

Notes on Policy

Young People, Youth Work and Youth Policy:

European Developments

Maurice Devlin

Introduction

Recent years have seen very significant developments in the 'youth sector' at European level. There are two major institutional contexts for these (and other) European developments, and not surprisingly people sometimes get the two mixed up. The first is the European Union (EU) which grew out of the European Economic Community (EEC, or 'Common Market') established in 1957 when six member states signed the Treaty of Rome. The membership has grown over the years to its current figure of 27 (Ireland joined in 1973) and a succession of further treaties have amended and expanded the competences of the 'community' or 'union'; these include the Treaties of Maastricht (1993), Amsterdam (1999), Nice (2003) and, most recently, Lisbon (2009). While the term 'economic' is no longer included in the EU's name, economic matters remain absolutely central to its purpose.

The Council of Europe (CoE) is a different organisation. It was established in 1949, in the aftermath of the Second World War, by ten founding members (including Ireland) with the purpose of promoting democracy, the rule of law, human rights and cultural cooperation across the continent. Its most important and best known instrument is the European Convention on Human Rights which established (and is enforced by) the European Court of Human Rights. For several decades the CoE's membership was confined to the countries of western Europe but in the years following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (and the associated political transformations) it grew into a genuinely pan-European organisation. It currently has 47 member states.

Both the European Union and the Council of Europe have relevance for youth, youth work and youth policy. The CoE has played a pioneering role in these matters, and has had a significant influence on the approach adopted by the EU. In fact the two work closely together and in more recent years have formalised their collaboration through the EU-CoE Youth Partnership. Keeping up to date with recent and current developments in youth policy at European level means knowing what each organisation is doing separately and also what they are doing jointly through the Youth Partnership. Below is an outline of developments under each of these three headings.

European Union

The European Union has a somewhat limited legal basis for taking action in relation to youth work or youth policy. Even though Youth for Europe, the first youth

mobility/exchange programme, was introduced in 1988, it was not until the Treaty of Maastricht came into force in 1993 that the European Community (as it then became known) was given formal entitlement, in the chapter dealing with 'Education, Vocational Training and Youth', to take action aimed at 'encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors' (article 126). This formulation has been maintained in subsequent treaties, with the significant addition in the Treaty of Lisbon (in what is now article 165) of the words 'and encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe'. 'Socio-educational instructors' is, in the EU context, 'the legal term for youth workers' (European Commission, 2009: 11)

The Youth for Europe mobility programme (1988–91) was followed by Youth for Europe II and III (1992–95 and 1996–99 respectively), the YOUTH programme (2000–06) and Youth in Action (2007–13). European Voluntary Service (EVS) ran separately from 1996–99 before being integrated into the main mobility programme. In short, 'promoting opportunities for mobility, exchange and cooperation among young people has been a priority for the European Commission for more than twenty years' (Denstad, 2009: 34).

The European Commission is the executive body of the EU. Its Education and Culture Directorate-General (DG EAC) currently has two youth units, one responsible for youth policy and the other in charge of the management of the Youth in Action programme. Partly because of its close cooperation with the Council of Europe but also because of active encouragement from the non-governmental youth sector and from youth studies researchers and academics – as well of course as the initiative taken by its own members and the fact that it is 'the only body paid to think European' (Day, 2006) – the Commission has for some time been inclined to take a more proactive approach to promoting European-level developments in the youth sector than might be suggested by a narrow reading of article 126 of 'Maastricht'. The *White Paper on Youth* was the first major sign of this.

White Paper on Youth

In November 1999 Viviane Reding, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth, Media and Sports, announced the preparation of a White Paper on Youth. There followed an extensive process of consultation with governments, youth organisations, young people and youth researchers; in fact this process has been described as 'by far the most comprehensive in regard to any white paper that had been launched by the European Commission' (Denstad, 2009: 31). Almost exactly two years later the European Commission published the White Paper *A New Impetus for European Youth* (European Commission, 2001).

