

EUROPEAN YOUTH TRENDS

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IV. SUMMARY

*There are only two lasting bequests we can give our offspring.
One is roots, the other wings.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this report

This report was written on initiative of the **National Youth Research Correspondents** - representatives of national research communities nominated by Ministries in charge of youth affairs to give advice on policy and research matters within the framework of the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe. It is based partly on reports submitted by the National Correspondents, and partly on a review of broader research literature and statistical data.

The information and comments included in this report are representative of the National Correspondents' concern for a balanced and effective strategy of action that would eventually underpin both young people's aspirations and expectations and those of the governing bodies of each country.

In this view, it is being acknowledged that, notwithstanding prevailing economic and social considerations and constraints, a number of worthwhile initiatives have been launched and sustained for quite some time around Europe. Young people in many European countries have become consciously aware of society's need to re-structure and re-evaluate its priorities as a result of both foreseen and unforeseen circumstances, such as economic upheavals and accelerating progress in areas such as information technology.

Young people have been successful in adapting to a number of unpleasant

circumstances. However, this fact does not distract our concern about overt actions that lead to the exclusion of a large number of young people from equal opportunities, from equity in educational provision and from obstacles to decent and fair employment. This is further confounded by elimination strategies that put youth in risk situations, such as those that foster prolonged and enforced dependency and that obstruct the development of relevant competencies and skills. It is unfortunate to note that young people's aspirations and expectations are often defined and managed by adults who have become experts in proposing strategies through which they can exclude young people from decision-making processes and social and educational benefits while, at the same time, appearing to offer participation and acquisition at all levels on a silver plate.

This report endeavours to outline common trends in the socio-economic situation of young people in Europe, trying at the same time to account to the greatest possible extent for national and regional diversities. We have chosen to limit our analysis to areas where the transformation of social institutions gives rise to the most visible conflicts and risks, and draw attention to the necessity for urgent reformulation of policy objectives and strategies in order to meet the challenges of our age.

The understanding of current youth trends requires a comprehensive examination of the socio-economic and cultural transformation of European societies that is beyond the scope of this report. We are aware that a more systematic examination of current youth trends should take into consideration the expected outcomes of reforms and programmes under way in each country. Large issues such as the evolution of values, family and youth cultures, gender relations and differences, the divergence between urban and rural environments, the interaction between young people and the media, leisure, and many others, have been deliberately left out of this report.

Our objective is to demonstrate, on the basis of a few key indicators, that **the socio-economic situation of young people today, and especially that of certain categories, raises concern** (some observers speak of a crisis situation or a generation time bomb) **that is not always reflected in policy priorities.** We have used quantitative data and expert opinions selectively, in an illustrative manner, and are conscious that the general picture might be de-centred, although not distorted, by the absence of information for some countries.

Under the effects of economic globalisation, all European societies have entered a process of renegotiating the scope and direction of policy intervention in the course of social development. Universal welfare mechanisms of the post-war period, responding to individual and collective needs, and conceived as a political instrument for applying the principles of *solidarity* and *social justice*, are now in competition with a concept of public spending increasingly defined as a means of enhancing economic prosperity and assessed in terms of *cost-effectiveness*. Many social policy theorists argue that the role of the state at the end of our century should be one of securing *both* the nation's economic competitiveness, and social justice. The development of human capital on an all-inclusive basis, beyond the elitist model maintained by present educational and training systems, is said to be a way of encouraging both the rise of competitive high-skill, high-technology

economy, and a society with a high level of social and cultural cohesion. Moreover, social cohesion, apart from its intrinsic value is argued to be, for today's economies, a central element of the economic infrastructure, together with telecommunications, public administration, legal and financial frameworks, etc.

2. Why focus on youth?

Policies aiming at the development of human capital as a means of fulfilling the above economic and social objectives should be based on coherent strategies for initial training, life-long learning and social integration of vulnerable or disaffected groups and individuals. The information society shifts the emphasis from social and economic structures to processes, from status to function, from role to initiative. Sociologists argue that the process of socialisation is replaced in the information society by a process of individuation, while politically designed project for social progress is replaced by individual's life project. Social cohesion becomes therefore crucially dependent not on a shared belief in an ideal model of society but on the ability to help everybody acquire those cognitive, emotional and psychological resources he/she needs to become a successful economic actor and realise his/her personal project.

Life-long learning is the key term for the information society. It designates a permanent process of personal development, as well as an institutional framework supporting this development. But life-long learning is also a complex of cognitive faculties (capacity to acquire, critically assess and generate knowledge) and attitudes (to learning as a value in itself, not as an instrumental value) that can be most successfully developed during the initial stages of education and training.

Welfare is the other key term which, in the context of youth policies, should be considered not simply a means to improve well being, but as an essential condition for individual development. This report will demonstrate that early exposure to welfare deficit is the main risk factor of exclusion whose effects can hardly be repaired at later stages in life.

It is all the more justified, therefore, to attempt and develop policies targeted at youth as a specific group, and based on well-defined objectives. These policies should focus primarily on education and welfare as instrumental to the acquisition of personal capacities necessary for the empowering of the individuals in the realisation of their personal projects.

All European countries recognise that in our times investment in the development of human capital is crucial for nations' economic success. While the states lose their power to regulate economic processes by monetary and legal measures, the domain of human capital is still within the competence of national authorities. Investment in education (in the largest sense of the term) and youth welfare beyond current levels is the single most effective measure for the prevention of risk and for halting the cycle of reproduction of social exclusion. It would be therefore inadmissible if policy makers, preoccupied with the short-term policy benefits, overlook the opportunity to lay the foundations of sound and comprehensive policies designed to give all young people opportunities for a positive start in life.

3. What is youth?

For most practical purposes, youth is identified as an age group - in the general case in Europe comprising the population between 15 and 25 (sometimes 30) years of age. Societies "construct" youth as a specific group, and define the status of young people through explicit (legal) and implicit (cultural) norms. Formal transition of adulthood, i.e. the acquisition of full citizenship rights, is normally accomplished within these limits. From a sociological point of view, however, transitions to adulthood are shaped not only by norms, but also by social conditions and practices in the fields of economy, education and training, justice, welfare...

Conceptually, youth has been defined in the sociological literature as a stage of socialisation and transition to adulthood. At present, however, youth is being re-evaluated as a **central and strategic phase inside the life course**. This conceptual shift required by the growing individualisation of the process of growing up, i.e. what sociologists call "diversification" of pathways into adulthood. Individuals determine their adult positions through a process of "negotiation" instead of simply following paths pre-defined by their social origin. This does not mean, however, that origin no longer matters: the individual's capacity to negotiate successfully his/her transition is still strongly dependent on the cultural capital and the support provided by one's family, as well as by opportunities and constraints related to gender and region.

Youth becomes, in this sense, a decisive life-phase where the main choices and decisions determining the rest of the life course, are made, and the main social competence and qualifications acquired.

But modern youth is also characterised by **individualisation and autonomy**, by **specific peer-fashioned youth cultures and lifestyles** that exercise an often stronger influence of young people's attitudes, choices and behaviour than family and other institutional contexts.

The changing nature of modern youth has far-reaching implications for youth policies. Youth policies today can only be effective if they provide sustained support to individual development rather than seek to mould personalities; facilitate and inform individual choices rather than bluntly discipline; awake for (life-long) learning rather than impose standard knowledge in standard ways and then register educational and labour market failure...

The provision of universal services and support frameworks, based on the assumption that formal equality of rights and opportunities is a sufficient guarantee for social justice, needs to be reconsidered in the light of modern knowledge of youth transitions. Social divisions are accentuated, and not levelled-out by the effects of globalisation. The demise of social support frameworks such as family and community calls for policies that reinforce individual's capacity to acquire resources (and particularly knowledge resources, self-reliance and social competence) needed for a successful establishment into adulthood. Such policies should take into account the specificity of both individual situations and local contexts and should therefore

be de-centralised and flexible.

Youth policies cannot be divorced from structural policies concerning market regulations, employment and welfare support. Furthermore, youth issues are often revelatory of tensions related to the changing perceptions of questions of social justice, liberty, rights and equality in societies in transition. In this sense, youth policy at any given moment, if it is sensitive to, and reflects youth values, life-styles and expectations (and those tend to evolve from one generation to another) can be seen as a predecessor of policies that would be extended to societies as a whole.

