

Chapter 10

From mutual ignorance to ignorance? Youth work and social work in France since 1945

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Introduction

Today in France the concept of *animation*, an approximation for “youth work”, tends to be part of a large but loose entity. Both “social workers” and *animateurs* (youth workers) are likely to call themselves *intervenants sociaux* (social support workers) or even *travailleurs sociaux* (social workers). These facts are new and rather surprising when one considers what social work, historically, was in France since it originated in the first half of the 20th century. It is even more striking when one takes into account the origins of youth work and what its features were in the French context until the 1980s. Historically, youth work and social work were two distinct worlds with very little in common, despite regular attempts to co-ordinate them and make them work together. In the last 30 years or so, they partly merged; however, in terms of professional qualifications, for example, the two domains remain clearly delineated. Rather than the “merging” of youth work and social work, it is more pertinent to speak of youth work being slowly engulfed or annexed by a new type of social work, whose boundaries have expanded at the expense of its unity and public image. This change tells us quite a lot about youth work and social work and, moreover, says much about the evolution of the youth question within French society since the late 1970s.

Two questions will be addressed throughout the rest of this chapter.

- ▶ How and why youth work (or rather its French equivalent) emerged in France probably later than in some north-western European countries and why action regarding young people was mainly educative and cultural when it was institutionalised in the 1960s, thereby positioning social workers on the very margin of this action.
- ▶ What the current apparent reconciliation of social work and youth work – not to say the integration of youth work within a broader but weaker social work – tells us about the state of youth in French society today and especially about young people at the lower end of the social spectrum.

Sociocultural youth work for young people: a dream of the 1960s?

It is important to bear in mind that “youth” as a political category and even as an administrative category has long been contentious and controversial in France. This stems from the fact that the first youth policy was the responsibility of a dictatorship – the Vichy regime in the 1940s. This contrasts dramatically with England and Wales where the youth service was also established in 1940 but by a democracy fighting to keep the world free. Nonetheless, up to the 1960s, the idea of “youth policy” had some scent of totalitarianism about it. Notwithstanding this concern, in France youth organisations never did attract levels of participation as large as in England or Belgium and most of these organisations were faith-based around Catholicism; the *laïques* (secular forces) never did succeed in creating such youth movements. They were much more successful with sport and, above all, “cultural”, artistic organisations. The struggle between Catholic forces and republican secular forces was central in shaping French political and social life. The Ligue de l’enseignement, the main body of the secular side, and many school teachers working in secular educational associations, opposed the idea of a ministry of youth in the 1950s, asserting that there was already one ministry of youth – the Ministry of Education, whose role was not only to provide schooling but also to develop citizenship.

Many countries experienced a rejuvenation after the Second World War but the “baby boom” was all the more important in France, for unlike most other European countries France had experienced a long demographic decline since the last decades of the 19th century, which had turned the birth rate into an obsession. At last, the long expected new wave of fertility had arrived (Sauvy 1959). In the first decade after the Second World War, the young children born between 1946 and 1953 would soon become teenagers in a society that was experiencing a rapid growth of income and was on the verge of entering the alluring but daunting consumer society.

The common feeling among social activists and thinkers was that the country was experiencing a crisis of its traditional structures, namely the school system, which was criticised for not being ready to prepare for the modernity that French society was facing at that time. *Animation socio-culturelle* – a term coined in the early 1960s – was seen as a way of responding to the challenges of the time, especially regarding what was called the “youth problem”. As was noted earlier, the term *animation* is, in France, the closest approximation to the idea of youth work. It had its heyday between 1962 and 1973 when hundreds of youth centres were built, and when thousands of youth workers were recruited. Throughout most of the 1960s youth policy was based on *animation*. The word “policy” is, however, partly inadequate as it conveys a sense of coherence and organisation that does not fit well with the rather pragmatic and piecemeal aspect of what was actually implemented. Whatever its name, this “action” was driven by an educational and cultural orientation. Its scope was universal in the sense that all young people were supposed to benefit from it: boys and girls, young people from rural and urban areas, young workers and students. It was seen as a way of enhancing civic conscience and participation among young people and to foster *démocratisation culturelle*, a French expression meaning the enlargement of cultural practices (especially access to art and artistic practices).

The most typical institutions of the 1960s and 1970s were significantly called MJC (*Maisons des jeunes et de la culture*; houses for youth and culture) which bear some resemblance to youth centres but with a more ambitious orientation towards the arts. In cities, most of them hosted a performance hall, some a theatre hall. Though they were mainly attended by young people between the ages of 15 and 25, the MJCs were also open to the general public (in other words, older people too) and they advocated strongly the mixing of young people and adults.

