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The Finnish perspective: youth work, policy and research

The history of Finnish youth work has its roots in Christianity. Finland had a predominantly Catholic culture until, at the end of the 16th century, the Reformation of the Church of Sweden was accomplished. Among other things, the church started the first basic form of comprehensive education. In 1809 Finland was occupied by Russia for a decade, though the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland remained active and shared its state church status with the Finnish Orthodox Church in 1869, when a new Church Act was passed, giving the church its own legislative body, the central synod. A year before, the Lutheran parishes were differentiated from the secular municipalities, both being given their own finances and administrative bodies. The general responsibility for comprehensive education and the care of the poor was transferred from the church to secular municipalities. From 1923 it became possible to leave the state church in Finland without having to join another religious congregation. However the majority of the Finnish people remained members of the church.

Finnish independence in 1917 was immediately followed by the Finnish Civil War, which divided the nation into Reds and Whites. The Lutheran Church assumed the White position without question,

while the Red side was anti-clerical, even murdering priests. After the Civil War there was great concern about violence, alcohol drinking and the morals of lower-class young people. Under the constitution of 1919, the new republic was deemed to be non-confessional, with freedom of religion. Many political youth organisations, such as civil guard youth clubs, were established in the 1920s and 1930s, still divided into Reds and Whites.

→ An example: the YMCA

I take here, as an example of early youth work, the YMCA (in Finnish, Nuorten Miesten Kristillinen Yhdistys, or NMKY), founded in Turku in 1886. At that time it could not get permission to operate under Russian rules. In 1889, after the YMCA's World Meeting in Stockholm, the authorities permitted three local YMCAs: in Helsinki, Tampere and Joensuu.

The Finnish YMCA had mixed groups for boys and girls, and closely co-operated with the Lutheran Church. The YMCA started Christian boys' and youth work in Finland, including camps and Scouting. Its own Scouts league, the Blues, was set up in the 1930s, but no longer exists. Music in many forms played an important role, with choirs, a symphony orchestra and brass bands. In 1923 the Finnish YMCA set up a special sports body, the Sport Alliance of Finnish YMCAs, which still exists. It introduced basketball in 1938 and volleyball in 1939. Co-operation with all Nordic countries was wide from the start. The Finnish YMCA started its international social work by helping refugees after the Second World War.²⁵ In 1979 it began development co-operation with the African Alliance of YMCA in Gambia. In 1990 bilateral co-operation started with the Estonian YMCA as part of its European fieldwork.²⁶

So, the YMCA has grown to be one of the most important youth movements in Finland.

→ Youth clubs and associations

The first Finnish youth association, Nuorisoseuraliike, was founded in 1897 with the aim of educating rural young people. The idea came from a Dane, Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (born 8 September 1783, died 2 September 1872), the father of the folk high school. Grundtvigian philosophy gave rise to a new form of nationalism in Denmark in the latter half of the 19th century. The most important philosopher of Finnish nationalism was Johan Vilhelm Snellman (born 12 May 1806, died 4 July 1881). He considered Lutheranism an important factor in Finnish identity – for example in agrarian youth clubs and organisations from the 1890s, in the 4H clubs (1920s) and the Scouts (1930s).

The roots of Finnish youth organisations were there in the 1880s, and the first secretary for Nuorisoseuranliike was being paid by the state already in 1906. However, early youth work was voluntary work for youth leisure-time activities and was often separate for boys and girls. Separate youth camps for boys and girls were organised from the beginning of the 1900s.

25 After 1945, the YMCA extended into work for international understanding, peace, solidarity and care for the environment. It also encouraged members to participate in physical exercise, sports and open-air activities.

26 The YMCA's mission is to help young people, especially those who are in danger of becoming socially excluded, or are already excluded, and those subject to social problems, assisting them to solve their problems.