Contemporary youth policies operate within the context of modernisation associated with globalisation of economic exchange, but also with the process of European integration. Against the background of the huge diversity of national and regional conditions, and the need for a more contextual and individualised approach to youth transitions, youth issues could only be addressed within the framework of European policies by means of establishing common standards and guidelines derived from good practice. The "youth trends" outlined below cover areas of particular importance to youth transitions (education, employment, risk behaviour). Focusing primarily on similarities among European countries, the report is meant to contribute to a better understanding of the general convergence of modern youth conditions in Europe and thus to the elaboration of policy guidelines.

This report evokes in very broad lines the general tendencies of structural change European societies are undergoing in order to emphasise that **structural challenges call for structural responses** and not minor adjustments in institutions and practices. Such structural responses imply a thorough revision of the architecture of national education, training and welfare systems meant for young people to phase them out with the nature of modern youth. Furthermore, youth policy, understood as a framework of, and support to individual development and competence-building, should seek to exercise **less direct normative control** over young people, be more sensitive to distinct individual situations, and operate through **"contextual conditions"** (media, youth arts, peer cultures, youth associations, consumer patterns...).

This report does not seek to put forward concrete proposals for policy action. Policy development should be based on comparative analysis of specific regional and local conditions (material, social and cultural resources and policies) and against the background of the challenges of the modernisation process in Europe and in the world today.

II. GENERAL YOUTH TRENDS IN EUROPE

With the reservation that much of the available data is partial and thus difficult to compare, or old, some common trends can be established with a reasonable degree of certainty for the majority of countries in Europe.

1. Better educated, single and in good health

Young adults (around 25) from middle and upper class backgrounds tend to

hold university degrees leading to relatively secure employment. They are likely to be single (perhaps cohabiting) and without children. Higher qualifications correspond statistically to higher employment rates¹ and better health. Gender differences in terms of education, employment, life style and attitudes are also less pronounced for the middle and upper class youth.

Against this generally positive background, however, economic modernisation and the corresponding changes in social structures produce divisions and tensions that are one of the most characteristic features of modern European youth scenery. **Major disparities in social-economic position exist across young people from different social origins (class and ethnicity) and from different European regions, but also across generations.**

a) Significant differences in situations by social and ethnic origin

Social origin is still the most important factor of successful entrance into adulthood. Social exclusion tends to be more widespread among young people from minorities, those living in inner city or disadvantaged rural areas, those with disabilities and those who have been brought up by single parents or those leaving care. The very high unemployment rate for minority youth is seen by some observers² as the underlying cause of the rising rates of single mother families (statistically, poorly qualified and unemployed girls tend to marry earlier and divorce, or have a child out of the wedlock). These families are in their turn associated with poverty, which closes the vicious circle of cross-generational transmission of marginality.

In Austria, "two thirds of youngsters [of immigrant origin] start their professional life as unskilled workers...Compared to Austrians of the same age foreign nationals are clearly disadvantaged in terms of educational and career opportunities...For Austrian society the combination of social disadvantage, urban ghetto life and discrimination due to foreign nationality is a social time bomb."³

In Bulgaria, "The processes of social differentiation are fastest among the young. Among the young the education booms, and again among them we find an unprecedented growth of illiteracy. The young received a real access to world culture and again the same generation we witness a cultural degeneration and quasi-cultural consumption of an unseen scope. Young people practice sports more than ever before and at the same time their peers ruin their health on a terrifying scale in at least one or two 'fashionable' ways"⁴.

b) Great diversity of conditions depending on country and region

In Central and especially in Eastern Europe, swift social transformation

¹ Although there is a tendency, still quite weak, towards the de-valuing of higher educational qualifications

² *The Truly Disadvantaged*, William Wilson. University of Chicago Press. 1987. Important exceptions are some national minorities (in Central Europe for instance, e.g. the Hungarian minority in Romania) whose situation is similar to that of the majority.

³ *Second Report on Youth in Austria*. Federal Ministry for Youth and Family, Vienna 1995, pp. 8 and 15

⁴ *Bulgarian Youth in the Period of Transition*. Committee of Youth and Children, Sofia 1996 (in Bulgarian), p. 67

engendered uncertainty, drastically growing crime rates, declining living standards, and disintegration of systems of welfare support resulting in a degradation of the quality of life for the populations as a whole. However, for the young generation, the overlap of the difficulties related to individual transition (to adulthood) and the societal transition, amplify problems beyond comparison with the other parts of Europe. The rules and mechanisms for social integration and success, once clearly defined, have become less transparent, leaving a greater space to hazard (according to a recent survey, a large part of Bulgarian youth relies on the good luck more than anything else for the fulfilment of their aspirations). Young people have to negotiate their paths into adulthood drawing on their personal and family resources in an environment where criteria for merit and reward can be contradictory (for instance the distinction between a "normal" and a "criminal" career have become a little blurred; the instrumental value of education for social success can no longer be taken for granted⁵).

At the other end of the spectrum, Maltese youth seems relatively sheltered from the side effects of modernisation (unemployment, uncertainty, lowering living standards). While the waves of de-traditionalisation and modernisation cannot be kept away from its shores, the country has made a consistent effort to slow down drastic and radical changes. However, the socio-economic situation of Maltese youth is confounded because of the dichotomy that exists between dependence on the family up to the age of marriage, and the economic independence stipends and other credit facilities are projecting. Young people are at the crossroads of re-evaluating issues such as dependence, family ties, hard-earned cash and cost-effectiveness of ordinary life projects. Therefore, given its size and site, and history, Malta has its own menu of young people's dilemmas.

c) A growing disparity between generations

Studies demonstrate that different generations are at present in an unequal position both in relation to the way the globalisation processes affects their **well being and opportunities** (age effect), and their **attitude** to the developments related to globalisation (generation effect).

- Those (adults) who are already established in the labour market suffer less from the globalisation's effect on **job security and working conditions**. Protective labour market regulations in force apply to those already in jobs, while the newcomers on the labour market are more exposed to precarious job arrangements.

For example "In Italy, the risk of poverty because of unemployment is confined to the entry level, but once *in* the labour market (*in* meaning here a secure regular job) it is more difficult to get *out*. Rigid *hiring* and *firing* regulations slow down the turnover, *freezing* employment"⁶.

⁵ Only 53 % of young unemployed in Bucharest are interested in participating in vocational training programmes: Statistical Report of the General Directorate for Labour and Social Protection, Bucharest 1996

⁶ *Policies for the Unemployed and Social Risk Absorbers: The Italian Experience*. Dell' Aringa, Carlo and Samek Lodovici, paper presented at the MIRE conference "Comparing Social Welfare Systems in Southern Europe, Florence 22-24 February 1996

The same problems of entry into the labour market have been registered by studies in Norway⁷, France⁸, as indeed in most of the European countries, including Central and Eastern Europe.

The present young generations in all parts of the continent are victims of a particular disadvantage regarding **the material conditions of existence**. While the older age groups can rely on accumulated resources (own accommodation, professional experience, savings, social networks), the young have to face the combined effects of an extremely unfavourable housing market⁹, high unemployment and the diminishing quality of working life, missing or insufficient welfare assistance¹⁰ and greater exposure to unhealthy or "anti-social" life styles.

The **consequences for young people's physical and psychological well being** can be serious, affecting the rest of their lives.

The Russian example is perhaps the most striking one and we lack information for other European countries where the situation may be similar. In 1995 only 10 % of school graduates were in good health, 40-45 % were chronically ill. The Ministry of Health has found that for one third of 15-17 year olds the choice of future profession was limited by their health conditions. Besides reasons like deteriorated environment, decline in the quality and availability of food and the crisis of the health care system in Russia, specific factors are pointed out such as the decrease in sports and other recreational facilities formerly provided for free by trade unions and state enterprises.

- Young people's **attitudes to work**, while remaining generally positive, are nevertheless clearly different from those of the previous generations.

A German study reveals that career or purely financial concerns tend to disappear and that young people's motivation (from all educational and occupational categories, as well as the unemployed) lies in self-realisation and social integration through work¹¹. Although the majority of young people still place job security at the top of their value scale, a growing part of them prefer self-employment to salaried

⁷ see *Explanations of Youth Unemployment*, Torild Hammer IN Young, Volume 1, Number 4, 1993

⁸ *Attitudes des jeunes à l'égard du travail au cours des années 80*, Claude Dubard et François Potter IN Jeunesses et sociétés, Armand Colin, Paris 1994, pp. 34-37

⁹ 78 % of young Romanians (15-29) still live with their parents. As many as 44 % of married young people are in the same situation.