Education versus social work

MJC youth workers defined their new profession in opposition to teachers whose pedagogy, they claimed, was traditional – some said even undemocratic – and, above all, ineffective, especially outside the classroom. Schoolteachers (school masters, who had historically played a key role in cultural matters beyond the school) were now considered to be out of date, according to members of the *Ligue de l'enseignement*. But these youth workers also opposed the model of the social assistants who in the 1960s typified the social worker: their practices were seen by youth workers as patronising and not democratic enough (Besse 2008). The gender issue was of some importance in this rejection: youth workers were men whereas social assistants were still women, often spinsters, the older ones typically from the most privileged backgrounds. Though not systematically Catholic, they remained inspired by religious values, not least because the majority of training schools they attended were still faith-based, even if the qualification was granted by the government. Social work was seen as the legacy of the Christian charitable work of the 19th century, which for an historian is partly an oversimplification, but it was an opinion widely held in the 1950s and 1960s (Bouquet, Garcette and Salomon 1995). Even if some of the new youth workers were also Christians, at least from their upbringing and their early militancy in, for example, the JOC (*Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne*; young Christian workers' association) or the Catholic Scouts, they opposed the vision of clerical structures and the legacy of charitable work. They did not identify themselves as social workers.

Earlier, in the late 1940s, there had been attempts to make connections between social work and what was then called *éducation populaire*, which approximately means non-formal education for both young people and adults, often in collaboration with the schooling system or the churches. One interesting fact was that these initiatives for connections came from the most secular supporters of social work. The co-operation proved to be all but easy. The stress put on techniques derived from the growing influence of American casework on social work in contrast to cultural matters that were seen as exclusively on the side of *éducation populaire* made the encounter unlikely (Richez 2011). The growing importance of specialised educators (*éducateurs spécialisés*) in the 1960s did not change this stand-off situation as much as might have been expected. These new professionals, whose role had been professionalised since the war, were to be called “social workers” by the end of the decade, even undermining the role of the social assistant as being a social worker. They dealt mainly with young people, described as maladjusted, a category which encompassed young people with disabilities and those attached to the juvenile justice system. The specialised educators were mostly men, trained in institutes that were both faith-based and secular. As Maurice Herzog, the long-standing under-secretary for Youth

pointed out in 1959, *animateurs* dealt with “young people with no problems”, that is, young people attending secondary school or finding their way into the labour market. Young people “with problems”, however, were dealt with by specialised educators, especially street-based youth workers, depending on subsidies from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Little was done to make these two categories work together, despite the fact that from 1961 to 1963 street-based youth workers and MJC youth workers experienced a period of common training in order to create bridges. But the experiment failed, as the differences between the two worlds of “working with young people” proved to have been underestimated. The only real example of the intersection between social work and education was to be found at that time within the *Foyers de jeunes travailleurs* (young workers’ hostels). These settings were diverse but they had a strong legacy of social Catholicism through the JOC. They had strong links with the Ministries of Housing and of Social Affairs and also with the administration of Youth and Sports. They did not limit their influence on the educative and cultural side, and they paid attention to the daily life of young people, but their activity was not seen as social work.

The idea of youth work fitted into the dream of the 1960s of a no-class society, or at least a kind of averaging, a dream whereby social conditions in French society would gradually converge towards a large lower middle class. Parallel to the secondary and technical schooling that experienced a surge in the 1960s, youth work was thought of as a way of enhancing opportunities for people. In this respect it was seen as “social” but not in the restricted meaning of caring for deprived people or dealing with the social question in the 19th-century way. The 1960s were the decade of what was then called “human sciences”: psychology, sociology and communication. Debates in France, as in other western European countries, were influenced by North American theories, especially outside university. Communication and social psychology were seen as offering techniques to understand and transform what was called “mass society”. David Riesman’s book *The Lonely crowd* (1950) was known among cultural, educational activists well before it was translated into French in 1964. Youth work was seen as way of making society more fluid, more communicational. And Carl Rogers was seen as influential in shaping youth work ideology, probably more so than its effective practice. The first department of youth work within French universities was established in Bordeaux in 1967 by Robert Escarpit, a specialist in English literature who then introduced communication sciences to France. He was also a Marxist who was close to the Communist Party, although not an affiliated member, and he was also a prominent member of the Ligue de l’enseignement. The heirs of the Catholic tradition were probably even more sensitive to the influence of human sciences: they were seen as tools to escape from the “charitable works syndrome” (Poujol 1993).

