on different groups of young people.

Nevertheless, the EU has made an important start. Critically, though recognising that there were sometimes strong arguments for a higher number of indicators, the European Commission’s Expert Group that composed the dashboard was determined not to present a suffocating number of indicators, and this is an important stance to take. It may be that just a relatively small number of indicators, suitably interrogated, can provide a useful weathervane for the efficacy of youth policy and the direction of its travel in improving the lives of all young people or of sub-sections of the youth population. One recurrent problem of youth policy is that the positive opportunities created are, too often, taken up disproportionately by young people already benefiting from other opportunities, thus compounding the relatively ‘exclusion’ of others. Signalling not only positive improvements across the population but also a decline in negative indicators within more vulnerable groups of young people is an important dimension of any benchmarking and indicators strategy.

In parallel with the work on indicators by the EU Expert Group, the European Commission funded an independent report on how its Member States were currently applying indicators at national level in areas related to youth. The ECORYS (2011) report considers both the strengths and weaknesses of using indicators. It is arguably rather gushing in its advocacy for the sustainability of stable youth policy beneath what it refers to as ‘high-level political perturbations’ and for the value of an EU level approach in informing national policy. Those are *not* messages that would find support from the experience of the Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy. Nonetheless, the ECORYS report is helpful in some of the strategic conclusions it draws, not least the need to strive to restrict the number of indicators to those that are considered most relevant and to endeavour to identify indicators that provide cross-cutting evidence, both horizontally across policy domains and vertically between different layers and levels of youth policy development and implementation (ECORYS 2011, p.38).

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Flash Barometer 408 on ‘European Youth’ (April 2015), with regard to youth participation and engagement in voluntary activities: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/flash/fl\\_408\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_408_en.pdf). Many other Eurobarometer flash reports are available.

This is, of course, easier said than done. The ECORYS report talks of indicators that can provide “a succinct and simple framework for evidence-based policy”; it goes on to contend that “using indicators requires commitment and alignment at all levels” (ECORYS 2011, p.38). Neither assertion has a great deal of weight in youth policy realities or is likely to materialise in the near future. Youth policy, precisely because it has to operate across numerous policy domains and is often dependent on the commitment and engagement of line ministries, is *always* complex and messy; and, from formulation at a political level to operation on the ground, youth policy rarely retains fidelity, as it suffers from ‘policy leakage’, ‘translation’, ‘re-interpretation’ and ‘implementation failure’. There can be a huge gulf between political vision and grass-roots reality, as Hyman’s classic text graphically illustrates (Hyman 2008<sup>43</sup>). Indicators have to be careful about what they are exploring, where and why, and cautious in the conclusion they may draw.

None of these concerns, reservations and caveats should halt aspirational work in the field of youth policy, such as a recent publication by the European Youth Forum (European Youth Forum 2016). Its accessible eight-point wheel of youth policy standards, with a ‘traffic light’ system to assess its indicators and form judgements is very well composed, despite having been worked on in parallel with an Erasmus + project (Holtom *et al.* 2016) moving in a similar direction, though in relation to national youth councils rather than the European context – hardly a constructive advertisement for the ‘joined up’ and collaborative approach routinely promulgated by many different actors in the youth field. The key point is that it is critical to constantly remember and be reminded that such ideas remain largely rhetorical and bear limited connection to the youth policy realities that exist in most, if not all, contexts throughout Europe.

All this suggests that the Council of Europe Youth Department should tread carefully. Meaningful and manageable indicators and benchmarks will need to work *within*, rather than be superimposed on, the very different ‘youth policy’ contexts that prevail around Europe. That diversity takes many forms, from the ‘integrity’ (as opposed to fragmentation) of youth policy, through the very different levels of (both financial and human) resources allocated to youth policy and the uneven data sources available, to the different formulations and interpretations of similar concepts and ideas within youth policy (such as intercultural learning, and even ‘non-formal education’). Critically, indicators and benchmarks must seek to avoid invidious rankings and ‘league tables’ and instead contribute to enabling environments for youth policy through mapping progress and development.