During the Second World War, the church again became an important factor in Finnish nationalism. The church participated actively in social work, getting closer to the labour movement. Diaconal, family and youth work emerged as new forms of church activity. The ideology exemplified in the slogan "For the home, the faith and the Fatherland" had a strong influence on youth movements. The Second World War turned the Orthodox Church of Finland into a church of evacuees. After the Winter War, Finland was obliged to cede Karelia to the Soviet Union. The church lost 90 per cent of its property, and 70 per cent of its members had to be evacuated from their homes. The Orthodox population became dispersed throughout Finland. As a result of this the Orthodox Youth Association of Finland (in Finnish, Ortodoksisten Nuorten Liitto, or ONL) was founded during the war, in 1943. The main activity in the early days of ONL was to arrange study circles and clubs for Orthodox young people. In the children's clubs and youth clubs, religious teaching played a very significant role. ONL has had close connections and co-operation with many Orthodox youth groups, for example with the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth in Poland and in Estonia. Nowadays ONL also organises pilgrimages for youth, mostly to Russia and Greece.

Finland lost the war, but maintained her independence. She seemed powerless to confront the military superiority of the Soviet Union, hence negative references to "finlandisation". J.K. Paasikivi (President, 1946-56) started a new foreign policy with regard to the Soviet Union. The Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance, signed in 1948, formally integrated Finland into the Soviet Union's security framework. Despite this, Finland could in fact be considered a neutral country from a legal standpoint. Efforts to achieve neutrality during the Cold War era actually approached the Swiss model. Finland refrained from membership of international organisations, including the UN, right up to 1955, because such commitments could have resulted in the eventuality of having to take sides in conflicts between the superpowers.

Finnish foreign policy became more active under President U.K. Kekkonen (1956-81). Among his initiatives were the Nordic nuclear-weapon-free zone, persuading the Nordic countries to declare their neutrality and organising the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

→ Student youth movements

In 1963 the Students' United Nations Committee (Ylioppilaiden YK-yhdistys) was founded in Finland. The committee played an integral part in debating international affairs and promoting foreign policy debates. The union radicalised in 1968 and played a key role in student politics. Also in 1963, the Committee of 100 (Sadankomitea) against war and nuclear armament was established, inspired by its British predecessor. Its supporters came from leftist youth and student groups, and advocated civil disobedience to achieve their aims and to promote the idea of peaceful development.

The first student union elections were in 1963. Although student unions had previously been dominated by traditional student organisations, several communist representatives were elected for the first time. In 1965 about 130 demonstrators participated in the first Finnish demonstration outside the US embassy in Helsinki against the American war in Vietnam. Although people previously were hesitant, Finland's foreign political position started now to be discussed openly. On 1 May 1968, thousands of students took part in a march against war, capitalism and "bourgeois" values in university cities all over the country. Student caps and traditional

academic symbols were set on fire in the central market places. On 21 August 1968 the student unions organised demonstrations in front of the Soviet embassy, against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The radical Finnish student movement divided between those who condemned the Soviet occupation and those who tolerated it.

An important step for the radical Finnish Student organisation was 25 November 1968, when students occupied their Old Student House in Helsinki, the venue for the Student Union's 100th anniversary. The occupation became a kind of political expression in Finland, although the radical opposition was still without a political home and internal ideological divisions were strong. The continuing cycle of new social movements began at the end of the 1970s.

→ Political youth organisations

The political youth organisations have their own history, connected to the history of Finnish politics and political parties. Nowadays young people are involved in the parties' work and in creating youth policy. The youth organisations are particularly active during party congresses, when the main policies of the parties are formed. Generally, the chairpersons of the youth organisations have the right to take part in the main decision-making bodies of their mother parties. In Finland there have been few youth boards, and participation in political youth organisations has been weak during recent parliamentary and local elections. The political voice of young people is not articulated as it was in the 1970s.

→ Finnish youth policy and youth work

Youth organisations have had a significant role in Finnish youth work and policy for a hundred years. Their activities are based on young people's own involvement. Freedom of assembly and subsequent organisational activities are basic rights enshrined in the Constitution of Finland. Since the 1940s, central government has subsidised youth organisations systematically. The Act on Government Transfers for National Youth Work (1035/1973), effective from 1974, established the support system that had already been the practice based on appropriations allocated from the state budget every year.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the objective in Finnish youth policy was to guarantee equal conditions for growth and opportunities for self-enhancement for everyone, regardless of his or her background. In 1992 a new youth project called NUOSTRA (Nuorisotyön strategia, or "New youth strategy") was launched. The aim was to provide new stimuli and content for youth work, and thus ensure conditions for the existence and development of youth work even in the economic depression in Finland in the 1990s. NUOSTRA's principal idea was: "Young people have the right and the duty to construct their own future." The priorities defined in NUOSTRA were growth and civic activity, young people's living conditions, the prevention of exclusion and international co-operation and exchanges.