Youth work was then consensual within French society. Politicians from different views supported the idea of building youth centres: the planning laws which funded sports and youth buildings in the 1960s were supported unanimously – a virtually unique event in the decade. The idea of recruiting youth workers was not always popular at this level but it was popular enough to propel a movement of recruitment and training, which radically changed the face of youth work. Those who criticised the professionalisation of youth work decreased rapidly after 1965. But it did not lead to a professional status, not even to a standard diploma. For a long time, to some

extent until today, youth work has remained a sector where on-the-job training has been the way of entering the profession. The administration did not favour a status for what was seen as an emerging profession. But opposition also came from the youth and cultural organisations, which were very fond of their independence and of their ideological specificities, and were anxious to keep their own training. Even when the CAPASE (*Certificat d'aptitude à la promotion des activités socio-éducatives*) became the official qualification threshold for the managers of youth centres, the effective criterion for reaching that position was still ground-level work experience.

This contrasts strongly with the changes experienced by social work at the same time. From 1946, social assistants had a status and were required to have a diploma, the earliest form of which could be traced back to 1932. And the new specialised educators gained a national collective pay agreement in 1966 and a diploma (*diplôme d'État d'éducateur spécialisé*) the year after; the position of *éducateurs* was exclusively held by certified specialised educators only (Boussion 2013). The contrast with youth workers was obvious.

By the end of the decade, youth work was even further challenged. The events of May 1968 put an end to some illusions about the consensus around youth work and turned the debates into more critical views. Youth centres then were blamed for being places of unrest and the figure of the youth worker became much more controversial. But probably of more importance was the decline of the belief in the powers of youth work, especially for young people. Sociological enquiries and daily practice in youth centres had shown by the end of the 1960s that youth work had partly missed at least one of its targets: youth centres had clearly had difficulties in attracting young people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, apart from the new category of technicians. Its democratic promise, as a result, was challenged.

The age of social intervention

A new youth question emerged in the late 1970s in the context of increasing unemployment, which was affecting young people first, and a growing concern regarding delinquency. The Barre Plan (named after the prime minister) for youth employment in 1977 was the first programme to address young people regarding jobs. The same year the report *Réponse à la violence* was published.⁷ This focused on young people's delinquency, criticising the role of youth centres, among other institutions, and accusing them of failing to offer young people what they expected and thus paving the way for delinquency. A few years later urban riots began, such as the 1981 riots of les Minguettes, a social housing area in a suburb of Lyons. These riots were the first to be subjected to extensive media coverage. The theme of "integration" began to spread, with the famous Schwartz report of September 1981 illustrating well the turn towards integration (Schwartz 1981). One of the main recommendations of the report was to create "local integration centres", and as early as March 1982 local agencies were created in order to help young people to find housing, training and jobs. If the youth centre

7. *Réponses à la violence* (1977), report of the study group headed by Alain Peyrefitte, La Documentation Française, available at : www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/rapports-publics/774023100/index.shtml

epitomised the 1960s, the job centre or, more accurately, the “local centre” could be said to exemplify the 1980s. Integration advisers were recruited, some of whom were reoriented and redeployed youth workers. They were the first of the new *intervenants sociaux* whose number increased drastically in the 1980s, many of them working within the regeneration schemes of the *banlieues*, the urban deprived working-class housing areas that can be found in many large French cities.

The growing importance of social work linked with employment policies changed the very nature of public action towards young people. The global tendency was towards the generalisation of schemes whose common philosophy was based on restoring “individual involvement or responsibility”. The RMI (minimum income support allowance) established in 1988 is emblematic of the whole mutation of social action. It consists of an allowance which is conditional on the involvement of the recipient in a process of a return to employment. The unemployed person, once seen as a victim of technological advancement, of the economic system or of the economic crisis, was now required to take responsibility: it was their personal duty to take charge of themselves. Remaining unemployed arouses suspicions of idleness, of misuse of benefits, even of psychiatric deficiencies (part of the social problems becoming addressed in terms of health or disability problems, especially mental health ones). Even if the RMI is restricted to people over 25, it makes visible the profound changes in social action that have affected young people whose main problem, since the late 1970s, has been unemployment.