The White Paper recognised that youth policy is primarily a matter for individual member states but proposed four themes in relation to which governments were invited to coordinate their policies. The themes – all intended to touch in one way or another on the core concern of 'active citizenship' – were participation, information, voluntary services and a 'better understanding of youth'. It has been suggested that these themes, 'while important, are perhaps not the most urgent issues in the lives of many young people in Europe, especially those who are more disadvantaged and excluded' (Williamson, 2007: 62). Nonetheless, as the same author also says, the White

Paper has produced 'concerted political effort that would almost certainly not have materialised had it not existed' (ibid.: 61). The document's political and symbolic value were (and are) perhaps as significant as its detailed content, particularly given that at the time of publication there had been less than twenty white papers ever published by the Commission (Devlin, 2002: 3).

The White Paper proposed the use of the 'Open Method of Coordination' (OMC) in order to encourage and facilitate closer cooperation on the four named youth policy themes. The OMC was to be one of two strands of a 'new framework for cooperation in the field of youth', the other being greater attention to youth in the development of other policies (or what might be called 'mainstreaming'). The OMC is used in a number of areas where there is no formal EU-wide policy and the European Commission has limited competence. It involves the Commission identifying priorities and, after consulting with individual members states, proposing to the Council of Ministers¹ for a given policy area a number of common objectives which – if approved by the Ministers – are then worked towards and reported on periodically by each member state. The Commission analyses progress on meeting objectives, reports to the Council and proposes new priorities and objectives in what is referred to as a 'rolling agenda'. The White Paper on Youth specifically stated that *young people themselves* should be consulted on the identification of priority themes and their follow-up (European Commission, 2001: 15).

European Youth Pact

The 'Lisbon Strategy', adopted by the European Council (of heads of state or government) meeting in Lisbon in 2000, set out to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' by 2010. Five years later, in reviewing the Strategy, the European Council adopted a European Youth Pact, with three strands (European Council, 2005):

- Employment and social integration;
- Education, training and mobility;
- Reconciling work and family life.

In attempting to address these central 'hard' aspects of young people's lives and experiences the European Youth Pact went beyond the White Paper's concern with 'softer' (and perhaps less contentious) themes and issues, and therefore – whatever its actual success or effectiveness – represented a decisive move forward in the development of what might be called 'European youth policy'.

Structured Dialogue

The European Commission's youth portal (<http://ec.europa.eu/youth>) describes the 'structured dialogue' as a 'direct follow-up to the *White Paper on Youth* and a logical consequence of the European Youth Pact, which both highlight the importance of consulting young people on matters which concern them'. In late 2005 the Council of Youth Ministers adopted a resolution calling on member states to 'develop structured dialogue with young people and their organisations at national, regional and local level on policy actions affecting them, with the involvement of researchers in the youth field'

and also calling on the European Commission to develop structured dialogue at European level (Council of the European Union, 2005).

With the publication of the *Council Resolution on a Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Field of Youth 2010–2018* (see below) each EU member state was invited to establish a national working group with representation of ministries, national youth councils, youth organisations, ‘diverse young people’ and researchers as well as the national agencies for the Youth in Action programme. The purpose is ‘to organise local, regional and national debates and to feed back the results from the national to the European level’. National and European events (timed in accordance with the rotating EU Presidencies) are held on pre-selected themes, which since 2009 tie in with the fields of action under the Renewed Framework (see below). The European Youth Forum² plays an important role (in this as in other youth-related initiatives) as the main umbrella body for youth organisations in Europe. The European Youth Week (www.youthweek.eu) is also intended to be a significant contribution to the Structured Dialogue.

An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering

By 2009 the European Commission felt able to say that ‘youth cooperation is a well structured and developed EU policy field’, but it also suggested that the existing framework (which was in any case due to expire in that year) ‘has not always proved its efficiency and capacity to deliver’ (European Commission, 2009: 3). The Commission proposed a new strategy, *Investing and Empowering* (subtitled ‘a renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities’). The Strategy set out three ‘overarching and interconnected goals’ which corresponded to the goals of the *Renewed Social Agenda* published the year before (European Commission, 2008). Under each goal the Commission identified a number of ‘fields of action’ with related objectives. The goals and fields of action proposed were as follows:

- **Creating more opportunities** for youth in education and employment
Fields of action: education; employment
- **Improving access** and full participation of all young people in society
Fields of action: creativity and entrepreneurship; health and sport; participation
- **Fostering mutual solidarity** between society and young people
Fields of action: social inclusion; volunteering; youth and the world

Significantly the Strategy included a section entitled ‘a new role for youth work’. Youth work had received little explicit attention in previous EU policy documents, meriting only a passing mention in the main body of the White Paper (although of course its themes of participation, information and voluntary activities are central to youth work policy and practice). The Strategy noted that youth work ‘contributes to all fields of action and their identified objectives’. It defined youth work as ‘out-of-school education managed by professional or voluntary “youth workers” within youth organisations, town halls, youth centres, churches etc., which contributes to the development of young people’; and stated that ‘despite being “non-formal”, youth work needs to be professionalised further’ (European Commission, 2009: 11). It then set out an objective and actions for youth work:

Objective

Youth work should be supported, recognised for its economic and social contribution, and professionalised

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

- Equip youth workers with professional skills and promote their validation through the appropriate European instruments (Europass*, EQF**, ECVET***)
- Promote youth work through, inter alia, Structural Funds
- Develop mobility of youth workers as indicated in the EC Treaty
- Develop innovative services, pedagogies and practice of youth work

The Commission will develop its analysis of the economic and social impact of youth work.

Source: European Commission, 2009: 11.

* A set of templates for presenting CVs and related documentation

** European Qualifications Framework

*** European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

The Strategy advocated a greater emphasis on cross-sectoral policy-making ('youth policy cannot advance without effective coordination with other sectors', p. 12), and proposed a review of the Structured Dialogue as well as increased 'peer-learning' between member states (in the form of high level seminars and 'clusters' sharing technical expertise). It also proposed to focus on 'evidence-based policy-making' through a number of measures, including the development of a 'dashboard of existing indicators and benchmarks concerning youth in education, employment, inclusion and health' (European Commission, 2009: 13).

Renewed Framework for Cooperation in the Youth Field 2010–2018

Within months of the publication of the Commission's proposals in *Investing and Empowering* the Council of Youth Ministers responded with the *Council Resolution on a Renewed Framework for Cooperation in the Youth Field 2010–2018*.³ The Ministers accepted the thrust of the Commission's proposals. They set out two 'overall objectives for cooperation in the youth field', namely to:

- (i) create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market, and to
- (ii) promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people.

The Council of Ministers adopted a slightly amended list of 'fields of action' from the one in *Investing and Empowering*:

- Education and training
- Employment and entrepreneurship
- Health and well-being
- Participation

- Voluntary activities
- Social inclusion
- Youth and the world
- Creativity and culture

An Annex to the Council Resolution sets out 'aims and possible initiatives' for each field of action. The Resolution provides that the renewed framework will be implemented through a series of three-year work-cycles, the first running from 2010–2012, with thematic priorities agreed for each eighteen-month period (the first being youth employment for January 2010–June 2011). It also provides that the Commission will prepare an 'EU Youth Report' for the end of each cycle (so the first will be published in 2012).

The EU Youth report will evaluate progress made towards the overall objectives of the framework, as well as progress regarding the priorities defined for the most recent work cycle and identify good practises. The EU Youth Report should be based on national reports drawn up by the Member States in the youth field and in other relevant policy areas, as well as on other existing information and statistical data. Duplication of reporting obligations should be avoided. The EU Youth Report should also serve as a basis for establishing a set of priorities for the following work cycle. (Council of the European Union, 2009: 8)

The Council also accepted the Commission's proposition that youth work's contribution is 'cross-sectoral' and can contribute to all fields of action:

Under this framework of cooperation, supporting and developing youth work should be regarded as cross-sectoral issues ... The ways in which youth work can contribute to achieving the overall objectives identified above – as well as be supported and recognised as an added value for its economic and social contribution – should be further examined and discussed under this framework. Among the issues to be discussed are: appropriate training for youth workers and leaders, the recognition of their skills using the appropriate European instruments, support for the mobility of youth workers and leaders and the promotion of innovative services and approaches for youth work. (Council of the European Union, 2009: 10)

Notably, however, the Renewed Framework does not repeat the Commission's proposal that youth work should be 'further professionalised'. This is no doubt because youth work has developed in different ways in different countries (with some EU member states having scarcely any provision for young people that others would recognise as 'youth work') and also because even where there is a strong tradition of youth work it is often associated with – and based on – voluntary service on the part of adults and the notion of 'professionalising' such activity is not straightforward. The difference between the Commission's *Strategy* and the Council's *Resolution* in this specific regard confirms that the professionalisation of youth work is a contentious and even 'political' issue (Devlin, 2011 forthcoming).