That is, indeed, what the international reviews of national youth policy have, over the past two decades, endeavoured to do, without invoking instruments such as indicators. But the international reviews have ‘compared and contrasted’, identifying pockets of good practice even where youth policy is

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<sup>43</sup> Hyman, a former speechwriter for British Prime Minister Tony Blair, subsequently became a schoolteacher and opened an alternative ‘free’ school. The subtitle of his 2008 book is: ‘From Downing Street Vision to Classroom Reality’.

largely under-developed, and always acknowledging the very uneven playing field on which similar youth policy development is being attempted. It may therefore be useful to systematise the basis for those comparisons in the context of ‘milestones’ on a journey of youth policy development – especially on those matters where the resources and expertise of the Council of Europe Youth Department have been invoked. There may also be a case for considering some ‘strong’ indicators on what might be agreed as a core offer or entitlement for young people, with some lighter measures attached to more peripheral or innovative practice:

### **Guiding the indicators debate within the Council of Europe – a framework:**

	<i>Core youth policy offer</i>	<i>Outlying youth policy</i>
<i>Council of Europe Youth Department assistance</i>	<b>Strong indicators</b>	Moderate indicators
<i>Other youth policy</i>	Moderate indicators	Lighter ‘measures’

In a sense, this has been the intention of the Council of Europe Youth Department for some time, at least since the international review of youth policy in Lithuania in 2002. The introduction of, first, a follow-up element to a review, and then a preliminary visit to agree core priorities for a review, were designed to identify central issues and to look, subsequently, at how they had developed. The follow-up process element of an international review has never been satisfactorily pursued<sup>44</sup>. Nor has any consensus been reached on what might constitute a ‘core’ or baseline youth policy offer, but this could usefully serve as an anchor point for the application of indicators, in the first instance at least. And, as with the process that guided the development of indicators on children’s participation, there would need to be experimental and exploratory steps in a handful of countries before anything was rolled out further afield. As with the EU dashboard that works its way across various policy domains affecting young people, so a Council of Europe Youth Department framework of indicators would need to ensure attention to both the levels of ‘governance’ of youth policy and the effectiveness of its delivery to relevant groups of young people. In the former case, following the thinking of the late Peter Lauritzen<sup>45</sup>, the existence of a properly funded and independent National Youth Council and mechanisms for

<sup>44</sup> Belgium is committed, in 2017, to hosting a follow-up visit, having had an international youth policy review in 2012.

<sup>45</sup> The late Peter Lauritzen was, amongst many other things, a senior official in the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe, its first educational adviser, the co-ordinator of the international youth policy reviews between 2002 and 2006, and the chair of the Expert Group on Youth Policy Indicators that met in 2002 and 2003. He was also one of the first to formulate a framework for thinking about youth policy, which included ‘budget’, ‘legislation’ and a ‘national youth council’.

‘expert’ input and involvement from wider civil society, thus ensuring diversity not duplication of youth opportunities at regional and local level, would point in the direction of a healthy climate for youth policy debate and development. In the latter case, it would be important to examine whether targeted health strategies, for example, really reached young people considered most vulnerable to health risk behaviour. Prevention programmes are fairly pointless if they only reach young people who would never have been at risk anyway!

Identifying and agreeing some form of core youth policy offer, around the themes of access and participation, would seem to be a sensible starting point for then agreeing relevant indicators to determine the kind of ‘traffic light’ or RAG (Red, Amber, Green) system that might assist improvement and development. As noted above, a menu of indicators might contain both ‘essential’ (required) and ‘elective’ (optional) elements<sup>46</sup>: those considered to be non-negotiable and those where a host country invited scrutiny.

None of this is impossible but it demands considerable sensitivity if it is to remain constructive, with active participation from all parties involved, rather than destructive and subject to suspicion and resistance.

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<sup>46</sup> England experimented with a suite of public service targets in the mid-2000s. Yet there were only some 200 to span the whole of the public sector. Each local authority had to select some key themes, within which they had to prioritise around 80 of the 200 targets. One theme was ‘Young people in the path to success’. Various indicators lent themselves to this theme because some core requirements such as educational participation and attainment. These included: preventing first-time entrants to the youth justice system; reducing the number of school exclusions; increasing the number of children from public care backgrounds remaining in education beyond the minimum leaving age; delaying the age of first use of an illegal drug; delaying the age of first sexual intercourse. Such indicators had been distilled from swathes of research knowledge and evidence; they may still not have been precise, but they were ‘good enough’ to determine whether the trajectory of youth policy – shaped at national level, put into practice at local level – was promoting improved opportunities and reducing risks, or not.

## Conclusions

Have the Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy come to a 'natural' end<sup>47</sup>? Certainly requests for such reviews have dried up and this is likely to be, in part at least, because the international reviews have become ever more elastic and demanding. What once took six months has become a project lasting two years, or more. There are both good and less good reasons for this. The process has evolved for the better, with – *inter alia* – an initial visit to clarify expectations and priorities, space between the two substantive visits to strengthen knowledge and understanding, an extra day in each substantive visit for discussion, reflection and feedback from the international review team, a national hearing and an international hearing. Less good have, sometimes, been delays in starting the review process and even greater delays in publishing conclusions following ratification by the Joint Council of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

