

Youth Policy and Participation.

Potentials of participation and informal learning in young people's transitions to the labour market. A comparative analysis in ten European regions

National report of the Netherlands

Prepared by Wim Plug

Section Education and Youth Studies, University of Leiden

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Introduction

In this report, the context is sketched in which Dutch young people make their transition from school to work. This context is made up of structures and institutions (the educational and training system, the labour market structure, the transitional system connecting these two), current governmental intervention policies (transition and youth policies) and the wider scientific and political discourses and discussions that exist.

The first section describes the structure of the Dutch transitional system and provides data on the participation and trajectories of young people in relation to the educational system and (the transition to) the labour market. The second section gives an overview of existing Dutch governmental policies with regard to (the transitions of) young people.

The third section deals with the discourses and discussions on the concept of participation that takes place in the Netherlands.

1. Transition systems in the Netherlands: structures, participation and trajectories

1.1 Structure of schooling system

In the Netherlands, the educational system is divided into three levels: primary (BAO; Basic Education), secondary and tertiary. Regular primary education is for pupils that are aged from 4 to 12 years. Special primary education exists for children (aged 3 to 12) who require special educational support. For older pupils in this category, there is also special secondary education (VSO¹). Pupils in the age between 12 and 16-18 years are engaged in secondary education. Dutch children and youth are obliged to participate in full-time education up until they reach the age of 16. Thereafter, education is partially compulsory up to the age of 18. At present, secondary education is divided into three different trajectories (see Figure 1 for a complete graphic overview, below only the most important trajectories are given):

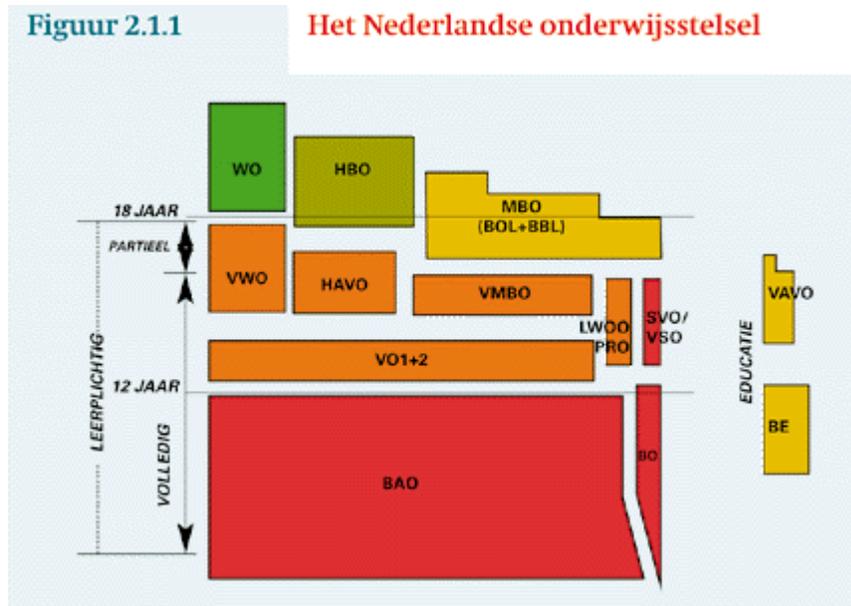
- Pre-vocational education (VMBO, used to be MAVO and VBO) for pupils aged 12-16 years, which prepares for secondary vocational education (BOL or the dual trajectory BBL; used to be MBO and ‘Leerlingwezen’ respectively).
- Junior higher general secondary education (HAVO) for pupils in the age of 12-17 years, preparing for higher professional (third level) education (HBO).
- Pre-university education (VWO) for pupils in the age of 12-18 years prepares for university (WO).

An important consequence of cuts in educational spending during the last ten years has been the institutional merging of different types of secondary (vocational) education into very broad school communities. At present, the vast majority of students attend schooling in broad educational settings that represent all the different types of secondary (VMBO, HAVO, VWO) and secondary vocational (BOL, BBL, adult education) that are available. The latter institutions are referred to as ‘ROC’s’. Adult education also takes place in these institutions (VAVO).

¹ See Annex 1 for an overview of abbreviations

In general, the first two years of secondary education are ‘bridging years’ (VO 1+2 in the graph), with similar subjects and programmes for all the students. After these two years, a final choice is made for a specific type and level of schooling.