In Finland, legislation governing youth work has been enacted regularly since 1972, being reformed every ten years or so (1986, 1995 and 2006). The Youth Act (72/2006) includes support for young people's growth and independence, promotion of active citizenship, social empowerment of young people and improvement of their growth and living conditions. The act also lays down provisions on expert bodies assisting the Ministry of Education, the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs (NUORA) and the Youth Organisation Subsidy Committee. The Advisory Council

mainly focuses on youth policy issues and it submits to the government annual evaluations of implementation of the Youth Policy Development Programme.

The Youth Act authorises the financing of youth by support systems for youth work and policy – for example, government grants for youth organisations and investment grants for national youth centres, grants towards construction of facilities for young people, support for youth research and support for international youth co-operation. In addition, local authorities and youth organisations receive discretionary grants earmarked for workshop activities for unemployed young people, afternoon activities for schoolchildren, youth information and counselling services, preventive substance-abuse welfare work using web-based media, young people's cultural activities, the International Award Programme in Finland (Avarti), national and regional youth work development projects and provincial youth services.

Annual government expenditure on youth work amounts to about 39 million, accounting for about 0.1% of the state budget. Municipal youth work appropriations total about 150 million, equating to 0.6% of municipal budgets. The amounts targeted at children and young people account for about 15% and 35–45% of the state budget and municipal budgets respectively. This means that youth policy, including the national Youth Policy Development Programme and municipal child and youth policy programmes, has a far-reaching economic impact. Within the Ministry of Education budget, youth work is mainly funded from the proceeds of the national lottery and pools. In line with the Lotteries Act (1047/2001) and the related Act on the Use of Proceeds from Money Lotteries, Pools and Betting (1054/2001), youth work receives 9% of these funds. Other beneficiaries are the arts, sports and science.

At the beginning of 2006, there were 432 municipalities in Finland, of which 44 were bilingual (Finnish and Swedish). Swedish is the first language in 19 municipalities, and three municipalities have Saami languages as their first language.²⁷

The Ministry of Education has been given responsibility for the general development of youth work and youth policy. State Provincial Offices are the authorities dealing with youth work and policy issues at regional level, whereas local authorities have local responsibility for these issues. A new element in the Youth Act is a national Youth Policy Development Programme, to be issued by the government every four years. The programme includes national youth policy objectives, and guidelines for the preparation of provincial and municipal youth policy programmes. The programme is prepared in co-operation by key ministries involved in youth affairs, working under the leadership of the Ministry of Education.

→ Internationalisation

Finland has played an active role in multilateral youth sector co-operation within the frameworks of the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe (CoE) and northern European regional structures. The most important of these have been the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK), the Baltic Sea Working Group for Youth Affairs (WGYA) and the Working Group on Youth Policy of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (WGYP), which was chaired by Finland between 2005 and 2007.

²⁷ In 2005, Finland had 5 255 580 inhabitants, with about 2% of these being immigrants and 62% living in urban municipalities. The capital city, Helsinki, had a population of 560 905.

When Finland joined the European Union in 1995, it changed both Finnish youth policy and the everyday life of young people because, with EU membership, young Finns could join various EU programmes and move more freely inside the EU countries. Finland also initiated reviews of European national youth policies and was the first country to be reviewed in 1996.

The Finnish Youth Work Act 2006 represents European youth policy as laid down in the White Paper, for example, promoting active citizenship of young people in decision-making and working actively in youth organisations, and it offers an Internet-based system of listening to young people.

→ The Finnish tripod of youth research, youth work and policy

In Finland youth work is now network-based characterised by a tripod structure, representing co-operation between the Ministry of Education's Youth Division, Allianssi and the Youth Research Network, which is part of the activities of the Finnish Youth Research Society. The tripod structure implies working together, using the skills, knowledge and expertise of different partners (for example, in implementing the EU White Paper on youth policy and the EU Youth Programme).