Two features are particularly evident. First, social action increasingly targets some territories, called *quartiers*, which signify (deprived) areas, concentrating in these places measures and institutions aimed at unemployed people, whether or not they are beneficiaries of the RMI. Secondly, this new social action tends to fragment by its very nature: each institution, each *intervenant social* asserts the specificity of his or her work within an ever denser and more heterogeneous network of *travailleurs sociaux* (Ion and Ravon 2005): some work within job centres (today *Pôle emploi*), others in “local centres”, and they try to help match the demand for work with the standards of the job market, while others work towards helping beneficiaries to improve their presentation to potential employers (CV and presentation workshops, for example – all often outsourced), not to speak of people organising remotivation sessions. This fragmentation leads to competition among institutions to gain subsidies and secure public resources. The youth work institutions established in the *quartiers* cannot escape from this general trend. They have turned themselves into access points, or rather, orientation centres towards social services: there, young people are supposed to find gateways to the specialised service that can address their specific needs: for example, help for homework or parenthood mentoring. Youth work (and youth workers) have therefore remained “generalist” practitioners, as opposed to the new (more specialist) *intervenants sociaux*. This can be seen as a way of keeping a global view of young people as opposed to the specialised, partial and compartmentalised perspectives of these new social support workers. A more pessimistic view would stress the fact that the so-called generalist position of youth workers is the product of their position on the ladder of social intervention: they are down at the bottom, street-level “interveners”. The migration of quite a large number of youth workers to positions in “local centres” or other positions on the more social side of social

intervention (Mauger 2001) is one indication of the fact that the reconfiguration of social action in the 1980s and 1990s has reduced the prestige of youth work within the world of social and cultural intervention. This rather pessimistic view is partly counterbalanced by the fact that youth work was – at last – given in 1988 “a sector conventional agreement”, which means that conditions of employment and wages are standardised at national level, which can be seen as proof of a kind of autonomy, even if this agreement does not specify the training required, or provide a statutory basis for youth work (and youth workers).

At the same time, youth work also lost some of those dimensions that had been central during the 1960s when it was first developed, such as “cultural democratisation”, which has been challenged by the growing importance of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, whose prestige has been steadily enhanced since the 1970s. Sociocultural youth work (*animation socioculturelle*) was by the mid-1980s being challenged both on the social and on the cultural sides of its field of intervention, having been torn between those two dimensions (Ion 1986). What is called youth work elsewhere in Europe had, by then, become something quite small and is still shrinking.

The most acute challenge to youth work comes, however, from the youth question itself, which turns from educational to social matters as youth unemployment grows and as access to the labour market becomes more selective than ever, linked to a growing and more selective schooling system (Baudelot and Estabiet 2007).

A tale of two kinds of youth?

From a French perspective, youth is today synonymous with young people attending school. The population having the secondary school final exam grew from 25% in 1985 to 60% in 1992 and led to a massive growth in the student population during the early 1990s. New students are no longer young intellectuals with middle-class backgrounds living out their university time as “amateurs”, as in the 1960s. Instead, today, young people are rather anxious about their studies, the career options available to them and, above all, the value of their degrees on the labour market. In the context of mass unemployment affecting young people more than any other segment of the population, study and career strategies are no longer considered in terms of personal improvement and development, but rather in terms of placement in a market where degrees and qualifications are seen as key advantages. Schooling is now central within the life course of young people. The so-called ivory tower of school is criticised by business leaders, who now call for the greater integration of job-oriented requirements within curricula, and who want internships to be made compulsory. These critics are far from the critics of the school system in the 1960s, of which youth work (*animation*) was a part. Academic studies, especially liberal studies, have lost part of their importance, especially in higher education. In this context, where the national objective is still to have 80% of a generation passing the secondary school final exams, those who do not enter the main track are seen as a social problem, not to say posing “the” social problem: the integration of young people. For them, new aspects of social work are laid out: a mission to integrate them into the labour market and into social life (housing, mobility). Among these “off the track” young people, the *jeunes de banlieues*, are young males from working-class

backgrounds, living in deprived social housing estates, mainly foreign, especially of Arab origins and who are engaged in petty crime and drug trafficking. They typify antisocial young people: the early school leavers, delinquents and those with no occupation who are the exact opposite of the young student from the normal track. This parallel draws a portrait of two kinds of youth, not to say two kinds of nation.