¹⁰ Suffice it to say, that in some cases if you're 19 to 24, and you're a single mother, and you have a child under seven years of age, then you will not be covered by the training - and may be cut off the living - allowance provision. A study conducted in Germany by Vaskovics and Shneewind, the *per capita* income in upper class families drops to the welfare minimum when adults support financially not only their household, but also that of their children who live on their own. IN Jeunesses et sociétés, p.62

¹¹ *Le rapport au travail des jeunes*. Martin Baethge IN Jeunesses et sociétés, Armand Colin, Paris 1994, p. 153

work¹²

Eastern and Central European youth is characterised by a more instrumental perception of work¹³ compared to their western counterparts, but also compared to their parents.

In a longitudinal study carried out by the Russian Academy of Science, young people ranked professionalism as a factor of achievement in life on the second position in 1990 and on the sixth position in 1997. Higher ranks are now given to useful contacts, family background, and physical strength¹⁴. This shift in values is easy to understand since the work socialisation of a growing part of Russian youth occurs in the "shadow" economy which is estimated to make up around 40 % of national economy.

2. Major problem areas

This section provides a more detailed examination of reasons for, and consequences of disparities outlined above, focusing on three areas of particular importance for young people's biographies: employment, education, and risks associated with drugs and delinquency.

2.1. Unemployment

The youth labour market in the 1990s is characterised by falling relative salaries, dwindling opportunities for permanent and full-time employment, and high unemployment rates.

"Changes in youth unemployment move with greater amplitude than those of adults. Indeed, in Britain it has been calculated that if the unemployment rate for males raises by 1 %, the unemployment rate for young males under 20 years excluding school leavers raises by 1.7 %".¹⁵

2.1.1 Youth unemployment is still higher among the least qualified: all labour market surveys demonstrate that there is a clear correlation between educational attainment and labour market success. However, in some countries endemic unemployment is affecting better-qualified job seekers to

¹² As a IARD survey on young Italians and the work on the field of crafts points out, over 60% of young interviewees prefer free-lance to salaried employment, 33% and would consider earning less if this means also working fewer hours. There are only slight variations in attitudes of young people with different level of cultural capital. (Istituto di Ricerca S.c.r.l. Via Soncino, 1997). According to a recent Swedish study, 20 % of the repondents had a preference for self-employment (Young People, Their Life Projects and Plans for Future Professions, B. Jonsson. Paper presented at the conference "Youth and Unemployment in Europe", Smolenice October 1997)

¹³ *Le rapport au travail des jeunes*, Martin Baethge IN Jeunesses et sociétés, Armand Colin, Paris 1994, p. 165

¹⁴ *Social Development of Youth. Report of the third phase of the study*. V. Chuprova et al, Moscow 1997, p. 7

¹⁵ *Young People's Understanding of Society*, A. Furnham and Barrie Stacey, Routledge 1991, p. 72. This pattern has been established during the recession of the 1970s/80s and is still very much valid on the Continent.

an unprecedented level. Whereas in Portugal 76 % of unemployed 15 to 29 year old had not completed compulsory education in 1985, in 1996 unemployment affected all categories of young people, with graduate unemployment reaching 7.3 %. Gender differences with regard to labour market position vary significantly across the countries. Still, in the general case, for men increasing age lowers the risk of unemployment. For women, however, the risk does not decrease with age.

Youth unemployment rates in Eastern and Central Europe are comparable to the EU average (about 30 %) but the reasons behind the facts are somewhat different. "Many of the state enterprises that formerly recruited graduates from vocational and professional schools have closed or downsized, leaving the young people with no roots forward... New career roots have appeared - jobs in private businesses, self-employment and unemployment for example. Links between these destinations on the one hand, and young people's family and educational backgrounds on the other, have typically been weak or non-existent".¹⁶

Unlike the EU countries where unemployment is far more pronounced for young people without, or with very limited qualifications, in some of the former socialist states it is almost equally spread among educational levels.

In Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria, the unemployed are more likely than the self-employed to have completed only elementary education but the majority of the unemployed are not particularly poorly qualified. It is sometimes argued (for instance in the case of Slovakia) that it is not the lack of qualified labour force but the insufficient supply of qualified jobs that is the reason for high unemployment rates.

This means that employment policies need to have a different emphasis from those in Western Europe where the focus is on vocational training programmes, the development of entrepreneurial skills, financial and infrastructure support for the creation of enterprises, and reinforced job search systems and job counselling. The educational and training systems of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe need to adapt to the demands of liberal economies in the context of globalisation. The qualifications they offer are still not competitive enough, especially those related to foreign languages, computer skills and knowledge about the functioning of the economy.

2.1.2 Another common trend for Europe as a whole is that the periods of unemployment are getting longer¹⁷. At the same time, long-term unemployment has been proved to diminish the chances for finding a job (an Irish study shows that young people who have been unemployed for more than one year have a 74 % probability of remaining unemployed the following year¹⁸). Thus some observers warn against the danger of establishing a

¹⁶ *Youth Unemployment and self-employment in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia*, K. Roberts. Paper presented at the conference Young people and Unemployment in Europe, Smolenice October 1997

¹⁷ In Finland in 1989 the average period of unemployment for young people was eight weeks, in 1994 it was already 25 weeks.

¹⁸ *Putting Youth on the Agenda*, National Youth Council of Ireland, 1996, p. 33

perpetual underclass as a new development linked to the globalisation and the disappearance of non-qualified jobs. The existing welfare mechanisms do not provide an adequate response to long-term youth unemployment: they have been tailored to provide temporary support to those in need after an accidental loss of earnings, or permanently in case of disability, not a means for social reintegration compensating for structural disadvantage.

The long-term young unemployed receiving no benefits represent the group most exposed to crime, drugs, family and emotional problems, etc. Although in some countries the group does not seem to be growing, the gravity of the problem from the point of view of social justice and individual rights is alike all over Europe.

Experts note that the constitution of youth as a distinct phase of life (as opposed to a transitional situation of short duration) requires particular social policies and the recognition of social rights specific to young people: the right to education, to housing and material support in case of unemployment. **However, any universal solution is bound to confront a growing diversity of living conditions and life styles that render its success uncertain.**

2.1.3 Currently a significant number of young unemployed are excluded from welfare support. In most European countries school leavers cannot claim unemployment benefit until they are 18, or unless they have had, and lost a job. In Poland only two in three young unemployed receive benefit; in the Czech Republic the figure is around 50 %; in Bulgaria around 30 %. In France and the UK young people below 25 who do not qualify for unemployment benefit do not receive the minimum welfare support on the assumption that their families should care for their subsistence. In the UK, an estimated 89 % of 16 to 17 year olds receive no benefits. In Italy (which is, in this context, representative for Southern Europe, though not for strictly all Southern European countries, Malta being an exception) there is no consistent legal framework for unemployment benefits and the right of a person to receive support depends on the financial resources of municipality.¹⁹ In Finland and UK, youth unemployment benefit is subject to the applicant's readiness to participate in a training scheme and is seen as inadequate compared to the work trainees are expected to do.²⁰

The young unemployed are disadvantaged regarding the reception of unemployment benefits compared to the other age groups. In many countries school and university graduates are only entitled to a benefit after a "waiting" period which can be as long as two years. The fact that young people are over-represented in temporary employment that often does not entitle them to benefits is also a factor of age-based inequality.

Current welfare arrangements are disproportionately geared to protect established rights (to unemployment benefit, pension) but do not guarantee the rights of newcomers to the labour market. Thus the "universal" welfare

¹⁹ *The Institutional Structuring of Power*, Yuri Kazepov IN Jovens em mudança, Actas do Congresso Internacional "Growing up between centre and periphery". Lisboa, 2-4 de Maio de 1996., Edições do Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa No 10, 1997, p. 169

²⁰ *Review of National Youth Policy*, Finnish Ministry of Education 1997

systems have become one of the central factors of the marginalisation of youth.

Societies try to respond in very different ways to the youth unemployment problem: inflation of the number of disabled receiving living allowance (the Netherlands), the excessively prolonged stay in education (Italy and Austria), Italy's 12 million self-employed, "youth" jobs subsidised by public budgets and tax exemptions (France). **Little, however, has been done to adapt welfare provisions to the changing structure of needs.**

"In the last 10-15 years young people's direct experiences of welfare have been changing. They changed statistically in most countries from zero to a majority of those receiving social assistance. These [new] experiences have been related to unemployment and lacking rights to unemployment benefits for most young people, or they had these rights but at insufficient levels... Serious Nordic studies are showing that the distribution of welfare between generations is increasingly developing in favour of the elderly while the young generation is the loser ("the new poor")²¹. The results of a recent study in Switzerland, based on official definitions of poverty, demonstrate that young people are more affected by poverty than any other age group, with a particularly high poverty rate for the age group 20-29²².

