



New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 51

Active Participation and Informal Learning in Young People's Transitions to the Labour Market

Context of the Research

Many young people move from formal education into work by actively choosing what they wish to do in the labour market. However, for some, especially those with poor qualifications, their active participation in choosing their pathway is rather more limited. Their transitions often involve them being channelled into training schemes that don't always match the needs of the labour market and neglect individual aspirations and strengths. This results in de-motivation and disengagement.

This project has focused on young people's active participation in their transition to the labour market and its impact on both formal and informal learning. Through case studies from different regions, it has assessed policies that involve active participation and recognition of informal learning for young people in transition. The project has considered whether these policies are successful at enhancing motivation for active re-engagement in transitions to work, compared to existing conventional schemes.

The project has aimed at understanding more about bridging gaps between education and training, labour market and youth work. It has observed existing practice in nine European countries: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Key Conclusions

1. Active participation of young people is not a key principle in policies concerned with young people's transitions to work.
2. It tends to be limited to 'soft' policies such as youth work, compared to 'hard' policies for young people such as education, training or labour market policies.
3. In 'hard' policies disadvantaged young people are seen as having individual deficits that need to be rectified rather than being entitled to subjectively choose a career.
4. Lack of motivation is being regarded as such a deficit. Especially, activation policies reduce motivation to a rational choice model justifying coercion and pressure.
5. In many cases policies fail to reach disadvantaged young people due to their high distrust of formal institutions, where they do not feel treated as individuals.

6. If available they prefer informal rather than formal support, these informally acquired competencies do not get the necessary recognition.
7. Social inequality and marginalisation tend to be reinforced because networks of disadvantaged youth are weaker, especially for youth from ethnic minorities.
8. There is some evidence of gender differences:
 - Young men seem to have more difficulties in maintaining motivation after having demotivating experiences in the formal system.
 - Although being channelled into restricted gendered pathways young women seem to be more capable of managing their motivation in a reflexive way. But, this does not mean that they are more successful in finding their way into recognised positions.
9. Socio-economic and motivational factors are interrelated in determining young people's transition patterns.
10. Key motivational factors are having a specific interest to focus on and a feeling of self-efficacy. This means that motivation itself depends on access to resources and opportunities.
11. Young people's experience of active participation tends to result in motivational change. Participation and motivation are to be seen as external and internal aspects of self-determination.
12. Analysed case study projects achieved participation by:
 - Choice to enter projects on voluntary basis.
 - Flexibility to adapt projects to own needs and interests.
 - Relationships with project workers based on trust.
 - Leaving directions of individual orientation open.
 - Activities that were relevant, of self-interest and had social recognition.
 - Space for self-chosen and self-determined activities.
 - Group building and peer learning
 - Non-formal learning and training situations
 - Being responsible for their own learning and project-related decisions.
 - Respect and recognition for own choices and aspirations.
 - Being able to act out and mediate conflicts.
 - Reflecting on learning careers in retrospect as well as with regard to the future.
13. However, due to structural limitations the experience of motivation through participation does not necessarily result in sustainable inclusion for all young people:
 - Only a few initiatives succeed in providing young people with both 'hard' resources (qualifications, jobs and/or income) and 'soft' skills.

14. Most projects – and especially the most innovative and participatory ones – suffer from discontinuous funding as the integration of youth policy elements with education, training and labour market policies rarely takes place.

15. Differences also result from structures of different European transition regimes: -

- The largest scope for participation can be found in the Scandinavian universalistic regime. Choice is provided at different levels and participation integrated within ‘hard’ policies. Education and training are rewarded by financial allowances.
- In the liberal regime of Anglo-Saxon countries and the employment-centred regime of continental European countries ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ policies are separated. Active participation initiatives tend not to result in a transition to work.
- In the sub-protective transition regime of Southern countries and the post-socialist transition regime of Eastern Europe ‘soft’ policies are often underdeveloped, despite there being structural deficits in transitions to work.

16. The effects of participation with regard to young people’s motivational change, social inclusion and citizenship remain ambivalent as long participation is: -

- Reduced to ‘soft’ policies
- Not secured by material security and negotiation rights

Key Recommendations

Policies addressing young people in their transition from school to work need to: -

1. Put young people at the centre of policies concerning their lives and give them negotiation power.
2. Rather than addressing lack of motivation as the result of ‘individual deficits’ there is a need to provide young people with access to relevant meaningful careers and increase their control over achieving this target.
3. Overcome the structural limitations between formal and non-formal learning i.e. between youth work, education, training and labour market policies.
4. Re-structure funding for projects in a way that provides security and continuity of initiatives.
5. Assist projects in providing young people with “hard” resources (qualifications, jobs and/or income) within “soft” youth work settings. Key elements should include opportunities for young people to: -
 - Choose appropriate careers
 - Develop trust, a feeling of belonging and self-confidence
 - Space for experimentation
 - Options beyond traditional gender roles and are related to ethnicity
 - Take responsibility for own projects with support available “on demand”.

- Orientate and plan their individual destinations
- Focus on strengths
- Have space to address conflict due to diverging interests

Further research into young people in their transitions to work should: -

6. Consider the socio-economic, institutional and psychological dynamics involved in the processes of de-motivation and re-motivation.
7. Give young people a voice through qualitative research that can provide knowledge on the relevance that “policy offers” have for their “clients” and thus explain why some initiatives are used by young people and others not.

Further Information

The full title of the project is: “Youth Policy and Participation. Potentials of participation and informal learning in young people’s transitions to the labour market. A comparative analysis in 10 European regions”. (November 2004)

The project web site is at <http://www.iris-egris.de/yoyo/> with several working papers available.

Key Publications

Du Bois-Reymond, M (2004) Youth – learning – Europe, *YOUNG*, Vol. 12, Issue 3, pp. 184-203.

Du Bois-Reymond, M. & Stauber, B. (2005) , in H. Helve & G. Holm (eds.) *Contemporary Youth Research: Local Expressions and Global Connections*, Aldershot: Ashgate (forthcoming).

Pais, J.M. & Pohl, A. (2003) Of roofs and knives: the dilemmas of recognising informal learning, in A.López Blasco, W. McNeish & A. Walther (eds.) *Young people and contradictions of inclusion: towards Integrated Transition Policies in Europe*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 223-243.

Walther, A. (2003) Empowerment or ‘cooling out’? Dilemmas and contradictions of Integrated Transition Policies, in A.López Blasco, W. McNeish & A. Walther (eds.) *Young people and contradictions of inclusion: towards Integrated Transition Policies in Europe*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 183-205.

Walther, A. (2005) Active participation in the support of young people in their transitions to work, in A. Heimgartner (ed.) *Face of Research in European Social Development: Aims, Result, Impact*. Proceedings of the European IUCISD conference in Graz 2004 (forthcoming).

Walther, A., Stauber, B. & Pohl, A. (2005) Informal networks in youth transitions in West Germany, *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (forthcoming).

A book publication is being prepared (editors: Walther, A., Biggart, A. & du Bois-Reymond, M.)

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Deutsches Jugendinstitut München, Germany

AREA, Asociacion Regional y Europea de Analisis, Valencia, Spain

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