

YOYO Research Project – summary report for the first year

General Objectives of the Project

The main objective of the project “Youth Policy and Participation. Potentials of Participation and Informal Learning for Young People’s Transitions to the Labour Market” (YOYO) is to improve the knowledge of the prerequisites for citizenship, focusing upon young people's active participation in their transition to the labour market in 10 European regions (Romania, Denmark, East and West Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom). It is assumed that citizenship, both at the national and European level, requires the ability to actively influence one's own biography and everyday life. In contrast to highly motivated young people with often higher qualifications, those with low qualifications run the risk to embark in training schemes, where they often lose their motivation. These schemes often neglect individual aspirations and informal skills. The project aims to assess the potential of local youth policies to increase young people's ability and motivation to active participation. It is expected that the more local youth policies are geared towards young people's own life worlds the more participation is likely to increase. The project consists of exploratory interviews with young people on their transition experiences, a series of comprehensive case studies on local youth and transition policy models, and the elaboration of a training module for youth workers in participatory transition policies.

Content of the first year

1) 10 *National Reports* on Youth Transitions, Youth Policies and Participation

2) *Exploratory interviews* with 280 young people assessing their own criteria for participation and the prerequisites of intrinsic motivation and active engagement in their transitions:

- young people with risk biographies, i.e. low levels of qualification and problems of motivation
- young people with choice biographies, i.e. higher levels of qualification combined with informal skills leading to high motivation and individually shaped trajectories.

3) Start of *case studies* (3 in each country) by document analysis and expert interviews analysing transition agencies that apply a participatory approach (due to the early stage no findings can be reported of this stage yet).

Work carried out and main findings

ad 1) The first research step analysed regional respectively national structures of transitions to work, institutional forms of youth policies and current discourses of participation. These reports were based on literature analysis and on existing programme and policy guidelines. At first sight, these reports confirmed the hypothesis that participation in the sense of young people's active influence on their biographies is largely restricted to 'soft' sectors of youth policy which means youth work and programmes for the prevention of social exclusion. In contexts of 'hard' policy sectors as education and training or even more in labour market programmes addressing unemployed young people the meaning of participation is restricted to enrolment in some scheme or to later employment. 'Hard' sector policies in contrast tend to reproduce mechanisms of segmentation and selection and subsequently give way to processes of 'cooling out' of young people's aspirations and motivation. However, the joint state of the art report produced on the basis of the national reports, on additional literature including the "Study on the state of youth and youth policies in Europe" (IARD, 2001; commissioned by DG Education and Culture)¹ shows cross-national differences that imply significant variations in biographical scopes for young women and men in their transitions to work:

- different concepts of 'youth' confront young people with different demands: to enter (adult) employment quickly, to adapt to social positions via standardised training, to develop personally/individually or the lack of any social position of youth which is both recognised and institutionalised. A distinction between youth as problem and youth as resource referred to increasingly in the last years (cf. IARD 2001) in this perspective is reductive as even the discourse on youth as resource instrumentalises youth for external purposes which restricts active participation;
- different explanations for youth unemployment and meanings of 'disadvantaged' youth between individualising concepts – laziness, deviance (culture of dependency), individual deficits (lack of qualifications and social skills, lack of employability or 'trainability') – and structural concepts as segmentation or lack of jobs in general.
- different orientations of transition policies between employment, training, counselling, general education and youth policy (the latter being only legally implemented in Sweden).

¹ IARD (ed.) (2001) Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe (<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth/studies/iard/iard.html>)

These differences correspond to the typology developed by Gallie and Paugam (2000)² who distinguished a universalistic welfare model (Scandinavian countries), an employment-centred model of the mid-European countries, the liberal/minimal model (United Kingdom) and the sub-institutionalised / sub-protective model (the Mediterranean countries). The YOYO-context reveals the need of a fifth type regarding the transformation societies in Eastern Europe which appear to move from a mixture between social-democratic and employment-centred regulations towards a sub-protective reality.