2.1.4 Young people are often forced to take jobs inappropriate to their qualifications in order to cross the barrier of first labour market entry. Having no savings or other resources to "keep them going", they are often bound to take a "dead-end job", even only to qualify for unemployment benefits, or claim work experience when they lose it.

The analysis of the implications of changing educational institutions and rising skill requirements for labour market entry in Sweden reveals that the general upgrading of skill levels does not apply to jobs held by the young workforce. This is partly compensated by a minor rise in mobility from unskilled to skilled jobs, but trying out several jobs has a negative effect on upward mobility. The positive impact on upward mobility of shorter programmes in the old educational system has vanished after the expansion and reorganisation of secondary education²³.

"In all Southern European countries the rate of youth and adult female unemployment is considerably higher than in the rest of Europe; there are several factors explaining this difference: the lack or the poor functioning of vocational training systems discourages employers to hire young people without previous work experience; trade union policy is focused on the protection of employed workers... A large share of young people of both sexes enter working life only after a

21 Nordic Youth: Citizenship and Welfare. A proposal to the Nordic Committee of Ministers. Ola Stafseng and Advisory Group on Youth Research, November 1997, pp. 13-14

22 *Switzerland*, P. Rothlieberger IN A Statistical Portrait of Youth Exclusion, A Siena Group Monitoring Report, ISTAT N°1/1997, p.203

23 *Essays on the Functioning of the Swedish Labour Market*, Stig Blomskog (doctoral thesis Stockholm University 1997)

long period of semi-employment in part-time, seasonal or precarious jobs in the informal sector of the economy; some get a full-time job only when they are over 35".²⁴ In Greece, a significant proportion of young people work on the "black market"²⁵, and do not appear in unemployment statistics.

2.1.5 As far as employment conditions are concerned, the situation of "new entrants" tends to be more strongly affected by market liberalisation.

UK studies demonstrate that the 16 to 19 age group has the highest proportion of temporary workers (18%) and that females account for the majority (53%) of non-permanent employment.²⁶ Similarly, in France non-permanent and part-time jobs represent 41 % of all jobs for the age group under 25 but only 8.2 % for the totality of jobs.²⁷ In Finland, in 1989 61 % of those aged between 15 and 24 had full-time permanent jobs. In 1993 the figure had dropped to one-third²⁸.

Although it is not a novelty that the pay of young employees has at all times been lower than that of older and experienced employees, there is some evidence that the average starting salary is diminishing in both absolute and relative terms.

In March 1995 the net monthly salary of those employed for the first time in France was inferior by 7% to that in 1991. The average net monthly salary for the same category of employees has also diminished in relative terms: from 75% of the average salary in 1991, it fell to 65% in 1995.²⁹

The large discrepancy between the wages of young and older employees is a development that followed the slowing down of economic growth and the recession of the 1980s. Here, the effects of generation and age have been superimposed to the effect that the balance between remunerating work experience (age) and qualification is largely lost³⁰ and that the age pyramid and the pyramid of professional hierarchy overlap more than before. Higher educational qualifications no longer compensate for the lack of work experience in terms of remuneration.

²⁴ *The Delayed Entry into Adulthood: Is It Good or Bad for Society?* Alessandro Cavalli IN Jovens em mudança, Actas do Congresso Internacional "Growing up between centre and periphery". Lisboa, 2-4 de Maio de 1996., Edições do Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa No 10, 1997, pp. 180-181

²⁵ For instance, it is unofficially estimated that around 50 000 people, the majority of them under 30 years of age, are providing "shadow" educational services.

²⁶ *Temporary Work and the Labour Market*, J. Atkinson, J. Rick; S. Morris and M. Williams, IES Report N° 311

²⁷ *Chomage et emploi en mars 1997*, Claude Gissot et Marie-Annick Mercier. INSEE N°530, juin 1997

²⁸ *Review of National Youth Policy*, Finland 1997, p. 158

²⁹ *Débuter dans la vie active au milieu des années quatre-vingt-dix : des conditions qui se dégradent*. Sophie Ponthieux IN Economie et Statistique, N° 304-305 1997, pp.37-38

³⁰ *Le salaire du trentenaire : question d'âge ou de génération?* Christian Baudelot et Michel Gollac IN Economie et Statistique, N° 304-305 1997, pp. 1-35

Among the reasons for this development is the reduction of the working time of young employees (part-time work) and a decrease in the hourly wage levels.

Swedish figures confirm that youth is clearly becoming a low-income group: in 1991 47.8% of 16 to 29 year olds were classified as "low-income" against 15.5% in 35 to 74 age group.³¹ Data from the 1995 UK Labour Force Survey suggests that young employees will have great difficulties in increasing their earning power. In spring 1995 almost half of the jobs occupied by school leavers paid less than £4 per hour. The fact that this was also true of nearly 25 % of all jobs in the economy leaves them with dim prospects for finding better paid work, especially if they start their careers in sectors where they are unlikely to receive training in the kind of transferable skills needed for a shift to better paid jobs.

In many cases the de-pricing of youth labour is the result of deliberate strategies (Thatcher's allegiances for youth "out-prising itself on the labour market", "youth" wages in France) witnessing a double standard in the validity of regulations across generations and challenging the consistency of the concept of social justice.

The general tendency outlined above is toned down by **specific developments in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe** where the old state salary standards coexist with rates established by the free labour market.

For instance, two thirds of the university graduates in the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and in Latvia receive less than the average salary as they are employed in the state sector (as teachers, medical staff or civil servants). On the other hand, young lawyers, economists etc. employed by large private companies receive two to three times more than older employees with comparable qualifications who work in the state sector. Thus the sector of employment is more significant than the age factor in income distribution.

2.1.6 Vocational training programmes for the young unemployed are criticised all over Europe. They are said to provide outdated professional qualifications; to benefit exclusively employers who use trainees as a labour force (and often as a source of tax exemption) but do not offer them employment contracts at the end of the training periods. For the European Union, the percentages of young people aged 15 to 25 seeking a job and not receiving any form of training ranges from 4.6 % in Germany to 19.8 % in Finland, the average being 9.5 %³². In Denmark, Finland and Norway reforms are being carried out to focus on providing broader knowledge and skills rather than narrow qualifications that can be best acquired on a job. The traditional division between academic and vocational training is no longer

³¹ *Living Conditions, Values & Attitudes of Young Adults in Sweden. Summary.* Joachim Vogel, Stockholm 1994, p.7

³² *Labour Force Survey.* Eurostat 1996

adequate as jobs involving basic skills and repetitive tasks and requiring little knowledge tend to disappear. A system of education allowing for modules (developing simultaneously skills and knowledge) to be assembled by the individual although his/her would correspond better to the contemporary notion of "professional qualification" valid for limited space and time.

It has become increasingly common, particularly in the North of Europe, for young people to start working while they are still in education or training, sometimes as early as 12 to 14 years of age. Unlike ten years ago, the reasons for this are not simply financial (pocket money or supporting one's studies) but represent a strategy for establishing contacts in the world of work, as well as acquiring work experience. In 1987, 23 % of young people from the EU countries aged 15 to 29 doing part-time jobs named "getting a qualification" as a reason for working while still involved in education; by 1995 the figure was 33 %³³.

2.1.7 Employment services in Central and Eastern Europe currently tend to apply passive measures. On the other hand, young people are not seen as a priority group in training and qualification policy for the unemployed.

In Bulgaria, two thirds of unemployment services' budgets are used to pay unemployment benefits and only one third for training schemes. In Latvia, young people represent only 1.1 % of the total number of unemployed referred for vocational training although they are, as everywhere, the age group most affected by unemployment. In the past three years, the proportion of funds allocated for retraining in Poland was 0.8 % in 1991 as compared to unemployment benefits 82 %. Moreover, in certain provinces with the highest levels of unemployment, the number of unemployed benefiting from various courses is smaller than the national average. In the opinion of many Polish labour offices, the unemployed - particularly those with low levels of education - do not really want to retrain. Retraining does not guarantee employment and, in practice, does not offer better career prospects.

In most European countries, the most common way of finding a job is through networks of family and friends (in around 80% of cases). This is a mechanism largely unavailable to disadvantaged young people. Employment services still play an insignificant role in recruitment due to inadequate information facilities and weak or non-existent outreach initiatives. Therefore, one of the priorities for youth employment policies should be the development of integrated youth information and counselling facilities, available in disadvantaged areas and providing comprehensive and up to date employment information.