The international reviews of national youth policy have produced a significant body of knowledge and a respected, innovative methodology. Now is the time, perhaps, to consider more variation from the model that has been developed over the past twenty years (and itself adapted over the years), but nevertheless making good use of the experience of that model. The statutory partners of the Council of Europe Youth Department need the competence and commitment of youth researchers in order to constitute, in effect, the triangle of youth policy, practice and research that is now celebrated for its effective contribution to youth policy development and implementation. But there do not necessarily have to be six, let alone eleven, members of a team, though occasionally this may be needed (as it was, certainly, in the case of Belgium). The Advisory Mission composition of four members is quite sufficient for a single-issue, rapid response request. There may simply be a need for a paper exercise, with a relevant expert responding to a country's documentation, with subsequent scrutiny by statutory partners and a representative of the Secretariat.

What the international reviews of national youth policy have told us is that 'youth policy' is a moveable, and constantly moving, feast, incorporating many layers of practice and perspective. While it may, on the one hand, accommodate all those aspect of public policy that touch the lives of young people, it may also, on the other hand and increasingly, be a dedicated and focused package of provision developed explicitly under the banner of 'youth policy'. Both need to be considered. Furthermore, there is an unfolding debate about the concept of 'transversal' youth policy (see Nico *et al.* 2017), through which there is structured communication both across government at different levels and between government and other relevant stakeholders in the youth field, in order to develop best practice and to ensure consistency and not collision between different domains, strands and aspirations of youth policy.

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<sup>47</sup> The paper on broadening support measures for member states (Council of Europe 2016, p.3) notes that, despite no youth policy reviews currently being undertaken, the CDEJ "expressed the wish to keep this activity as one of the support measures for the development of member states youth policy".

But while we debate the niceties of youth policy planning, considering for example the extent to which it is 'evidence-based', the reality is that the lives of young people in Europe are getting tougher. Whether you are a young refugee or an unemployed graduate (and you could be both of these at the same time), the challenges have become greater, with fewer certainties and broader risks. The 'youth policy' offer available to young people still varies dramatically across Europe, in range and depth, in terms of 'liberation' and regulation, and in relation to different groups of young people in exactly the same context. Equalising that offer, through adherence to a set of core standards, with the option of supplementing and strengthening that offer through further optional positive possibilities, is now what public authorities should be addressing, where requested and appropriate, in different ways, through the critical engagement and advice of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.



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## Appendix 1

### Key themes covered in the ‘third seven’ Youth Policy Reviews

#### *Governmental priorities*

#### *Review Team themes*

<b>Based on</b>	<b>Synthesis 1</b>	<b>framework</b>				
<b>Latvia</b> 2007	Youth and youth policy Context Delivery	Key domains Education and learning Employment Health	(cont.) Sports Family/welfare Youth justice	Cross-cutting Youth participation and citizenship Youth information	(cont.) Elites and outsiders Social inclusion Urban-rural	Support Research Training Dissemination International
<b>Moldova</b> 2008	Youth organisations & political representation	Key domains Non-formal learning Transitions to work Entrepreneurship	Other Health Social protection Youth justice Sport & leisure	Transversal Transnistria Migration Urban-rural	Cross- cutting Participation and citizenship Social inclusion Youth information	Support Research Training Dissemination Evaluation
<b>Changed</b>	<b>procedure</b>	<b>3+3 themes</b>				
<b>Albania</b> 2009	The law	Delivery mechanisms	Youth participation	Youth information	Leisure-time activities	Youth crime and justice
<b>Belgium*</b> 2011 complex!	Flemish Community	French Community	German- speaking Community	<b>Dealing with</b> <i>[a case study]</i>	<b>Youth</b> <i>both vertically</i>	<b>unemployment</b> <i>&amp; horizontally]</i>
<b>Ukraine</b> 2012	Youth employment	Health	Patriotic education & citizenship	Youth engagement & participation	Vulnerability, risk and exclusion	Conceptual debates & cross-cutting themes
<b>Greece</b> 2013	Youth employment	Military service	Youth engagement	<b>Governance</b>	<b>of youth</b>	<b>Policy</b>
<b>Serbia</b> 2014	Education & employment	Information, access to rights & visibility	Participation	Social inclusion	Health and safety/ Security	Mobility

24.12.14/13.6.15/28.8.16/30.8.16/1.9.16/2.9.16/3.9.16/4.9.16/5.9.16/7.9.16/8.9.16/9.9.16/  
16.9.16/18.9.16/20.9.16/24.9.16/18.10.16/7.11.16/11.11.16/13.11.16/1.12.16/4.12.16/  
5.12.16/7.12.16/8.12.16/9.12.16/10.12.16/11.12.16/12.12.16/13.12.16/14.12.16/21.12.16/  
23.12.16/6.1.17/9.1.17