Figure 1: The Dutch educational system



Source: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

1.2 Educational participation and trajectories in the Netherlands

The trend of the last few decades has been the expansion of daytime educational participation: an increasing number of young people follow increasingly longer periods of schooling, both in compulsory and post-compulsory education. During the same period a shift in participation has taken place from vocational to more general education (SCP 2000). Around 1980, about 35% of all the 14 year-olds attended vocational courses. In 1990, this percentage had fallen to 26% (SCP 1998a). Since then, participation appears to have been relatively stable.

The growth in participation has several causes, among them the awareness among youth that their starting position and further chances on the labour market depend for a

large part on the level and type of education they have followed beforehand. Other factors are the unemployment crisis in the 1980s that took place in the Netherlands², the higher demand for higher-educated personnel on the labour market and the reforms that have made the educational system more coherent and flexible (SCP 1998b).

Vertical mobility between types and levels of schooling has been common ('stacking-up trajectories'; cf. Du Bois-Reymond et al. 2001). Boys tend to use the latter option slightly more often than girls. Stacking-up behaviour among pre-vocational graduates appears to be almost non-existent: far most of these graduates continue with MBO instead of HAVO and VWO and the movement towards higher levels of education seems (primarily HBO) to take place only via secondary vocational education. Furthermore, while the rate of boys and girls who leave full-time education after graduation at the VBO level has gone down from 47% to 42% and 39% to 29% respectively, a large minority of young people within pre-vocational education still leaves full-time education after the obtainment of this diploma, especially boys. The observed rates are and remain far higher than for the other secondary school types, for which at most a maximum of 12% is found (HAVO girls). Only a minority of the pre-vocational education graduates (17% in 1997) continue with a combined work and schooling trajectory in the dual system ('Leerlingwezen', now BBL) (SCP 2001).

Primarily because of reasons of efficiency, an important focus of Dutch educational policy in the 1990s has been to push back the availability and use of detours within the educational system and the piling up of diplomas. It appears to be the case that these stacking-up routes are decreasing in importance (SCP 2000).

1.3 Data on participation and trajectories in education

In the school year 1998 / 1999, about 87% of the 12-17 year olds and more than 25% of the 18-24 year olds were enrolled in full-time education. Most of the latter group were students attending higher vocational or university education (CBS 2001).

The overall increased participation in higher levels of education can be inferred from the distribution between the different school types at the third grade of secondary

² Young people tend to stay on in school longer when there is a non-receptive labour market, i.e. to avoid unemployment.

education, in which pupils are mostly at the age of 15. Since the mid-1980s, participation in the highest levels of secondary education (HAVO, VWO) has increased from 27% to 36% during 1998/1999. During the same period, participation at the middle levels (VBO, MAVO; now VMBO) has dropped from 63% to 51% and participation at the lowest levels (VSO, etc.) has increased from 8% to 12%. Within the latter group, boys are highly over-represented.

While the number of young people in mainstream education has steadily decreased in recent decades due to the smaller absolute number of youth, the number of students in special education has risen by some 15% over the last ten years, especially the proportion of ethnic minority students. Research shows that children, once having entered special education, rarely pass on to mainstream education (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport 1998). According to the SCP (2000) therefore, we are witnessing a process of polarisation: while many more young people attend higher levels of secondary schooling, at the same time more young people also have more difficulties to attend higher levels of secondary education and fulfil higher demands.

The direct flow, i.e. those continue with higher levels of daytime education without any detours, has also changed between 1985 and 1997 (CBS 2000; SCP 2000):

- The direct transition from pre-vocational and junior general education (VBO and MAVO, now VMBO) into secondary vocational education (MBO, now BOL) has progressed rapidly. For qualified VBO boys for instance, the participation rate went up from 30% to 51%, and for qualified VBO girls, the rate went up even more, from 46% to 68%.
- The direct transition from MAVO to MBO went up from 68% to 79% for boys and from 66% to 80% for girls. During the same period, a – decreasing – minority of boys and girls continued with HAVO: 21% to 18% for boys and 20% to 16% for girls.
- Direct transitions from HAVO to HBO went up from 42% to 59% for boys and from 35% to 59% for girls. A minority continued with MBO (22% of boys and 21% of girls in 1997; rates have remained stable) and VWO (15% of boys and 9% of girls in 1997; rates have dropped).