2.1.8 Conclusion

Youth unemployment should be taken all the more seriously as research results suggest that compared to the employed, the young unemployed tend

³³ *Youth in the European Union. From Education to Working Life*. European Communities 1997, p. 43

to be more depressed and with lower self-esteem³⁴. They present increased psychosomatic and psychological symptoms and increased alcohol and narcotic abuse³⁵.

UK research revealed that having a job correlated with good health as only 7 % of those in full time employment were in poor health against 31 % of women and 23 % of men out of work³⁶.

In Central and especially in Eastern Europe, besides the psychological and material difficulties associated with youth unemployment, the outflow of young people risks posing serious demographic problems in the future. Armenia has lost nearly one fifth of its population to emigration. In 1995, over 70 % of young Slovenians were prepared to go abroad forever or for a long period. Bulgaria has lost between 1985 and 1992 460 000 people in outward migration, while in a recent survey two thirds of school leavers declared their wish to emigrate while one in four stated that they would do anything to achieve this.³⁷

An OECD paper draws attention to educational failure as a central factor of labour market exclusion:

"A wide variety of labour market policies have been tried to improve youth job prospects. One lesson from this experimentation is that early intervention is vital in terms of improving prospects later. By the time a young person leaves school, it is very costly for "active labour market policies" to overcome the handicaps of poor educational preparation and the de-motivation that can accompany it. Preventing educational failure is a community and societal responsibility. Here, improving early childhood development and care is essential. This is not only a question of social equity, but also a key factor in improving the longer-term health of OECD economies.

Therefore, policies that contribute to reducing early school-leaving are critical since anything less than a sound upper-secondary education, or its equivalent vocational qualification, may be associated with low earnings capacity and is insufficient preparation for getting into the job market and for access to further learning."³⁸

Youth employment policies can only be successful if conceived as a complex of macro-economic measures, re-structuring of educational systems, better educational counselling³⁹, more efficient employment information facilities, encouraging mobility, and labour market support⁴⁰.

³⁴ *Unemployment and Youth: A longitudinal study*, W. Patton and P. Noller, Australian Journal of psychology 36, 1984, P.399-413

³⁵ *Youth Unemployment and Ill Health: Results from a 2-year follow-up study*, A. Hammarstrom, U. Janlert and T. Theorell, Social Science and Medicine, 26 1988, pp.1025-33

³⁶ *Twenty Something in the 1990s*, ESRC Briefing, 1997

³⁷ *Statistics about the situation of young people in Bulgaria*, S. Langova, unpublished paper 1996

³⁸ *OECD Employment Outlook*, 1996

³⁹ For instance in Norway the number of students in social sciences and psychology is constantly growing, in spite of the bleak employment opportunities, and that of students in building and engineering is declining (Weekly Bulletin, issue 1-2 1998).

⁴⁰ Tax exemptions aimed at compensating for what employers consider as cost associated with the

2.2. Learning or education

Young people today stay longer in education as the numbers of those who pursue secondary and higher education courses is in a steady increase nearly everywhere in Europe.

Recognising the positive effect of this development on the broadening knowledge resources in society, many observers nevertheless underline the difficulties of educational systems to positively respond and adapt to social change. The major challenges can be summed up as follows:

- **Education tends to expand quantitatively (more students, longer studies) but to shrink qualitatively** (falling motivation of teachers and students, increasing drop-out, inflation of educational credentials, decreasing irrelevance of competence of school-leavers to the needs of the labour market). State school systems are heavily criticised all over Europe for their inability to motivate the young for learning and give them basic learning skills, for their failure to provide the competence needed by the contemporary economy (initiative, independent judgement and critical thinking, creativity, team work).
- **Education perpetuates social inequalities based on class, region and ethnicity instead of levelling them out.** The growing private provision of supplementary education and training (in Central and Eastern Europe but also in UK, and in the South, particularly in Italy) widens the gap between those who can afford it and those who cannot which reinforces social divisions.

2.2.1 Effective economic and civic participation of individuals in the information age depends critically on their knowledge resources.

Therefore educational systems should not content themselves with a development on an extensive basis but seek to invent a post-industrial, post-fordist model of teaching and learning.

The traditional education system praises academic excellence. Its structure facilitates the identification and deployment of scholarly achievers. It was, and remains, time-based and teacher-centred, with programs arranged by academic year, term or semester...

Such systems tend to be inert, orderly, bureaucratic, and resistant to change. They typically satisfy the perceived needs of societies in which the pace of social and technological change is modest and employment for life in a single occupation is perceived as the norm.

If individuals, organisations, and economies are to maintain control over, rather than be controlled by, their ever-changing social and economic environment, they must first understand it. This can be achieved only by actively building on the reservoir of human knowledge and skills through the acquisition of new knowledge and

lower productivity and bigger need for controlling young employees.

skills, as they arise and as they are needed. Hence, importance is being given increasingly to continuing professional education, 'just-in-time' recurrent training, and adult education programs.

Educational policies need to create learning opportunities that are accessible to all individuals at all times in their lives so that new learning needs are able to be met whenever and wherever they arise. Ideally, learners themselves are able to identify those needs or, if they cannot, they are at least able to obtain guidance as to how their needs might be validly assessed and reliably met. The nature of work and learning in our knowledge-based society and economy requires active participation by individuals and groups in the construction of knowledge. Therefore, the fostering of a culture of lifelong learning should be considered a primary policy objective. Schools should become places where knowledge is not simply transmitted, but actively constructed and where participation in collaborative learning, and building on learners' interests and experiences outside of school are major threads in educational reform and new curriculum standards.

Such considerations have revived, and to a large extent transformed, the concept of lifelong learning. In its beginnings, and under other names, it was perceived as an instrument of social change and an augmentor of economic advancement.

The first aspect is the widespread emphasis on education for economic development, reflecting an embracing of human capital theory more common in developing than developed countries. This leads to policies emphasising education for working life, and a concern to make sure young people can function in an industrial world dominated by modern technological developments. Along with this is a concern for methods of learning appropriate to this new world, emphasising problem solving and the application of knowledge, flexibility, creativity, and an ability to continue learning after schooling. However, there are a number of policies that contradict this concern for the methods of learning: a curriculum that is increasingly subject centred, accompanied by a 'back to the basics' movement and an increase in assessment and testing at a national level.⁴¹

School dropout tends to reach higher levels, which signifies that **educational institutions have failed to adapt to the changing needs and requirements of young people**. The evolution of school systems towards a "number cracking" approach have lead to a growing proportion of drop-outs, as the teaching and assessment methods have not been sufficiently adapted to the needs of new "client" groups. Furthermore, surveys demonstrate that grading systems based essentially on comparing students' achievement are disastrous for individual's motivation. Repeating a class is damaging to student's progress and an economical nonsense. It leads more often to general failure than to more successful studies.

⁴¹ *Curriculum Development and New Information Technology*. ROBERT MCCORMICK, Centre for Technology Education, The Open University, United Kingdom (<http://rice.edn.deakin.edu.au/Archives/JITTE/j113.htm>)

As the pool of dropouts continues to grow, employment opportunities for them are more limited, because today's economy requires of the labour force increased literacy, more education, enhanced technological skills, and lifelong learning. Research has shown that dropouts are more likely than other citizens to draw on welfare and other social programs throughout their lives.

The reconciliation of quantity and quality in education is obviously a substantial methodological and financial puzzle involving a fine balance between centralised and decentralised decision-making; the mainstream implementation of successful experiments; the resourcing of teacher training and teaching material, the achievement of a more intensive interaction between schools and industry. "To reform education in the full sense demands more than the acquisition of new teaching strategies and techniques. It stretches well beyond the technical dimension to a reconsideration of the "why," "what," and "how" of education. This reconsideration is fostered when professionals are part of a "learning organisation"⁴² with a culture that values reflection, change, and collaboration."

2.2.2 The effects of decreasing quality of education tend to be felt more strongly by groups suffering from social disadvantage. Among the social reasons for low educational achievement one counts:

- non-attendance at, or non-completion of school because of lack of motivation (poor job prospects in economically depressed areas) and family support (peasants, small farmers);
- lack of resources for additional educational assistance (as for instance in the case of immigrant children in Luxembourg whose insufficient knowledge of the host-country's language is a major obstacle to educational success).

Young people most affected by academic failure are those whose parents have the lowest academic qualifications.

in Portugal 77 % of those who have failed a year are children of parents who have not completed the compulsory school cycle. Another strongly affected group are children from traditional sectors of society, namely from peasant and rural working class background (failure rates over 70 %). The need for additional workforce to ensure the survival of small family farms means that children continue to be kept away from school⁴³.