Council Resolution on Youth Work

Youth work attained its highest profile to date in EU policy-making with the publication of the *Council Resolution on Youth Work* which was adopted as this article was about to go to print (Council of the European Union, 2010). As we have seen the Commission's *Strategy* and the *Council Resolution on a Renewed Framework* (both 2009) devoted explicit attention to the 'cross-sectoral' contribution of youth work in a way that had not been done before. Impetus for a Council statement focusing entirely on youth work was added by the first European Youth Convention, held in Ghent, Belgium on 7–10 July 2010. The convention took place during Belgium's presidency of the EU and reflected the high priority given to youth work and youth policy within the Flemish Ministry in particular. The statement adopted at the conclusion of the Convention was a key influence on the content of the *Council Resolution on Youth Work*.

At the outset the Resolution refers to the Treaty's provision that EU action may be aimed at encouraging the development of exchange programmes for young people and 'socio-educational instructors', and with regard to the latter adds 'hereafter called "youth workers and youth leaders"'. It states:

Youth work takes place in the extra curricular area, as well as through specific leisure time activities, and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes and on voluntary participation. These activities and processes are self-managed, co-managed or managed under educational or pedagogical guidance by either professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and can develop and be subject to changes caused by different dynamics. (Council of the European Union, 2010: 3)

The Ministers recognise that in addition to the many personal benefits it confers on young people, youth work also makes an important contribution to the broader society. Because it rests on 'universal values regarding human rights, democracy, peace, anti-racism, cultural diversity, solidarity, equality and sustainable development', youth work can:

- promote social participation and responsibility, voluntary engagement and active citizenship,
- strengthen community building and civil society at all levels (e.g. intergenerational and intercultural dialogue),
- contribute to the development of young people's creativity, cultural and social awareness, entrepreneurship and innovation,
- provide opportunities for the social inclusion of all children and young people,
- reach young people with fewer opportunities through a variety of methods which are flexible and quickly adaptable.

Youth work therefore 'plays different roles in society and can contribute to youth related policy areas, such as lifelong learning, social inclusion and employment' (Council of the European Union, 2010: 4). The Resolution also specifies some of the material benefits of youth work:

Youth work, whether it is undertaken by volunteers or professionals, has a considerable socio-economic potential – as it can produce economic activity,

provides infrastructure, create economic benefits and increases (youth) employment. The labour market can benefit from the personal and professional skills and competences acquired through youth work by both participants as well as youth workers and youth leaders. Such skills and competences need to be sufficiently valued and effectively recognised. (Council of the European Union, 2010: 5)

The document goes on to invite a range of initiatives on the part of the member states, the European Commission, and the two together 'within their respective spheres of competence', as well as to encourage 'civil society active in the field of youth' to take action to promote and develop youth work. Member states are invited among other things to provide 'sustainable support for youth work, e.g. sufficient funding, resources or infrastructure' and also 'where appropriate create strategies on youth work' (Council of the European Union, 2010: 5). The Commission is invited to facilitate study and research into youth work's 'diversity, coverage and impact', to develop 'instruments for the documentation of competences of youth workers and youth leaders' and to provide 'databases, peer-learning activities, and conferences for the continuous exchange on innovative research, policies, approaches, practices and methods' (Council of the European Union, 2010: 6). Both member states and the Commission are invited to focus on issues of 'quality and recognition of youth work', capacity-building, 'appropriate forms of training' (and 'a systematic assessment of skills and competences required for any form of training'), employability of workers and their mobility 'through a better knowledge of their qualifications and the recognition of the skills acquired from their experiences', research in youth work and youth policy, and the promotion of 'exchange, cooperation and networking' (Council of the European Union, 2010: 6–7).