- The direct transitions from VWO to university (WO) went up from 62% to 69% for boys and from 44% to 55% for girls. A large minority went on with HBO (27% of boys and 34% of girls in 1997; rates have slightly gone up). Girls still comparatively opt more often for HBO courses, boys more often for university courses.

1.4 Educational disadvantage and early school leaving

As has been shown above, more and more graduated youngsters continue directly with full-time education over time - at all levels of secondary education. For both boys as well as girls, the participation in full-time education has increased. For example, between 1970 and 1997, the participation of 19-year-old girls rose from 12% to 60% and that of 19-year-old boys from 28% to 56%.

While girls used to participate relatively far less than boys, at present the participation rate of girls has caught up and, in the case of those of the age group of 16 to 21 year-olds, has surpassed the male participation rate (SCP 2000). However, they sometimes still tend to follow other educational trajectories than boys. Relatively more often, girls continue with MBO after finishing VBO and choose HBO instead of university after finishing VWO. There also remain gender-related contrasts relating to subject choices in secondary and tertiary education and eventually affecting their position on the labour market.

Class-specific differences appear to be even more persistent: children whose parents have low levels of educational attainment (in general from a lower class background) still tend to leave school earlier and in generally do not make it through tertiary education. They also more often choose and follow lower forms of vocational education or a combination of training and employment than middle- and higher-class youth (Hustinx 1998). The Dutch educational system continues to select pupils according to social background relatively early and often definitively (Knoers 1995; Meijers 1998).

The number of students of a foreign (non-western European) background in secondary education has increased strongly in time and has stabilised over the past few years. In 1994/95, approximately 8% of secondary school students belonged to a cultural minority (both parents of non-west European origin). Students of non-Dutch origin are

disproportionately found at the lower levels of education (VBO: 55% and MAVO: 19% in 1994/95). The participation of non-Dutch youngsters - especially in the case of Turkish and Moroccan youngsters - is considerably lower than that of their Dutch counterparts while youngsters from Surinam participate in education at roughly the same level as Dutch youth. Among young people from the Antilles, a relatively lower educational participation at a young age goes together with a relatively higher participation at a higher age (Tesser et al. 1999). Regarding the educational participation at a higher age and more upper levels of (tertiary) education (age category of 20-24 year olds), second generation youth are still lagging behind Dutch youth.

Hövels et al. (1999) estimate that, in general, around 5% to 6% of young people do not arrive any further than primary or special education and an additional 12% do not obtain a (lower or upper) secondary education diploma. In geographic terms, obtaining a secondary education diploma seems especially to be problematic in the four big cities of the urbanized, Western-part of the Netherlands (Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Utrecht, The Hague), where the dropout rates lie around 25% - thus with only 75% obtaining their secondary education diploma.

Still, in comparison with 1980, the absolute number of early school leavers has halved, but mainly as a consequence of the strong decrease in the absolute number of students in secondary education. The number of students leaving secondary education varies according to the type of education. The lowest rate is found at the MAVO school-type (17%) and the first three years of HAVO (6%). VBO has the highest rate with 35% of students dropping out (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschappen 1996).

The most recent figures on early school leaving at the secondary vocational level point to about one-third of MBO students not obtaining their diploma eventually (around 30% of the girls and 35% of the boys) (Sinkeldam 1996). For students enrolled into higher education (HBO, university) this figure is approximately 25% (CBS press release, internet-site).

Moreover, Hövels et al. (1999) also assess that about 42% do not obtain the required minimal 'Primary Starting Qualification' level, e.g. the minimum of education somebody should have accumulated in order to be prepared for the labour market and be able to develop further during his or hers professional career. This level, that of a 'starting

professional', is comparable with four years of secondary education and two years of senior vocational education (Van Tilborg & Spit 1998). In practice however, HAVO and VWO degrees are also accepted.

According to Uerz et al. (1999) and Voncken et al. (2000), push factors - behavioural and learning problems - are in general the most important reasons for leaving school early. Pull factors are considered far less important in general, but given the fact that early school leaving is especially high among VBO and MBO students, these young people appear to be more sensitive to the 'pull' of the labour market. If there is work, VBO and MBO students are tempted to take it to become financially independent and often without waiting to obtain a certificate (SCP 2000). At the same time, because VBO 'catches' many of the students leaving medium general secondary education (MAVO) before gaining a certificate, leaving the VBO is a more definitive step than leaving other forms of education.