In Austria 20% of all young people do not graduate from any kind of upper secondary school, for Bulgaria the 1992 figure was 7.2%. In some countries of Eastern Europe the tendencies of school attainment are dramatically regressive. Official Russian statistics show that 8,5 % of 15-19 years old have attended only elementary school, compared to 0.5 % of previous generations. In Latvia in 1990 91 % of students

⁴² Senge, P. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday, 1990

⁴³ *Fugirás à Escola para Trabalhar a Terra. Ensaio de Antropologia Social sobre o Insucesso Escolar*. Raul Iturra, Escher, Lisboa 1990

finished elementary school while in 1995 they were only 76.5 %. In those countries, where previously education was the single factor of upward mobility, the unleashed market forces have opened new roads of success and new career opportunities that do not take educational qualifications into account. The Russian national report states that a growing number of adolescents prefer street business to school.

In Slovenia, each year approximately 25 % of young people do not continue education at secondary level or drop out of secondary school. With each year of absence from education or employment those young people approach the status of a lost generation which will be difficult to enrol in vocational training courses or in jobs⁴⁴.

It is to be expected that with the graduate integration of former socialist countries in the global economy and the "normalisation" of their economic activity, education will recover its "market" value. However, a large number of those who are now missing their chance to obtain modern qualifications risk facing difficulties similar to those faced by unqualified job seekers in the countries of Western Europe.

2.2.3 All European countries have experienced a spectacular rise in the number of young people pursuing post-compulsory studies.

However, the general picture hides huge differences between countries and drastic disparities between the regions of the same country. For instance, in Romania the increase between 1989 and 1995 is by 155 %. In Russia the number of university students dropped considerably between 1985 and 1995, and is now back at the level of mid 80s. At the same time, the European North of Russia has three times fewer universities than the North-West which cannot be explained only by its smaller population. Similar regional disproportion in the conditions for education and employment can be observed in many other countries.

During the last few decades, post-compulsory education has acquired a double function: on the one hand, it remains the most universal instrument for cultural and economic socialisation; on the other, it has become a short-term remedy for the unemployment of the younger generations. This means that a simple quantitative growth of educational provision assures a relatively effective temporary "prevention" of the unemployment of graduates. An ever-growing number of young people are kept longer in education and training at a relatively low cost. In some cases, training provision for the unemployed amount effectively to an extension of compulsory education (e.g. the New Deal in the UK and the recent Finnish legislation) unemployment benefits being withdrawn upon refusal to enrol in a training scheme. The usefulness of such measures is disputable given the largely contested quality and relevance of the available courses.

At the present stage of economic development, businesses in Europe tend to invest more in technology than in employment in order to remain competitive on the ever broader and increasingly competitive markets. For some

⁴⁴ *Unqualified People - A group without Prospects?* I. Svetlik IN *Employment - Perspectives, Possibilities, Risks*. Ljubliana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1992 (in Slovenian)

countries, where economic growth is due mainly to gains in productivity but where governmental policies have followed the common pattern of encouraging people to stay longer in education, the *containment* function of education can be said to even prevail over the educational function proper. José Machado Pais highlights it in a paper drafted for the purposes of this report "the clearly perverse effect of increasing the level of the qualifications of the unemployed instead of reducing unemployment". He adds: "the countries of Southern Europe have the highest unemployment rates among the OECD countries for people with higher education. Portugal and Greece are the only countries where the unemployment rate of those aged 25 to 35 is lower among those who have left school with minimum qualifications than for those who have completed secondary or higher education courses".

Central and Eastern European countries need to meet the challenge of reforming their formerly over-centralised educational systems and the opening up possibilities for private funding of education while maintaining the principle of equality of opportunity. Public spending for education in most of those countries is lower than in the European Union, sometimes with a tendency to decrease in both relative and absolute terms.

In Russia public educational expenditure has fallen from 5.8 % of the GDP in the 1980s to 3.5 % at present while the GDP has itself diminished by 40 % (according to World Bank estimation). According to a recent Bulgarian survey, the importance of social background on educational achievement was two and half times lower in 1987 than the importance of individual merit. At present both factors have an almost equal weight.

Clearly, current educational policies (limiting sharply public support of universities, for example) do little to promote educational opportunities for socially disadvantaged groups. Even in countries with established welfare systems there is a fear that the progressive decentralisation of educational management and especially the increasing private financing of secondary and even primary schools, the notion of access to education as a welfare right is about to be lost. A Finnish Review of national youth policies raises the concern that "the eventual transition in education will be linked to a more general re-evaluation of the Nordic welfare model" on the basis of liberal standards. "In this context, the equality of educational opportunity is acquiring the characteristics of educational Darwinism, as the focus is increasingly shifting to open competition devoid of any egalitarian measures between individuals on both the educational and labour markets"⁴⁵. Britain has adopted an enterprise model of school management and financing with the effect that educational selection is now based on the wealth of parents rather than on student's merit⁴⁶.

2.2.4 Conclusion

Studies surface a growing tendency among young people to oppose institutional control and the socialisation influences associated with it. Much of

⁴⁵ *Review of National Youth Policy*, Finnish Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 143

⁴⁶ *Globalisation, Social Exclusion and Youth*. Phillip Brown IN *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change*, J. Bynner, L. Chisholm and A. Furlong (eds.), Ashgate 1997 p. 269

the socialisation process takes place now through peer interaction, the media, and in the consumption process. Despite the longer presence in educational institutions and prolonged economic dependence, modern youth is characterised by a relatively high, and growing, level of social-cultural independence.

Educational systems and the peer groups are becoming culturally two worlds apart. The much-discussed violence at school is a symptom of the emancipation of youth cultures from institutionalised adult control. The system's response to the violence phenomenon often reduced to policing, stronger enforcement of school internal regulations and more severe disciplinary measures address the symptoms, not the causes of violence. These causes, although barely studied, appear to be related to the process of individualisation and students' discontent to being subordinated to institutional power and impersonal rules, of being "de-individuated" by the "system". Alternative responses have been experimented on a small scale: giving more autonomy and responsibility to students in determining curricula, schedules and rules of behaviour; the constitution of age-mixed learning groups providing stronger adult presence not in the role of authority but in the role of peer. The successful proliferation of such models is a condition for the modernisation of education in Europe. It will depend upon a greater decentralisation and de-regulation of educational systems, but also more public support (methodological, pedagogical and financial) to the initiatives of individual educational establishments.

Strategies for improving educational provision should aim at closer interaction between the worlds of education and work. Comparative studies on the modes of transition from education to work confirm that earlier experience of working life (during the course of education), as in the case of Germany and the Scandinavian countries, favours the integration of young people into the labour market and the early development of an identity in the world of work.⁴⁷ Another objective should be the broadening of the notion of educational credentials to allow for a diversity of educational forms and contexts which encourage talents and skills that are economically useful but currently locked out from the formal recruitment process. Ultimately, the information (or learning) society will require a transition to models of education that recognise studying as a socially and economically productive activity, and stimulate the production, as well as the acquisition of knowledge within the educational cycle.

2.3. Risk behaviour as a factor of exclusion

Youth research is starting to build a conceptual framework for the understanding of the mechanisms and the extreme complexity of transition routes into exclusion. The family backgrounds of those young people who slip into drugs and trafficking, into "alternative careers" in crime or on the edge of the law have statistically common characteristics (low-income families, often missing parents and especially male relatives, poor school achievement). However, individual paths need to be studied and understood much more thoroughly than at present in order to provide the basis of meaningful and

⁴⁷ *Young People and Work*, F. Gamberale and T. Hagström (Eds), *Arbete och Hälsa* 33, 1994

effective prevention of exclusion⁴⁸.

2.3.1 Drugs

Research reveals a considerable diversity of national situations concerning drug consumption among the young.

Portugal witnesses a changing profile from consumption to trafficking, which means that the cycles of drugs and crime increasingly overlap and endanger even more the affected populations (a history of conviction aggravates exclusion). In the UK there is strong research evidence that the use of drugs has increased over the last decade and the number of registered addicts to hard drugs has doubled⁴⁹. In the Czech Republic the number of young people experimenting with drugs has increased from 6 % in the 1980s to almost 30 %. Furthermore, the age of first attempts in drug consumption is lowering as the drug "offer" is spreading around school areas. The general situation of youth drug consumption in this country is reported to be now similar to that of Amsterdam⁵⁰. In some countries (for example Romania) insufficient statistics make it difficult to establish trends with certainty but the accounts of specialised institutions lead to believe that consumption and trafficking are growing involving ever younger sections of the population.