The *Council Resolution on Youth Work* concludes by stressing the importance of ensuring that youth work is fully incorporated within other relevant programmes and policies and specifically the *Youth on the Move* initiative, about which information follows.

Youth on the Move

In March 2010 the European Commission launched the Communication *Europe 2020*, its proposals for a successor to the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 (European Commission, 2010a; European Council, 2000). *Europe 2020* is intended as 'a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth', and is built around seven flagship initiatives. These include initiatives on research and innovation, industrial policy, the 'digital agenda' and poverty, as well as *Youth on the Move* (European Commission, 2010b). *Youth on the Move* is 'an initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union'. It focuses on four main lines of action. The boxed text below presents excerpts from the Communication relating to each line of action.

Youth on the Move

An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union

Four main lines of action

Lifelong learning

Youth on the Move will support [lifelong learning], *inter alia*, by proposing a Council Recommendation to encourage Member States to tackle the high level of early school leaving, through the 2011 European Year of Volunteering and with a Council Recommendation [proposed for 2011] on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Higher education

Youth on the Move will seek to improve the quality, attractiveness and responsiveness of higher education and promote more and better mobility and employability, *inter alia* by proposing a new agenda for the reform and modernisation of higher education, including an initiative on benchmarking university performance and a new EU international strategy to promote the attractiveness of European higher education and to foster academic cooperation and exchanges with world partners.

Learning mobility

Youth on the Move will support the aspiration that by 2020 all young people in Europe should have the possibility to spend a part of their educational pathway abroad, including via workplace-based training. A Council Recommendation aimed at removing obstacles to mobility is proposed as part of the Youth on the Move package, accompanied by a 'Mobility Scoreboard' to measure Member States' progress in this regard. A dedicated website on Youth on the Move giving access to information on EU mobility and learning opportunities will be set up and the Commission will propose a Youth on the Move card to facilitate mobility.

Employment of young people

Youth on the Move presents a framework of policy priorities for action at national and EU level to reduce youth unemployment by facilitating the transition from school to work and reducing labour market segmentation. Particular focus is put on the role of Public Employment Services, encouraging a Youth Guarantee to ensure all young people are in a job, in education or in activation, creating a European Vacancy Monitor and supporting young entrepreneurs.

Source: European Commission, 2010b: section 1.1

Council of Europe

As already indicated, the Council of Europe is an older and, in terms of member states, larger organisation than the European Union. It was one of the first international institutions to focus in a concerted way on the needs, rights and circumstances of young people and on facilitating 'youth participation' in society. Its first steps were taken 'partly as a response to the social unrest of 1968 across Europe' (Denstad, 2009: 22) at a time when 'political establishments realised and recognised that something had to be done to accommodate and incorporate the aspirations of young people in wider structures of governance' (Williamson, 2007: 58). The first European Youth Centre was established in Strasbourg (where the Council of Europe is based) in 1972 and the second opened in Budapest in 1995 after the 'fall of the iron curtain'. Echoing Williamson (2008b: 65), Denstad suggests that in addition to 1968 and 1989 (the latter symbolising 'the fall of communism throughout Eastern Europe') a third key year in the history of the Council of Europe was 2001 and specifically the events of '9/11' and after. The Council of Europe responded to the terrorist attacks on the United States and subsequently on European cities 'by increasing its focus on mobility, intergenerational and intercultural cooperation and by focusing on faith within the context of human rights' (Denstad, 2009: 23).

European Youth Centres

The European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest ('EYCS' and 'EYCB') are 'permanent structures for the implementation of the Council of Europe's youth policy' (Council of Europe, 2010) They are international training and meeting centres which run an annual programme of forty to fifty activities in close co-operation with non-governmental youth organisations (NGYOs). Some forty such organisations cooperate regularly with the EYCs, representing party political interests, 'socio-educational and religious youth groups', rural youth movements, trade union and young workers' organisations, children's organisations and environmental networks (Council of Europe, 2010). The EYCS is also the headquarters of the European Youth Foundation which was established in 1972 to provide financial support for European youth activities that promote the Council of Europe's fundamental values.