The young people who leave school early are relatively often (ethnic minority) males from a lower class-background. Especially young Turkish and Antillean males (almost 25% and 18% respectively) tend to end the school career before obtaining a diploma in secondary education. Among Moroccan and Antillean males the dropout is less (around 13% and 11% respectively) but still considerably higher than that of Dutch males (5%). Early school leaving among Moroccan females is even higher than that of their male Moroccan counterparts (17%). Among other non-Dutch females the dropout rate is in general a few percentage-points lower, with Antillean females dropping out far more little (around 10%) (Tesser et al. 1999).

In comparison with Dutch children, non-Dutch children are already in a disadvantaged position during primary education, as a consequence of insufficient command of the Dutch language, which in turn is linked with the social and cultural background of many non-Dutch children. This disadvantageous position is often not corrected anymore during the remainder of their school career. As a group they perform less well in school and have a bigger chance to leave school early than Dutch children do (SCP 2000).

Recent studies show however that an overall pessimistic view with regard to school achievement of non-Dutch youth is not entirely correct anymore (Crull 2000; Tesser et al.

2001). A considerable number of second-generation Moroccan and Turkish migrant youth are doing well in secondary education, both at the higher and the middle levels, boys as well as girls. According to Tesser et al. (2001), the participation of Turkish and Moroccan young people in HAVO or VWO bridging classes went up from 20% in 1993 to 40% in 1999. Among Surinamese and Antillean young people the progress in participation has been even bigger, and now lies at roughly similar levels as that of Dutch young people.

1.5 Transitions and trajectories between education and employment

The transition from school to work in the Netherlands may be regarded as highly regulated, in the sense that the type and level of profession is very much connected with the type and level of qualification one has obtained, most certainly at the beginning of the labour market career. In other words, for nearly every profession a certain type of diploma is needed. However, given both the development of higher participation in especially general types of education and the development towards a broad-based service-economy without clear types of professions, in the future this might be changing to more emphasis on just a particular level of qualifications (as for instance is much more the case in the United States).

While the 'final' transition from daytime education to full-time work has in general been postponed to a later age, this does not mean that Dutch young people are totally absent from the labour market. On the contrary, during the last few years more and more pupils and students are taking on part-time jobs while in a situation of daytime schooling.

It is estimated that the total number of pupils and students jobs reaches 500,000, or 7% to 8% of total employment in the Netherlands (Van Hoof 2000). In 1997 for instance, 44% of all pupils and students held a part-time job. Far most students have a part-time job nowadays. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2001), six out of ten students in higher education have a job at the side. The rise in the number of part-time jobs can also be observed for pupils in secondary education, and now stands at around 50% (SCP 2000). In the case of students, an important reason for this development have been the successive cuts in study financing since 1994 and the necessity of having to earn extra income to make ends meet (CBS 1999a). Consequently, young people in

general enter the full-time labour market at an older age than former youth generations but at the same time tend to experience (part-time) employment at a younger age.

Recent empirical research shows that education and work-trajectories and the transitions between school and work are becoming more and more diverse in the Netherlands. Instead of a limited number of more or less standard trajectories and transitions, today an extensive range of types that lie between more standard and more choice-biographical life-plans can be found. Timing, structure and content of transitions have become far more flexible and it is not at all obvious anymore to definitively enter the full-time labour market after obtaining a diploma. Young people may for example exchange one type of education in favour of another, postpone education or training, be temporarily unemployed, change jobs, follow a dual trajectory of work and schooling or enter education again after having worked full-time for a period (Du Bois-Reymond et al. 2001). The necessity and opportunity of navigating oneself through this abundance of prerequisites and options places new demands on 'life-management' skills of individuals and places new demands on institutional arrangements for social integration (Plug et al. 2001; Walther & Stauber, 1999).

1.6 Position in labour market: (un-) employment, labour market disadvantage and unequal participation

While far most of the young people between 15 and 24 years of age are still attending school, a third of this age group does not follow full-time education anymore. For 2000, it is estimated that 44% of all the young people in this age group hold a paid job of 12 hour or more (including those pupils and students who are in full-time education).