In Germany, Austria and Switzerland, on the contrary, research shows that the attraction of drugs for young people is decreasing and that the age of drug consumers is raising.

Drug use most often cumulates with other social or psychological problems. UK school surveys have demonstrated that young people from single parent families and from homes without a full-time wage earner are over-represented among vulnerable youngsters. Moreover, the levels of school exclusion among these young people are high and young people themselves have frequently been in focus of police attention. The bulk of social problems have their root in young age as a function of families' economic conditions.

Most experts agree that the present school, employment and justice systems do not resolve the problem, but act a part of it by reproducing the processes of exclusion. In most countries drug consumption is illegal but law enforcement has failed to control illicit supply or to reduce illicit demand. On the other hand, it confronts young people with the difficult choice of breaking the law, often as a first step in a spiral leading to more serious offences. Finally, many of the adverse effects of drugs stem from the criminalisation of

⁴⁸ *Vulnerable Youth and Processes of Social Exclusion: A theoretical Framework, A Review of Recent Research and Suggestions for A Future Research Agenda*. Bob Coles IN Youth, Citizenship and Social Change in a European Context. J. Bynner, L. Chisholm and A. Furlong (eds.), Ashgate 1997

⁴⁹ *The Normalisation of Recreational Drug Use Amongst Young People in North-West England*. Measham, F., Newcombe, R. and Parker, H. IN *British Journal of Sociology*, 45 1994, pp. 287-312

⁵⁰ Data from 1995 and 1996 surveys of the Institute of Children and Youth of the Czech Republic.

drug consumption rather than from the drugs themselves⁵¹. While the understanding of the health risk associated with drugs should be the object of prevention strategies, the legalisation of various mild substances could prevent the risks associated with the stigma of a court record.

2.3.2 Delinquency

Youth delinquency, although not yet reaching the alarming rates of the USA or Canada, is becoming a serious issue for contemporary youth and social policy in all European countries. Recent changes in the methods of statistical registration of offences in a number of countries renders data regarding the evolution of youth crime rates unreliable. However, reports about a steady rise of youth offences attract media attention beyond precedent, often to the detriment of a realistic assessment of facts. Although it is true that offences committed by young people tend to increase and that the age of the offenders to decrease⁵², traffic and property offences continue to represent the bulk of all registered offences (more than 90 % in all countries) while the part of violence and serious crime register a very slight increase.

Involvement in offending and drug use amongst young people [in the UK] is widespread - one in two males and one in three females admitted to committing offences and the same number admitted using drugs at some time, though most offending is infrequent and minor. We know that a disproportionate amount of crime is committed by a hard core of persistent young offenders, with about 3% of offenders responsible for 25% of offences⁵³.

Discussions in research literature evoke a combination of factors favouring the engagement in crime.

- Disadvantaged family background (unemployed parents who lack the necessary cultural capital to support their children in their educational careers);
- the concentration of poverty in urban areas hampering the educational performance of schools (declining wages and growing unemployment of high-school leavers de-motivate from the pursuing of education);
- the particularities of identity formation in conditions of deprivation and lack of prospects (unable to gain self-respect through achievement in school or in a job, youngsters turn to illegal activities that bring the esteem of their peers);
- a youth culture in the inner cities endorsing short-term rewards. The rise

⁵¹ *The war on drugs. Prohibition isn't working, some legalisation will help.* Richard Smith, British Medical Journal. Volume 311, 23-30 DECEMBER 1995

⁵² With all the reservations that the court statistics do not necessarily reflect only the increase of committed offences but perhaps also the growing efficiency of police and judiciary, the figures are eloquent. The number of offences committed by minors in Russia doubled between 1991 and 1995. According to the estimation of criminologists the rate will increase by 40 to 60 % by year 2000 and will remain higher than those for the population as a whole. In Poland the number of verdicts for young offenders rose by 35 % between 1989 and 1991. In France juvenile delinquency increased by 80 % between 1989 and 1995.

⁵³ *Tackling Youth Crime*, Home Office Consultation Paper (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/tyc.htm>)

of “symbolic delinquency”, most visible in the form of urban violence, drives researchers to examine post-modern patterns of identity formation in the light of the process of “aesthetisation” of everyday life and the disappearance of dominant value models⁵⁴. Economic dependence increases the importance of social independence, that is, of having a status in the peer group that leads to pressure to take risks. The cumulated effects of the lack of authoritative adult life models and value systems, and the lack of motivating career and status prospects in the crucial phase of identity formation play a crucial role in the rise of contemporary youth deviance.

Young people who have been brought up in community care represent the perhaps most vulnerable category. Here, again, consistent information is missing across the countries but where available, it discloses troubling patterns of exclusion.

Although very few young people in Britain are in community care (around one %), almost one in four in ten youngsters in prison had spent time in care⁵⁵. A study of British young people in care⁵⁶ has found that three quarters had no educational qualifications at 16, compared to just 11 % among the age group in general. A correlation between growing up in care and homelessness and teenage pregnancy has also been reported. This data confirms again that risk factors tend to group together for certain categories of young people, proving the necessity of integrated strategies of prevention and social integration.

In Russia the number children in care is on the increase. The annual state report “About the Situation of Children in the Russian Federation” in 1997 stressed that after leaving care their situation on the labour market is particularly difficult due to inadequate education and training. New models of community care and experimental educational programmes have been developed but the initiatives are often blocked by the lack of finance.

Despite positive research evidence about the effectiveness of certain preventive and social integration strategies, they have not yet gained sufficient ground versus repressive approaches to youth delinquency in governmental policies. Neither are they conceived within the framework of general youth policies against exclusion and attributed sufficient resources. In the present state of events, criminal justice appears to belong to the array of factors of exclusion, making already disadvantaged young people even more marginalised through the stigma of a court record. Policy response to crime must shift more decidedly from repression to prevention focusing increasingly on at-risk young people and on the underlying social and economic factors associated with crime and criminality.

⁵⁴ *Anomie and Alienation: Violence and Knowledge in Youth Subcultures*. Nikos Gousgounis, <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Olympus/7722/youthI.html>

⁵⁵ *Vulnerable Youth and Processes of Social Exclusion: a theoretical framework, a review of recent research and suggestions for a future research agenda* IN Bynner, J., Chisholm, L. and Furlong, A. (eds.) *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change in a European Context*, Avebury: Aldershot 1997

⁵⁶ *Leaving Care and After*. Garnett, L., NCB: London 1992

Observers point out that there is a striking lack of coherence between criminal justice and welfare policies with regard to young people. In criminal justice they are the priority target group; in social security, they are of lowest priority⁵⁷.

Along with the adoption of broad crime prevention strategies, European societies need to develop a more tolerant attitude to minor offenders. Experience shows that alternative measures do not lead to an increase in the relapse rates. On the contrary, relapse rates for young people condemned to a prison sentence are very high (50 % in France, for example). The researchers' opinion is that "arguably, there are clear criminological indications that support the change taking place in prosecuting juvenile delinquency. Almost all young people are at some passing period involved in some sort of criminal activity, but no conclusions about a potential criminal career can be drawn from this as long as those juveniles are not cut off from social changes because of a prison record and its consequences".⁵⁸

Bob Coles draws from research evidence the following suggestions of social support and policy interventions that could help orient vulnerable young people towards more positive life styles:

"Integrated measures involving socially supported accommodation, training with real employment prospects *and* mobility to a more prosperous geographical area... offer care leavers a more realistic chance of making successful youth transitions than 'leaving care schemes' located on 'sink estates'. On the other hand, young people with special needs and disabilities require not so much an escape route out of the communities in which they live, but a more supported gateway *into* them"⁵⁹.

A recent study on the effectiveness of youth work in Scotland suggests "the transfer of resources from criminal justice to youth work as a means of reducing the long-term economic and social costs associated with crime"⁶⁰

In many cases reforms of judicial systems have taken place to promote a decriminalisation of certain delinquent acts, to denounce the tough sentences as a prevention measure, to raise the age of offenders treated by juvenile courts, and to strengthen pedagogical approach to juvenile delinquency (Austria, Netherlands, France).