The Finnish Youth Co-operation organisation, Allianssi, was founded in 1992 to carry on the work of the previous youth service organisation, Kansalaiskasvatuksen Keskus (KAKE, founded 1960). Allianssi has about 140 member organisations, so we can say that almost all youth-related organisations belong to it. Allianssi is also involved in youth information with many web services and maintains the Youth Studies Library and Youth Info House, a web service for youth work specialists. Its services also include training and seminars. Allianssi co-operates with the Finnish Youth Research Society and the Finnish Youth Research Network. They have published together a magazine *Nuorisotutkimus* ("Youth Research") and launched research projects on young people's living conditions and attitudes in their Youth Barometers from 1995. In addition Allianssi publishes the national youth work magazine *Nuorisotyö* (eight issues per year). Allianssi is also responsible for the youth election that is held in connection with the general election.

Allianssi is active in the European Youth Forum (YFJ), the European Youth Card Association (EYCA), the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), the Baltic Youth Forum (BYF) and the Nordic Youth Committee (NUK). In addition, Allianssi co-operates bilaterally and multilaterally with the United Nations by sending a youth delegate to the General Assembly every year, as part of the official Finnish delegation; in 2004, Allianssi received ECOSOC status from the UN. Allianssi also offers youth workers opportunities in various international exchanges, study trips and seminars.

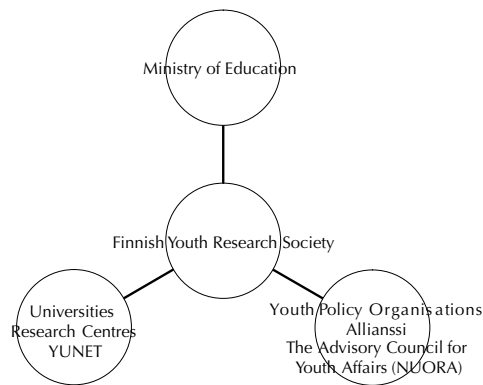
Allianssi co-operates with the Finnish Ministry of Education, participating in working groups and committees, giving statements and comments, and influencing decision-makers on matters related to young people's lives and youth work. In Finland the tripod system draws on representatives of three sectors: public administration (ministries, regions and municipalities), youth research and youth organisations (Allianssi). This has been the case, for example, with implementation of both the EU White Paper on youth policy and the EU Youth Programme. For the latter project an advisory group was set up, to which Allianssi belongs.²⁸

²⁸ The annual budget of Allianssi is more than 2 million euros, about two thirds of which comes as financial aid from national lottery funds, allocated by the Ministry of Education.

The Finnish Youth Research Society and network

The Finnish Youth Research Society was founded in 1988 in co-operation with the Youth Division of the Ministry of Education. The journal *Nuorisotutkimus* (“Youth Research”) began publication in 1983 under the Ministry of Education. The economic recession at the beginning of the 1990s spawned (in 1994) the Youth Research Programme 2000, which continued as the Youth Research Network (see www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi), which was set up in 1999 under the auspices of the Youth Research Society. In the same period, the funding for youth research – from the Ministry of Education – expanded enormously. At present there are about 20 researchers working with the Youth Research Network, whose projects are financed either directly by the Ministry of Education, as performance-based grants, or from outside projects.

Figure 10.1: Youth research in the tripod with youth work and policy



Finnish youth research is multidisciplinary, but dominated by the social sciences and youth sociology in particular. Evaluation research is a rising trend. In the academic field, qualitative cultural research has a strong impact. The Youth Research Network and the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs (NUORA) have published annual Youth Barometers describing young people’s values and attitudes, and yearbooks describing young people’s living conditions.

Table 10.1: The history of Finnish youth research and its ethos

The 1940s and 1950s	The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s	The 1990s and 2000s
Research on hobbies and leisure-time activities of young people (e.g. Helanko 1953; Allardt et al. 1958)	Research on youth cultures, leisure time and the development of youth work and youth policy (e.g. Rantalaaho 1969; Hirvonen 1978, Telemäki 1984, Lähteenmaa 1991)	Research on youth values, marginalisation, multiculturalism and citizenship (e.g. Helve 1998, 2002 and 2007; Suurpää 1995; Paju and Vehviläinen 2001)
Ethos of socialisation: nationalistic values of work, religion	Ethos of participation, equality and welfare	Ethos of individuality, life management and social empowerment
Moral and temperance education	Citizenship education	Hermeneutic and interdisciplinary approach

→ Youth work training

In recent years in Finland the subfield of education entitled Leisure Activities and Youth Work has been restructured, which means that people working in the same positions may have many different qualification titles. Programmes leading to youth work positions are available both at upper secondary vocational level and within higher education.