Participation on the labour market is however considerably higher among young people in the age group 20-24 years (65%) than in the age group 15-19 years (23%) (CBS 2001). At present, the median age at which a young person enters the full-time labour market stands at the age of 21 in the case of boys and 19 in the case of girls, the rise of which can be attributed for a large part to the participation of young people in both longer periods and higher levels of education (SCP 2001).

In comparison with the age group of 15-64 years of age, young people between 14 and 25 years of age more often work in a part-time job (around 30% compared to 40%

respectively) and far more often work in a flexible job (27% compared to 8% respectively) (CBS 2001). According to the SCP (2001) however, the difference between the latter figures is above all a consequence of the fact that especially the young people who are attending full-time education have flexible jobs. If one looks only at those young people who are active on the full-time labour market, the rate of steady contracts appears to be almost the same when compared to that of their adult counterparts.

Rates of labour market participation according to gender and ethnicity show at the one hand a relatively stable rate of participation among Dutch males and females, and at the other hand a lower but rapid increase of participation among non-Dutch males and females. Among Dutch young people, net participation has remained fairly stable, with rates between 40% and 45% (with females participating slightly less). The variation in unemployment rates between males and females for young age groups are relatively small and almost similar but become substantially larger if compared with more adult age groups.

On the whole, females still participate less on the labour market, have a greater chance of getting unemployed, cover a smaller range of professions and get paid less in relation to males. In Dutch society a shift from the ideal of the housewife to the ideal of combining motherhood and working outside the home took place between 1960 and 1990. Female participation in employment remained fairly constant from the beginning of the century until the 1960s (around 25%). Since then, the labour market participation of women has increased to about 50% in 1996 (CBS 1997). It has to be noted however that women predominantly work in part-time jobs; two out of three women with paid employment are working in part-time jobs and almost three out of four part-time jobs are held by women (Visser & Hemerijck, 1997). This predominance in part-time work has also to do with the fact that, although since the 1980s young people were encouraged by government policies and campaigns to achieve economic independence, everyday reality does not coincide with the liberal and egalitarian values stimulated. The combination of both caring tasks and employment can be so straining that a majority of women feel compelled to choose one of the two and the distribution of caring tasks remains uneven at least (Te Poel & Du Bois-Reymond 2001). The combination appears easier to deal with and/or more appealing as long as women can rely on proper day nursery, acceptable

working conditions and a partner who is able and willing to participate in child-raising and housekeeping. These conditions are often still insufficient or lacking all together, especially in the case of women and men who are employed in lower occupational levels (Hooghiemstra & Keuzenkamp 2000). And although it is a fact that more and more women remain employed after the birth of their first child (23% in the mid-1980s as compared to 9% in 1970), studies show that 80% of the ones who remain working, eventually quit after having their second child (reference). Furthermore, labour market participation is relatively low and unemployment high among young parents. During the period 1995 / 1997, 25% of all young parents were out of work and unemployment is especially high if young parents (primarily mothers) are single (CBS 1999b).

In general, the participation among non-Dutch young people - although having risen - remains considerable lower than that of their Dutch male and female counterparts: Turkish males participate 8 percent-points lower, Moroccan males 18 percent-points lower, Surinamese males 14 percent-points lower and Antillean and Aruban males 16% percent-points lower. For most of the females, the rates are even lower (especially among Turkish and Moroccan females, less so in the case of Surinamese and Antillean and Aruban young females). However, in both male and female cases, the rates are rising rapidly. Especially among Moroccan females, the growth in net participation has been remarkable; it doubled between 1994 and 1998 from 9% to 21% (SCP 2001).

In correspondence with the labour market participation of non-Dutch youth going up, unemployment among non-Dutch youth has gone down but still remains far higher than that of their Dutch counterparts. Between 1994 and 1998 and within the age group of 15 to 24 years of age, the unemployment rate for Turkish young people went down from 28% to 23%, for Moroccans from 41% to 31%, for Surinamese from 30% to 25% and for Antillean young people from 40% to 25%. In comparison, Dutch young people between 15 and 24 years of age are unemployed far less relatively (7% in 1998, 12% in 1994) (Tesser et al. 2001).