As we have seen, youth work is overwhelmed by the schooling system, which is supposed to guarantee integration, especially into the labour market, meritocracy and what we might call an “openness” that is a civic sense and a form of cultural emancipation. The new social work which is directed towards young people has filled the interstitial space between family and school. Youth work is then rolled back from children, leisure and the margins of social work. What remains of youth policies – under this very name – is on one side the “politics of engagement”, policies which attempt to sustain involvement and commitment within the city, which are a way of reinforcing citizenship in a country where citizenship is supposed to be central. On the other side are policies that could be termed “piecemeal policies”. Since the late 1990s, which saw France putting an end to compulsory military service, which had been central in the lives of many generations, a large spectrum of measures were taken to encourage young people to get involved in public life in order to enhance their sense of belonging to the nation. These schemes, such as *Envie d'agir* (desire to act), which were implemented by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, were soon presented as opportunities to gain and develop new competencies, especially those preparing their entry to the labour market. These two approaches, both civic and instrumental, are to be found again in today's schemes, and are considered so important because they tend to be a way of addressing youth unemployment by creating quasi-jobs within which undeniable precariousness (for example, wages not on a legal basis, fragmented working time) can be presented as a way of testing effort and dedication. This could also be said of the civic service or the European Voluntary Service programme through which opportunities are seized by young people coming from more affluent backgrounds, to the quasi-exclusion of disadvantaged youth. These schemes address *de facto* students, even if they were not planned for.

Youth work is still present within these plans but not in the way it might be thought. It may be mainly present because it offers precarious employment in, for example, summer camps or leisure centres for children under 13. Youth workers are now often students aged between 17 and 21, mainly young people (young adults) who treat these precarious (part-time, low-paid) jobs as a way of complementing their financial resources and their competences but also as a way of testing or experiencing their vocation. If French youth can be described in terms of a two-nation youth with a two-sided face, the same can be said of policies addressing young people. In parallel with these schemes directed *de facto* towards students, the “main-track” young people, there are other kinds of public action that have been laid out for the other group of young people. Employment-related issues lead the way in all government action, followed by schemes aimed at tackling school dropouts and preventing all kinds of forms of behaviour that are analysed as self-endangering (such as alcohol and drug abuse, and other addictions) – in a word, young people “at risk”. These young people are inherently seen as a risk population. Since the 1990s, a medically oriented approach concerning sexuality, food behaviour and an ever-increasing

number of “addictions” has been deployed. Born in the public health sector, these issues have since spread out into education, training and labour market policy as “risks” that are seen as barriers on the road to academic attainment, “employability” and labour market integration.

In deprived areas, policies addressing crime issues (including the prevention of urban riots after the November 2005 riots) follow the same lines, including of course youth work. Fifty years ago, as noted above, working with young people in a youth centre was driven primarily by a perspective of “openness”, a sense of a collective dimension of emancipation produced through cultural activities. Today, even if this dimension is still a long-term ideal for youth workers, it tends to be overshadowed by the imperative of managing risk. The aim is to create and build a relationship; the purpose is to work on the way young people plan their future regarding studies and employment. Accepting that one should not oversimplify or embellish a past that has never been as shiny as is sometimes believed, youth centres have nevertheless been turned into spaces of social intervention and direction rather than emancipatory educational and cultural environments.

From youth and sport to social cohesion

There is often a kind of inertia in administrative structures. Changes that occurred in the youth work sector in the 1980s and 1990s were not immediately reflected in official institutions. It is only in the last decade that these mutations have become visible. In 2007, under President Sarkozy, the Ministry of Youth and Sports became part of a new Ministry of Health, Youth and Sports, within which the central body was the Department of Social Affairs. More than ever, youth administration was moving to the outer margins. The effective responsibility for youth was sometimes assigned to an “under-secretary of state”, whose remit changed from what was initially “active solidarity against poverty and youth” to no mention of “youth” at all within its official title. In 2010, “youth” went back to the Ministry of Education whereas “sports” remained independent. But it was far from a mere return to the old organisation. From January 2010, the former Departmental Directorates for Youth and Sports which had been – since 1946 – the devolved bodies for youth and sports governmental administration were absorbed into a new Department of Social Cohesion centred on social action and under the Ministry of Social Affairs, though by that time the Ministry’s own name had changed to one responsible for “active solidarities and social cohesion” (DDCS). The return of the left to power in 2012 resulted in the recreation of a Ministry of Youth and Sports with even the addition of “popular education” to its title, which was seen as a sign of recognition to the associative world that had supported the election of François Hollande. Nothing changed, however, within the organisation of the administration: the DDCS has remained at the core of the structure of youth policies, with cultural and pedagogical issues continuing to be marginalised, as the specific responsibilities of the civil servants formerly attached to the late “youth and sports” directories have been diluted. In 2014, at national level, youth and sports were again reintegrated into a new Ministry of the City, youth and sports; “the politics of the city” (what might be called urban policy) in France is little more than a euphemism for naming policies addressing the difficulties of urban deprived areas. And whatever the results of the next elections (presidential and general) in France, the end of a youth and sports