Co-management

In keeping with its commitment to the participation of young people and youth organisations, the Council of Europe's youth sector is run on the basis of 'co-management', as represented in Figure 1. Senior government officials responsible for youth policy come together in the European Steering Committee for Youth (or Comité Directeur Européen pour la Jeunesse, known as CDEJ), while thirty representatives from European NgyOs make up the Advisory Council on Youth. The two bodies together comprise the Joint Council which establishes the youth sector's priorities, objectives and budgets (in other words which 'co-manages' the sector). A smaller Programming Committee (eight members each from the CDEJ and the Advisory Council) establishes, monitors and evaluates the programmes of the European Youth Centres and of the European Youth Foundation.

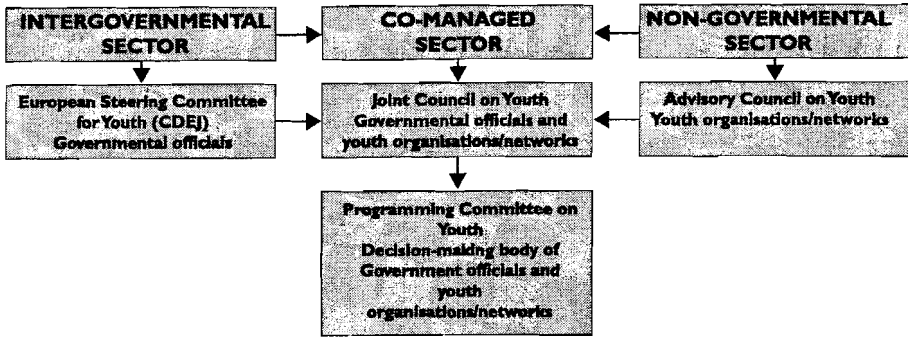


Figure 1: Co-management of the Council of Europe’s Youth Sector

Source: Council of Europe, 2010.

Conferences of Youth Ministers and Agenda 2020

The European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) organises regular conferences of the ministers responsible for youth within the Council of Europe. The first was in Strasbourg in 1985 and the most recent (the eighth) in Kiev, Ukraine in October 2008 (the next is expected to be in St. Petersburg, Russia, in September 2012). The Kiev conference proposed a long-term strategy for the Council of Europe’s youth policy. Entitled *Agenda 2020*, it was subsequently adopted by the Committee of Ministers, which is the decision-making body of the Council of Europe and comprises the Foreign Ministers of member states (or their permanent diplomatic representatives in Strasbourg). The boxed text below sets out the priorities identified. Methods for implementing the priorities include ‘intergovernmental and international co-operation on youth policy development, with particular focus on setting standards and supporting their implementation’, cooperation with the European Union, partnerships with other stakeholders, cooperation between youth researchers and policy-makers to promote evidence-based youth policies, and further development of the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (Council of Europe, 2008).

The Future of the Council of Europe Youth Policy: AGENDA 2020

Priorities

Human rights and democracy, with special emphasis on:

- Ensuring young people’s full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity and encouraging their commitment in this regard;
- Promoting young people’s active participation in democratic processes and structures;
- Promoting equal opportunities for the participation of all young people in all aspects of their everyday lives;

- Implementing effectively gender equality and preventing all forms of gender-based violence;
- Promoting awareness education and action amongst young people on environment and sustainable development;
- Facilitating the access of all young people to information and counselling services.

Living together in diverse societies, with special emphasis on:

- Empowering young people to promote, in their daily life, cultural diversity as well as intercultural dialogue and co-operation;
- Preventing and counteracting all forms of racism and discrimination on any ground;
- Supporting initiatives of young people and their organisations in conflict prevention and management as well as post-conflict reconciliation by means of intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimension;
- Supporting youth work with young refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons;
- Further encouraging the development of sub-regional youth co-operation in Europe and beyond;
- Encouraging young people to promote global solidarity and co-operation.

Social inclusion of young people, with special emphasis on:

- Supporting the integration of excluded young people;
- Ensuring young people's access to education, training and the working life, particularly through the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning;
- Supporting young people's transition from education to the labour market, for example by strengthening possibilities to reconcile private and working life;
- Supporting young people's autonomy and well-being as well as their access to decent living conditions;
- Ensuring young people's equal access to cultural, sporting and creative activities;
- Encouraging intergenerational dialogue and solidarity.