The following table portrays the unemployment rate according to educational level:

Table 1: Unemployment among 15-24 year olds according to educational level
(1998, in %)

<i>School type</i>	<i>Unemployed Labour force</i>
Primary education	20
MAVO (Lower secondary education)	10
VBO (lower secondary education)	8
HAVO / VWO (higher secondary education)	11
MBO (Medium vocational education)	4
HBO (Higher vocational education)	8
University	(*)

Source: CBS Web site & SCP 2001, p.98

(*) Figures not available, but according to CBS (1999b) this will probably be the same figure as for HBO graduates.

With the exception of VBO graduates, when the educational level is higher, the unemployment rate is lower. In general, lower-educated youngsters do less well on the labour market than the middle- and higher educated ones.

According to Van Hoof (2000), the concern for youth unemployment has lost much of its former urgency at present. This is due to the steady decline in youth unemployment since the second half of the 1980s, apart from a temporary halt in the first years of the 1990s. The youth unemployment rate remains a few percentage points higher than the overall unemployment rate, as a consequence of a relatively long job-search period after leaving school and due to the fact that young people - in comparison with unemployed adults - are more often not registered at the unemployment office. Young people often find work via other networks or do not want to register. Moreover, the official rate of youth unemployment is definitely higher because it does not include unemployed persons who are actively engaged in government aided and subsidized courses, training and jobs.

The popular view that the decline of youth unemployment is simply a consequence of the overall growth of employment in the Netherlands can be disputed. According to Salverda (1999), the main reasons for the drop in youth unemployment seem to be twofold. Firstly the fact that the absolute number of youth has fallen (demographic developments), and secondly the rise in, and extension of educational participation among young people. Furthermore, while the number of jobs (>12 hours / week) for

adults increased with almost 40% from 1987 onwards, the number of jobs for youths decreased with 25% since then. This picture remains roughly the same when employment volume is calculated as to the total numbers of hours worked. Van Hoof (2000) therefore concludes that the decline of youth *unemployment* has gone together with a decline of youth *employment*.

Because of higher participation rates in education and especially with regard to the fact that young people attend and attain higher levels of education, the intrinsic value of diplomas is also decreasing. Simultaneously, the number of jobs that demand higher qualifications has not kept up with the availability of those that have attained higher qualifications in the Netherlands. Therefore, processes of '*diploma inflation*' and '*crowding out*' have occurred. The former process forces young people to aim as high as possible while in school, the latter one leads to the displacement of less qualified young people out of their original employment levels.

The loss of a lot of full-time youth jobs since the middle of the 1980s and the surge in part-time jobs since the beginning of the 1990s puts early school leavers in a tough spot. They now have to compete with the more flexible employment possibilities that both secondary pupils and higher education students can offer. Moreover, as the structure of the economy is changing towards even more services-based, new competencies or skills are necessary to get by in the changing - and less secure - labour market. Therefore, learning, upgrading and retraining appears to become a standard element of future working-life for a large number of people. What used to be a *leading* trajectory for these labour market orientated youth is now becoming increasingly a *misleading* trajectory. The present-day norm is to follow an as high as possible level of - preferably general - education and the skills to keep on learning throughout your entire life. What used to be a normal pathway towards a more or less secure job in former days, now a too low a level of education will seriously hamper you future chances on the labour market.

2. Youth and transition policies

Up to the 1970s, attention was especially paid to general youth policy, to edify young people morally and culturally via leisure activities. Since then, emphasis has been laid upon dealing with specific (disadvantaged) problem youth. Today, attention seems to shift backwards, towards a more general approach again: increasing the opportunities of development and the participation of young people and the prevention of 'drop out'. The latter aspect is essentially seen in terms of early school leaving and the loss of paid work.

Simultaneously, municipalities have become more in charge in dealing with these issues. According to the national government, the prevention of problems among youth is served best through the strengthening of their social-economic position and their ties with, and commitment to society. The domains that are related to these issues, for instance welfare, youth health care, sports, labour market intermediation, parts of educational policy, etc. are already for a large part the responsibility of local public authorities. The national government limits itself to co-ordination and more sectoral youth policies (national educational policy, labour market policy, etc.).