national administration is more than likely. At the level of local authorities (cities and “departments”, i. e. provinces), the situation is probably not as clear as at the national level, but the general trend is also towards an inclusion of youth policies within social affairs rather than educational or cultural affairs. And viewed from the side of local associations acting for young people, the picture is very evident: the MJsCs (houses of youth and culture), which were at the forefront of 1960s youth work based on leisure and education, are closing one after another, with those remaining turning into social centres, especially in deprived areas. In the 1960s, social centres were run by social assistants, who were social workers as defined against the new genre of youth workers. Since then, social centres have moved from the provision of social assistance to a more comprehensive form of community work, and their workers are no longer social assistants. But their growth in terms of numbers and influence, while youth centres have been in steady decline, draws a good picture of the evolution of the relationship between youth work – as understood in France – and social work.

Further differentiating the young

Young people, whatever their status – whether students or “young people with problems” – are spontaneously thought of as male, even if girls have made up the majority of students since the late 1980s. And though delinquency is mostly a male affair, poverty within deprived areas also affects young women. Social action swings between undifferentiated – that is to say male-oriented – policies and special targeted measures for girls, oriented towards problems thought of specifically as female problems such as parenthood and prevention of domestic violence. Probably more than for boys, action towards young girls is increasingly social action where the influence of the youth work tradition – if any – is virtually nonexistent. But one should not forget another category of young people, the least noticeable: those who do not attend university but do not fit into the category of “young people with problems” either. We can think of a large number of young girls but also of all those young people in, for example, vocational training or technical schools. For them, transition from childhood to adulthood is rather short and rather early within the lifecycle. These are “unnoticeable” and “unnoticed” young people, ignored by social policies. They make occasional use of social support facilities, notably when entering the labour market. Their ambitions are shaped by the realism of the achievable: leaving their parents’ home to become a couple, owning their own homes, having steady employment (especially for boys), having a child (especially for girls) (Schwartz 2014). They are all in the blind spot of both youth work and social intervention and probably of many public policies too. Schemes aimed at enhancing civic commitment do not really address them, because the hidden curriculum of that provision is based on a middle-class student model. The young people in the middle see it as “not for us”, which can lead to a form of irony when considering the so-called “opportunities” available for young people (Bory and Simonet 2013). But they consider with even more reluctance the social side of youth policies: their deep awareness of the fragility of their status makes them strongly oppose the idea of being confused with “young people with problems”, targeted by youth policies which are mainly a form of social and security policies. This is far from the dream of the sociocultural policy of the 1960s and its dream of a classless society.

Conclusion

In the 1960s, the French model of youth work was born, finding its origins both in the legacy of *éducation populaire* and in the need to address the challenges of urban and affluent society that the country was experiencing. The global orientation was towards culture, arts and leisure. These were seen as the keys to civic participation and developing a civic sense. Co-operation with social work was the exception and the new youth workers did not want to be confused with social workers. Delinquents and pre-delinquents were supported by specific social workers (specialised educators) whose links with youth workers were loose. The horizon was the building of an open, inclusive and more egalitarian society whose base would have been a large “middle class”.

Fifty years later, youth work in France is very difficult to picture. Youth work, and especially youth clubs, have experienced a decline which contrasts sharply with the rise of a wide range of educational and cultural activities for children under 11. Two kinds of policies address two categories of young people. Mass unemployment, school dropouts and other social problems have paved the way for social youth work, not to say social work, targeting young men of working-class origins, especially those coming from urban deprived areas (*banlieues*). On the other hand, national and European schemes focus on students from more privileged backgrounds, trying to enhance their opportunities (whether social, cultural or job-oriented). In some senses, these schemes retain some of the inspiration of the 1960s – internationalism, for example. However, the continuity should not be overestimated: while yesterday's youth policies put the emphasis on the collective dimension, today's schemes are based upon a philosophy which makes individuals the core of its action – their capability, their talent but also their sense of responsibility are thought to be the keys to young people's success or failure.

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