Source: Council of Europe, 2008.

Reviews of National Youth Policy

Since 1997 the Council of Europe has sponsored a series of reviews of the national youth policies of member states. The reviews take place at the invitation of the member states themselves and there have been seventeen to date. Professor Howard Williamson, who has been key to the policy review process and to the development of European youth policy in general, has published two synthesis reports highlighting patterns emerging

and learning to date from the reviews (Williamson 2002, 2008a). Placing such learning in the context of broader developments affecting youth and society in recent European history (such as those noted at the outset of this section) and looking ahead to likely future challenges, Williamson has suggested that, as well as youth participation and intercultural tolerance and understanding, *'faith ... is one of a trilogy of additional themes, alongside mobility and generation, that needs to inform the shaping of European youth policy over the next two decades'* (Williamson, 2008b: 65; emphasis in original).

Youth Partnership of the European Union and the Council of Europe

While there had been informal contact between them for many years, the European Union and the Council of Europe first entered into a formal agreement in the youth field in 1998. The partnership agreement on 'European Youth Worker and Youth Leader Training' was complemented in 2003 by two further covenants, one on Euro-Mediterranean youth co-operation and one on youth research. Since 2005 cooperation has been strengthened and integrated within a single Partnership Agreement in the Field of Youth with the aim of providing a 'lasting framework for the joint development of a coherent strategy in the field of youth worker training, youth policy and youth research' (EU-CoE Youth Partnership, 2010a). In support of all of these areas (youth work, youth policy, youth research) in 2006 the Youth Partnership provided support for the development of a Masters in European Youth Studies by a university consortium led by Professor Lynne Chisholm of the University of Innsbruck (the consortium subsequently received Lifelong Learning Programme funding from the European Commission for the curriculum development phase of the M.A. EYS in 2009–11; for further information see: www.youthstudies.eu).

In July 2010 the two bodies signed a new framework partnership agreement, informed by their respective strategic priorities as set out in the Council of Europe's *Agenda 2020* (2008), the European Commission's *Investing and Empowering* (2009) and the subsequent *Resolution* of the Council of the European Union (2009). For the years to 2013 the Youth Partnership has adopted priority objectives in relation to:

- Social inclusion of young people;
- Democracy and human rights, democratic citizenship and youth participation;
- Intercultural dialogue and diversity.

The specific fields of action to achieve these objectives include:

- Promoting knowledge-based youth policy by developing and providing efficient tools (see below).
- Supporting youth work and building capacity of youth workers at European level (in close co-operation with existing strategies such as the European Training Strategy of the network of Youth in Action National Agencies).
- Paying special attention to the geographical scope of Partnership initiatives (focus on CoE Members which are candidate countries to the EU, CoE member states which are part of the EU Neighbourhood Policy including the Eastern Partnership and the Mediterranean; the Russian Federation and EU-Africa cooperation).

- Gathering, disseminating and providing information and publications on youth (through the web portal, training-kits, the magazine *Coyote* and the 'Youth Knowledge' series of books. (EU-CoE Youth Partnership, 2010a)

In relation to the first field of action above, emphasis is placed on improving the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCY), an online resource/database 'intended to provide the youth sector with a single access point to reliable knowledge and information about young people's situation across Europe', which is supported by a network of designated national correspondents. In addition, a Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR) is being established (to replace the former European Network of Youth Researchers). It is also hoped that 'national networks on better knowledge of youth', together with the work of EKCY and PEYR, will contribute to the development of more effective and evidence-based youth policies (see Figure 2).