Given the fact that young people are experiencing various developmental and transitional stages to adulthood, a large number of life domains are relevant, in turn making youth policy complex and interweaved (linked matters of upbringing, education, health, work, etc.). It appears however that the local political authorities still have a big problem with developing and implementing an integral and locality-specific youth policy; formulations and problem definitions are often too broad and incoherent with regard to content (SCP 1999). The same goes for young people who participate in unemployment projects. They are often faced with a multitude of problems and only since recent times local unemployment agencies are putting more emphasis on interlinked, holistic counselling, interlinking of institutions, involving for instance social affairs, the education department, the department of justice, housing agencies, etc.).

With regard to local youth and transition policies, the following ones should be mentioned:

- Youth participation through cultural activities (voluntary work for organising a pop concert, theatre festival, dance nights, etc.) have a long history. Local youth

- centres have often become cultural institutions over time, but are now also forced to pay a renewed interest into youth work related to problem groups.
- In a number of municipalities, a local youth council has been installed which has a say in providing ideas for the provision of local, public leisure services, other participation activities or even in evaluating local youth welfare policy. It is unclear however whether there are many instances in which such a council has direct or indirect political influence. Within education, political participation - for example in the shape of school parliaments – has never really caught up. In general, there exists no co-responsibility in decision-making between pupils and teachers.
 - Regularly, participatory youth studies are carried out, by young people and for young people. As they are experts of their own life-worlds, they are used by researchers as their assistants in constructing and carrying out youth research. Sometimes a local participation official has been appointed to provide information or to guard participation budgets
 - The existence of a regional monitoring system for truants and early school leavers (since 1994), involving various actors and functioning according to a ‘chain model’.
 - Introduction of the ‘broad school’, a network of facilities and services in and around the school (education, welfare, sports, family and childcare, etc.). It is targeted at improving the participation of children in society, education, recreation, etc., to take away any disadvantages and to increase social abilities. These projects have originated mostly from local initiatives, for example out of a demand for after-school day-care, but are more and more actively supported by national agencies too.
 - Additional funding for primary and secondary schools which have a disproportionate number of pupils coming from disadvantaged (lower-class) and ethnic minority milieus. This occurs on the basis of yearly counting.

With regard to national, sectoral transition policies, the following ones should be mentioned:

- The second phase of upper-secondary general education (HAVO, VWO) is being transformed according to the concept of the 'Study house', introducing new teaching methods to encourage working autonomy and 'learning to learn'. Alongside, choice profiles instead of a partly free choice of subjects have been implemented. These should improve the connection of upper-secondary general education with higher education.
- The WEB Act of 1996 has restructured secondary vocational education (MBO) into, at the one hand, more practical orientated (BBL; trajectory towards employment) and at the other hand, more school orientated (BOL; trajectory towards higher vocational education) vocational pathways. Alongside, national, standard qualification levels and requirements have been implemented, and attempts are made to introduce methods of assessing qualities of informal learning ('Erkenning Verworven Kwalificaties' / 'Recognition of Acquired Qualifications'. There are important problems surrounding such an operation, most importantly issues of arriving at an acceptable qualification standard and, related, that of reliability and validity. The Dutch qualification standard is based on job and task analysis and is industry driven, i.e. social partners at all levels participate in the definition of these standards (Bjørnåvold 2000).
- Introduction of bachelor / master system at university (from 2002 onwards) to ensure better comparability of qualification levels of higher education with other European countries.
- The Dutch government has also pursued policies to raise educational levels and lower the number of school dropouts. The efforts in question are laid down in the concepts of the *Primary Starting Qualification* and *A Well Prepared Start* (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschappen 1993). The necessity to raise educational levels, and in particular the possession of a minimum qualification, arises from two concerns. Firstly, from the (demand) side of the Dutch labour system in general: the development of the knowledge-intensive Dutch economy and the higher educational demands resulting from that. In addition, society is increasingly facing the consequences of demographic developments (de-greening