Church parishes train their own youth workers at their own vocational institutions. The qualification available at upper secondary vocational level is the Vocational Qualification in Youth and Leisure Instruction. The qualification confers the title Youth and Leisure Instructor and can be completed at several educational institutions offering programmes in Leisure Activities and Youth Work. Those who have completed the three-year upper secondary vocational qualification have general eligibility for further studies, which means that they can apply to the universities of applied sciences and academic universities. The qualification can also be completed as a competence-based qualification.

The first Finnish university course leading to a higher degree in this area – a “Bologna” master’s degree – has been provided since 2005 in co-operation between the University of Kuopio (Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy) and Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences (Department of Culture, Youth and Social Work, plus the Mikkeli University Consortium); it is a two-year Master’s Programme in Youth Education.

The University of Tampere has been offering university-level youth work studies since the beginning of the 1980s. In January 2009 it started a Bologna Master’s Programme (120 ECTS) in Youth Work and Youth Research, with 15 students.²⁹

Table 10.2: The professionalisation of youth work in Finland

Period	Changes in youth work	Professional training
1920s		Youth Institute opens 1922 for training of youth workers – moves to Mikkeli Paukkula in 1925
1940s	Need recognised for scientific youth research Need recognised for competent, professional youth workers (Guy von Weissenberg, see Nieminen 1998)	Youth Education studies start in 1945 in Helsinki Institute for Social Sciences with 32 students – course moves to Tampere in the 1960s The church starts its own education and training for youth workers in 1949
1970s		University of Tampere offers Degree in Youth Work from 1970, main subject Education
1980s		University of Tampere offers master’s-level orientation for Youth Work from 1980 (in some years from 1990 it offers Youth Education) University of Tampere offers lower degree (BA) from 1982
1990s	New leisure activities	Youth Work education – programmes offered for youth work positions at upper secondary vocational level (three-year upper secondary vocational qualification, 80 credits, raised in 2001 to 120 credits)
2000s		“Bologna” master’s level (120 ECTS) programmes offered from 2005

²⁹ In 2006, the Humanistic University of Applied Sciences started a Master’s Programme in Youth Work.

Master's degree for youth workers in Mikkeli

Training in youth work has a long tradition in Mikkeli, which has great expertise in youth work. The goals of the pilot Master's Degree Programme in Youth Education at Mikkeli were to provide diversified practical and theoretical skills for use in the fields of teaching, training, youth work and leisure activity leadership, planning, research work and evaluation.

The master's pilot project was financed partly by the European Social Fund. It involved developing co-operative models for municipal youth education, focusing in particular on the needs of municipalities and other actors in the field in eastern Finland. The experimental and research work associated with this project attempted to determine how young people's positive regional identities could be strengthened and how young people's exclusion from education and employment might be prevented. The possibilities of strengthening the position of actors from eastern Finland in international co-operation were also studied in the project, for instance in Estonian youth work methodological training (the International Award Programme) and in adjacent area co-operation with the Russian Republic of Karelia (EU youth work and culture projects intended to strengthen civil society). On the basis of the EU youth programme, this project helped to develop the European dimension in regional youth work and international exchange.

The project's educational objectives were well accomplished. Co-operation with those in the field of youth education on the municipal level was realised, and in the process models were developed for national and international co-operation. Local co-operation was primarily in the students' master's thesis projects. Their scientific investigation of young people's living conditions and identities within municipalities has become the basis for new forms of research and development work. Applying this sort of research work in practice can be seen as a means of improving the whole youth work area. The education provided by the programme has increased the professional qualifications of local youth workers.

This has already affected students employed in the field by advancing their careers, improving their salaries and enabling them to take on more challenging tasks in the field of youth work. Through the professional development of students and the 17 MA degrees granted, this project has brought new jobs and produced new research, development and training initiatives, which have created new working opportunities in youth work.