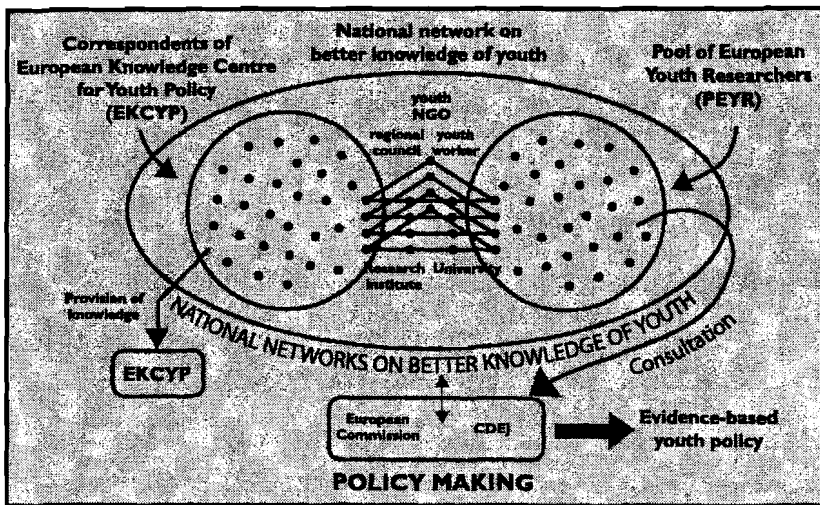


Figure 2: Evidence-Based Policy-Making

Source: European Union-Council of Europe Youth Partnership (2010b).

Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing that there has been a level of activity in recent years relating to 'European youth policy' (including youth work policy) that would have seemed highly unlikely two decades ago. Whether such developments at European level translate into discernable improvements for young people largely depends on the actions of member states (of both the EU and CoE) because they retain the right to determine their own youth policies. The international bodies can facilitate, support, encourage and exhort but without commitment from national (and in some cases regional) governments their pronouncements remain for the most part aspirational. Looking at some of the summaries and extracts included in this article the reader may feel inclined to agree with Howard Williamson that 'the same rather predictable themes can be found repetitively in numerous resolutions and declarations by youth

ministers and others: the rhetoric is easy to produce, real development and action is rather more elusive' (Williamson, 2008b: 67). Nonetheless, as Williamson adds, it is not all 'hot air': he draws attention to some 'concrete tools' that have emerged from the process, relating to both 'the overarching political and economic agendas of the European Commission (economy, education, social issues) and the more legal and cultural concerns of the Council of Europe (human rights, democracy and the rule of law)' (ibid).

To a large extent the developments documented above can be seen as providing enhanced *opportunities* to those inclined to take them, whether policy-makers, practitioners, academics and researchers, or young people themselves: opportunities to advance youth policy development at local, regional and national level (so that more young people all over Europe can benefit from coherent and effective policies) *and* to enhance the 'European dimension' of youth policy, the youth sector and young people's daily lives. To be in a position to take such opportunities necessitates being aware of them first, and this is an area in which problems may remain. All the developments mentioned above are equally relevant to young people, youth workers and youth policy makers all over Ireland, but those in Northern Ireland (in common with their counterparts in Scotland and Wales) may be at a disadvantage when it comes to being informed about and/or represented at key European events where the presence of the UK as a member state is in practice usually English. There are similar problems of course for other member states with federal or strong regional structures; and even in the Republic there remains an information deficit about matters such as those discussed here. Information is itself one of the European-level priorities identified above. If you have got as far as this page and paragraph you have taken steps to remedy that deficit and perhaps to be in a better position to exploit the opportunities available.

Notes

1. The Council of Ministers for a given policy area is formally known as the Council of the European Union (whose membership therefore varies according to the policy area being discussed and decided on). This should not be confused with the European Council, which consists of the heads of state or government of EU member states (see the section on the European Youth Pact); and both are of course to be distinguished from the Council of Europe which is a separate organisation altogether.
2. The European Youth Forum is a representative body established in 1996 and consisting of national youth councils and international youth organisations. It is the successor organisation to the Youth Forum of the European Communities (YFEC/YFEU, established 1973), the Council of European National Youth Committees (CENYC, established 1963) and the European Coordination Bureau of International Youth Organisations (ECB, established 1971). See: www.youthforum.org
3. While a Council Resolution is a strong statement of support it is not as strong as a 'Council Recommendation'. The first Council Recommendation in the youth field within the EU dealt with the mobility of young volunteers (Council of the European Union, 2008). Its adoption 'has increased the attention to youth policy on the EU agenda' (Denstad, 2009: 31).

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