- and ageing), so that an increasing appeal to the skilled potential (hidden or not) in the current and future labour force will be needed. Secondly, seen from the perspective of the individual, the awareness of the increasing importance of a good qualification in order to contend on the labour market and to ensure career prospects.
- The prime example of policies to combat youth unemployment during the 1990s was the *Youth Work Guarantee Act (JWG)*. It tried to offer an integral and no-escape system approach to schooling, income and work, applying in principle to all young people between the ages of 16 and 27 who were registered as being unemployed for longer than six months. The problems with the JWG have been numerous. Firstly, a relatively large number of potential young participants do not register at the unemployment office at all and therefore remain undetected. Secondly, the number of jobs was often inadequate to fulfil demand and often too simplistic and undemanding. Thirdly, the intention of creating one approach for one problematic group, evolved into a system with different categories for different groups (with more or less chances on work) and also different income regimes. Furthermore, some youngsters were even excluded from the project -and benefits- if they did not comply with the rules. Recently, the JWG has been integrated into a new unemployment scheme since the beginning of 1998, the *WIW (Act on the Mobilisation of Job-seekers)*. The specific youth element of the JWG has been put away with accordingly. According to Van Hoof (2000), youth unemployment and the related government programs will in the near future become much more focused on a relatively small but marginalized group of youth with an accumulated set of problems.

3. Discourses on participation

During the 1990s, a broadly carried plea was made for active citizenship of children youth. Active citizenship or involvement in social life should guarantee that youth would develop autonomy and a democratic inclination within a multi-cultural society (Du Bois-

Reymond et al. 1998). On the basis of these ideas, advice was given and agreed upon regarding the promotion of participation of youth in various domains of their life worlds, at both national and international (European) levels.

In first instance, the concept of participation appeared to be understood especially in terms of political participation and in the Netherlands it was put forward as an issue that should apply to all youth. All young people should be heard and should have the possibility of influencing political and local decision-making. Later on, the Dutch Council for Youth Policy took a broader view of the concept and expanded it to a whole range of social activities and situations as for instance voluntary work, neighbourhood activities, employment, political activity, etc. By participating in all these different sectors, young people would gain knowledge about the social world, develop self-confidence, learn to make choices and learn to communicate with people from various backgrounds.

However, the young people who are involved in (political) participation policy do in general not reflect the whole youth population (for instance a lack of ethnic minority or lower-class youngsters), and at the implementation level, emphasis has been laid especially on problematic and disadvantaged youth. In the case of the latter group, it is thought that involvement and active participation in social life will encourage problem-solving abilities and will prevent marginalisation. Special attention should therefore be paid to young people in riskful situations and, consequently, the concept of participation has in the Dutch youth policy context become a tool of *prevention*.

Paradoxically, it appears that the young people who are in riskful situations often are limited in their participation choices. While it is certainly the case that new ways of thinking in relation to, for example, youth unemployment programs, is visible in the methods used, especially transition policies with regard to problem groups are still often narrowed down to the context of either being in fulltime education or having paid employment (cf. Integration Through Training 2001; INPART 2000). These specific 'preventionist' participation projects (early school leaving, unemployment) are also meant to provide more funding efficiency and save public costs (Du-Bois Reymond et al. 1998).

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Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment: <http://www.minszw.nl/>

Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS): <http://www.cbs.nl/>

Social and Cultural Planning Agency (SCP): <http://www.scp.nl/>

List of abbreviations

BBL	Beroeps Begeleidende Leerweg <i>Vocation Accompanying Pathway</i>
BOL	Beroeps Opleidende Leerweg <i>Vocation Educational Pathway</i>
HAVO	Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs <i>Higher General Secondary Education</i>
HBO	Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs <i>Higher Vocational Education</i>
JWG	Jeugd Werk Garantiewet <i>Youth Work Guarantee Act</i>
KMBO	Kort Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs <i>Short Senior / Medium Vocational Education</i>
Leerlingwezen	<i>Vocational education (dual trajectory)</i>
MAVO	Middelbaar Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs <i>Junior / Medium General Secondary Education</i>
MBO	Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs <i>Senior / Medium Vocational Education</i>
ROC	Regionale Opleiding Centra <i>Regional Training Centres</i>
VBO	Vorbereidend Beroeps Onderwijs <i>Pre / Junior Vocational Education</i>
VMBO	Vorbereidend Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs <i>Preparatory Senior / Medium Vocational Education</i>
VSO	Voortgezet Speciaal Onderwijs <i>Secondary Special Education</i>
VWO	Vorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs <i>Pre University Education</i>
WEB	Wet Educatie en Beroeps Onderwijs <i>Vocational Education and Training Act</i>
WIW	Wet Inschakeling Werkzoekenden <i>Act on the Mobilisation of Job-seekers</i>
WO	Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs <i>University education</i>