→ Some critical views of Finnish youth policy and youth work

Here I try to describe some changes in Finnish youth policy in recent years. There has been a shift in the ways of speaking of and reacting to children, young people and families with children. This change has been described as a transition from a welfare policy regime to risk politics (Harrikari, 2008). This change is connected with the economic recession of the 1990s, with the resulting scarcity of public resources for youth policy-making. Finnish studies have pointed out that the direct implications of the economic depression and social policy in the depression era were both exceptionally harsh and had a severe impact on youth (see Helve, 2002; Harrikari, 2008).

The first indicators of a new regime were changes in the topics of public debate (cf. NUOSTRA, 1992). Since the mid-1990s, parliamentary initiatives concerning children, and young and families with children increased rapidly. In 2001 nearly a tenth of all parliamentary initiatives were targeted at these groups. However,

debates about children and young people are permeated by concern, fear and panic, as a result of the school shootings at Jokela (2007) and Kauhajoki (2008) and the Myyrmanni bombing in Vantaa. Crime as a societal problem is obviously highlighted in the issues of children and young people much more since about 2000 than it was in previous decades. Politicians have focused on the criminal activity of those under 15 (the age of criminal liability in Finland since 1894).

The development and maintenance of the comprehensive, high-level social service system – which prevented all types of social problems and especially violence among young people – was challenged. This meant that the principle of prevention as the leading strategy was now rejected, at least in the sense in which the principle was understood and implemented in the welfare policy era. New concepts were adopted and the old ones were adapted.

Alongside the social prevention of the welfare policy, early intervention became the dominant orientation from the late 1990s. Prevention and early intervention in the Finnish context were aimed at the whole population in order to avoid social problems. Implicitly this policy accepts the emergence of social problems since it has the intention to correct them and fill the “holes” of insufficient prevention. It observes and allocates control activities to the problems that have already emerged. Harrikari calls this “risk-oriented hot-spot thinking” in which control sensitivity to societal reactions is significantly lower if compared to the old idea of social prevention.

Perspectives for Finnish youth work

Different studies have shown that young people in danger of exclusion are very sceptical of youth politics and youth work services. The services and the young people have separate existences, without a great deal of contact in practice (Kauranen, 2006). Young people seem to seek help only when absolutely necessary. The world of welfare services often seems distant and alien to young people, who find it virtually impossible to influence them. Youth work and youth policy need to develop a closer relationship with young people to be in touch with their life situations (Harrikari, 2008).

The paradox for young people living under the threat of exclusion is that they often go undetected because they are not recorded statistically. Their exclusion should not be interpreted one-dimensionally; it has to be examined from several different perspectives. At its worst, it is a combination of economic, social, health and educational disadvantage coupled with exclusion from the centres of power, participation, and labour and housing markets. In view of this, there are good reasons for creating holistic forms of assistance for these young people from local social and public health services, local youth work, labour authorities and the various other services.

This requirement is recorded in the Finnish Youth Work Act 2006. A society with separate sectoral services cannot see young people's living conditions as a whole or view each individual's situation as unique. The stated aim is to help young people to control their lives by improving their life situation and creating conditions for civic initiatives. The purpose of the Youth Act 2006 is to support the upbringing and independence of young people, promote their active citizenship, strengthen youth socialising and improve the conditions of young people for living and growing. Active citizenship means young people participating in the running of society. Strengthening their socialising focuses on improving the life situation and life management of young people in danger of social exclusion. The Youth Act obliges municipalities to involve young people in the drafting of youth issues.

The law states that young people should be given the opportunity to take part in dealing with youth work and policy matters locally and regionally. Young people have also to be listened to on matters that concern them. The question is how this act can reach those young people who cannot even be found in statistics in a polarised society? (*Nuorisobarometri*, 2007)

What kind of youth policy or youth work should we practise today? Exploring the history of the theory and practice of youth work in Finland gives no clear answer to this question. Even the meaning of the term “youth work” is unclear: reading the introductory texts of various youth organisations, the Ministry of Education, Youth Research and other bodies, we find some very different concepts of youth work.³⁰ The new freedom in local municipality youth work arrangements may diversify and enrich the methods of youth work, but problems will arise if local authorities primarily use it in order to make cutbacks by purchasing youth work services as cheaply as possible at the cost of quality.

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³⁰ Today, the functions of Finnish youth work cover the socialisation of good citizens (or is that hidden control of young people?), support for (national/EU) identity formation, compensation for excluded young people (special youth work; youth welfare), and resources and allocations (Youth Act).

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