A subject-oriented or biographic notion of participation in youth transitions – corresponding to the working hypothesis of the YOYO project – is most likely to be found in Scandinavian countries as Denmark (in this case especially through individualised education), participation in terms of individual employment is most pronounced in the United Kingdom and Ireland, participation meaning involvement in standardised education or training dominates in Germany and the Netherlands whilst registration under any regular activity (employment, education or training) accounts for the Mediterranean countries Italy, Spain and Portugal as well as for Romania as ‘participation’.

ad 2) The next work step had the objective to contrast the official and structural dimensions with young people’s perceptions and experiences in this regard. To this purpose we concentrated on young people not following mainstream education and training either for having failed to enter and subsequently disengaged (‘disengaged’) with the formal system or for preferring informal pathways in constructing an individual biography (‘trend-setters’). The analysis of interviews however showed that this distinction was only of heuristic value. We found a considerable percentage of young people who can be characterised as somewhere between these two categories whilst the concepts ‘disengaged’ and ‘trendsetters’ revealed to be ascriptive as well as hiding the fact that individual disengagement derived from negative experiences with transition agencies and/or from poor starting positions and opportunities. It was therefore necessary to differentiate during the analysis. This was done first by distinguishing the dimensions of resources and opportunities (low vs. high) and of motivation and engagement (low vs. high), second by considering the dynamic structure of ‘motivational careers’.

All young people interviewed criticised the formal system sharply – mainly school, careers counselling and training or employment schemes – for not linking theory and practice, for not considering young people as individuals, and for not being effective in providing jobs. However, those with high resources still managed to succeed in the formal system which they productively complemented with informal resources (mainly informal learning and peer support). Those with

² Gallie, D. & Paugam, S. (2000) (eds.) *Welfare Regimes and the Experience of Unemployment in Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

poor resources still were restricted to adapt to the formal system and in many cases – due to the lack of subjectively relevant options – therefore disengaged from the respective agencies, institutions and programmes. Most interesting for the objectives of the YOYO project were those who – despite of low resources/opportunities had maintained or regained motivation and engagement through getting involved with one of the case study agencies. The joint report highlights the following factors as decisive in developing and maintaining motivation and participation:

- *informal structures* addressing the whole person and allowing for reconciliation with life-styles
- *active participation*: have a say in objectives, contents and forms of learning, counselling and working
- *trust* into the objectives and the honesty of agencies and key-persons
- *social networks* in terms of first, a (more or less) powerful resource, and second, linking the own transition to everyday life (but also expanding the horizons of everyday life)

It is obvious that there are methodological limits to the comparability of the findings. However, experiences of de-motivation and disengagement as well as examples of highly motivated and individualised biographies were related to concrete given contexts. For example the forms of frustration and disengagement with formal institutions were related to the manner in which these institutions operated. Individualising deficit-oriented or workfare-oriented policies facilitate a hostile attitude and mistrust, absence of support leads to resignation or desperation. The scope for individually constructed biographies – the incentive to invest in the individual transition, the probability to arrive somewhere by doing so – was related to education, training and employment systems that were flexible enough to provide a diversity of access options while leaving space for reconciliation with formal and informal support networks. At the same time, both labour market structures and flexible labour market policies enabled or inhibited young people to experiment with self-employment.

Investigating the potential of participation and informal learning on young people's motivation in transitions to work one cannot pay attention solely to the support provided through participatory pedagogy or projects. This is particularly true when analysing so-called best practice projects and concentrating on the biographies of young women and men who despite structural disadvantages have maintained or developed motivation to actively engage in their transitions (especially after experiencing agency support. One has to consider general political-economic structures as well (and it will be necessary and helpful to use the comparative-contextual knowledge related to upward turning points in this regard). Otherwise, participatory approaches just contribute to the

elevator effect of re-structuring competition for scarce socially recognised *and* subjectively meaningful positions in society.

When we state that *all* young people should be entitled to receive satisfying and successful learning and working experiences, we distance ourselves from a position which concentrates only on the most disadvantaged young people. In policy terms this means to argue for an approach of *Integrated Transition Policies*³ which avoids one-sidedness in youth-oriented policies (education and training, welfare and labour market policies). Integrated Transition Policies means that policies are planned and evaluated from the perspective of the individual biography. Therefore they have to be flexible in terms of cross-sectoral coordination, in terms of recognising learning processes, also if occurring informally, in recognising work also if not paid according to standard work arrangements. Finally, and this has been underlined by our findings, flexibility has to be balanced by security. In many cases this basic security is provided by young people's families, whilst in others it is lacking and thus may undermine the development of trust into society and its institutions. Therefore, an equivalent to family support might be extended to all young people through a form of basic income for young people to give them minimum security during their transition period in order to make full use of their learning potentials in a knowledge based society which is at the same time a risk society.

³ Walther, A., Stauber, B. et al. (2002) (eds.) *Misleading Trajectories – Integration Policies for Young Adults in Europe?* Opladen: Leske+Budrich.