A special effort must be made to reach young people at risk early and provide them with means and motivation to learn to recognise and avoid risks and

⁵⁷ *Youth Policy in the United Kingdom and the Marginalisation of Young People*, Howard Williamson IN Youth and Policy, 40. 1993, p.36

⁵⁸ *The Possibility of the Education of Children in Public without the Application of Force*. C. Pelikan and A. Pilgram IN Second Report on Youth in Austria, Federal Ministry for Youth and Family, Vienna 1995, p. 78

⁵⁹ *Vulnerable Youth and Processes of Social Exclusion: A theoretical Framework, A Review of Recent Research and Suggestions for A Future Research Agenda*. Bob Coles IN Youth, Citizenship and Social Change in a European Context. J. Bynner, L. Chisholm and A. Furlong (eds.), Ashgate 1997, p. 83

⁶⁰ *Evaluating Youth Work*. F. Cartmel, A. Furlong, S. Hall and J. Powney. Report for the Scottish Council, Education and Industry Department, 1997, P. X

take independent decisions. What can make a positive difference is the presence of caring and respecting adults in the context of institutions (schools, youth clubs, information, training and leisure centres) built on the principle of de-segregation of age groups.

III. Youth policy - a modernising force?

Youth policy is in transition - as a concept as well as practice. The original concept of youth policy was developed in the post-war period when re-affirming citizenship as a *political* relationship between individual and society was a major concern (state power was feared as potentially "destructive" and it was urgent for civil society to *re-appropriate* control over the state). At present, the force of contradiction has shifted back to society whose internal divisions are increasing to the point of threatening social cohesion. The state is required to resume its role of "mediator" between conflicting groups. The changing function of youth policy should be analysed in the light of that reverted relationship.

1. Youth work: a policy partner, a policy instrument

Limiting for a long time their *raison d'être* to the support of voluntary youth activities, youth administrations regarded youth organisations as their most legitimate, and even only partners. They are now in the process of constructing a new platform based on the open defence of youth rights⁶¹ and the provision of structural conditions for youth development, redefining some forms of youth work as a part of these conditions.

Youth work has always been considered, and rightly so, a valuable instrument for developing young people's interest in, and capacity for social and political participation, and more recently as a framework for the social re-integration of vulnerable or disadvantaged youth.

The picture of youth work structures and their evolution is extremely varied across the continent. Represented mainly by youth organisations for a long period since the beginning of the century, it has incorporated new forms of open youth work and community education in the 1970s and 1980s and evolved towards special prevention and integration programmes targeted at vulnerable groups in the 1990s. As the management and fund-raising activities within youth work have acquired a greater importance, a tendency towards the professionalisation in the context of both voluntary associations and youth service could be established but the role of volunteers has remained essential⁶².

Independently of the evolution of forms and methods of work, the core principles (identified by Thompson⁶³) distinguishing youth work from other

61 A delicate operation as the very term as "youth rights" connotes a certain opposition between "young" and "not young", but no more than the - more or less accepted nowadays -opposition between women and men, straight and homosexual, majority and minorities...

62 *Young People and Associations in Europe*. Vanandruel, M., Amerio, P., Stafseing, O. and Tap, P. Council of Europe Publishing 1996

63 *Experience and Participation: Report of the Review Group on the Youth Service in England*,

services and from other forms of education - experiential curriculum, participation of young people in decision-making, voluntarism, and a non-directive relationship between youth workers and young people, have never been questioned.

It is difficult to estimate the number of young people who are members of youth organisations due to the absence of a standard definition of what a youth organisation actually means. If one excludes from the category of youth organisations the sports, religious, political and trade-union structures and groupings, the average membership in youth organisations in the EU countries is about 7 %. If, on the other hand, one accepts an enlarged definition, the numbers are significantly higher (over 50 % for the 15 EU member countries)⁶⁴. It is estimated that some 25 percent of children and youth in Poland are involved in various youth organisations and groups. 4.7 % of Romanian young people are members of youth associations, 1.4 % of them of non-political nature. It is estimated that only 1 % of the Romanian youth takes part in voluntary projects and activities. In the Czech Republic 18-20 % are more or less active members of youth organisations (65 % of them with a sports profile). Around 20 % would be ready to do voluntary work for limited periods, preferably abroad which raises questions about the real reasons behind this desire⁶⁵.

Still, there are countries where youth services and community education are only starting to develop (Central and Eastern Europe, but also Austria), others where provision is being reduced (for example in Sweden a large number of youth clubs has been closed in the past years), or growing (in France state- and community funded jobs are being created in the social care sphere within the framework of the governmental programme against youth unemployment). Youth work agencies and organisations receive public financial support but the extent of it is judged by them as unsatisfactory. Youth work actors are more and more confronted with a narrowly instrumental perception of youth work requiring quick and massive results in counterbalancing the various factors of exclusion.

A recent expert evaluation of the effectiveness of youth work in Scotland gives an overview of the difficulties of evaluation and provides a valuable analysis that can be relatively safely extrapolated to contemporary youth work conditions and outcomes in general. We shall therefore quote it at length:

In the modern world, effective youth work can help equip young people with useful skills and information and may help them develop as responsible citizens... The failure of youth work to address the complexity of modern youth transitions must be regarded as a major shortcoming of the service and is reflected in the age-related decline in participation among young people. Mainstream youth provision tends to centre on young people who are in the organised leisure phase: as they begin to favour more casual leisure pursuits there is a noticeable drop in the uptake of youth services... The main models of youth work

HMSO 1982

⁶⁴ The Young Europeans: Eurobarometer 47.2, European Commission 1997

⁶⁵ Data from a 1997 survey of the Institute of Children and Youth

were developed at a time where the client group was a much more clearly defined age group and one indicator of its limited effectiveness relates to the extent to which youth work fails to attract or meet the needs of young people who face complex decisions and challenging economic circumstances. The main exception to this was found in relation to detached and outreach youth workers who frequently managed to make effective contact with young people who found more traditional forms of youth work inappropriate. At the same time, we were struck by the low priority given to the maintenance of this type of provision which can provide the most vulnerable young people with an essential source of support⁶⁶.

It is crucial that decisions concerning the scope and content of youth work provision are made in each country on the basis of thorough evaluation of effectiveness of the range of existing forms. However, it is also important to realise that youth work provision aimed at disadvantaged groups can only be beneficial if conceived as part of coherent preventive and integration strategies and that such strategies should be at the core of contemporary youth policies.

2. Towards a broader concept of youth policy

For some observers, the modern concept of youth policy as a complex of strategies supporting youth transitions is over-ambitious and impractical. They evoke the heritage of administrative divisions as an enormous obstacle for the design and implementation of an integrated youth policy. In many countries, "universalist" youth work is within the competence of youth ministries or committees while special prevention lies with Social Affairs or the Interior. The attempts made in some countries (notably the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Russia...) to deal with youth issues in inter-ministerial committees have done little more than raise the awareness of sectorial administrations such as health, education or justice, of the need for a specific attention to problems related to young people⁶⁷.

Often without dedicated budgets, these bodies have had a limited impact. In Finland, the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs established in 1995 as a consultative body seeking "to build co-operation and networks across party-political and administrative boundaries"⁶⁸. Relying mainly on experts, the Council "pushed aside and excluded from youth work politics" organisations and youth workers. "And it seems that many new, socially relevant and politically hot issues concerning young people (their life in the margin

⁶⁶ *Evaluating Youth Work*. Cartmel, F., Furlong, A., Hall, S. and Powney, J. The Scottish Council for Research in Education report, 1997, pp. 105-106

⁶⁷ According to experts, the creation of a specific governmental body (the Russian State Committee for Youth Affairs) with limited competence and resources (0.01 % of the GDP are allocated to youth policy) cannot compensate for the massive degradation of youth service infrastructure. The promising experiments with youth enterprises never received the necessary support). The forthcoming reforms will deprive enterprises from the remnants of facilities for sports, health, culture and recreation to transfer them to local authorities. As most of the communities do not have enough budgetary resources for the maintenance and exploitation of infrastructure, it will probably be lost for young people.

⁶⁸ Review of National Youth Policy, Ministry of Education (Finland) 1997, P. 206

between school and employment, faced with the uncertainty and the risk society) constitute a clearly distinguishable set of problems, but when it comes to the making definite decisions in budget preparations, young people are left in no-man's land"⁶⁹.

Youth policy will have, in its new role, to face uncomfortable tensions around inter-generational distribution of resources. "In the past, at least in countries like Italy, the interests of the younger generation have been largely disregarded", states Alessandro Cavalli⁷⁰. He adds that "...in many other fields the interests of future generations are treated as secondary to those of the present adult generations; see, for example, the heavy burden placed on future generations by the accumulation of huge public deficits, or the way in which, in many countries, old age pensions are financed through the contributions of the younger generation of workers... We know that the 'conflict of generations' has to a large extent disappeared from the domestic arena, but this conflict is structurally embedded in some crucial institutional arrangements of our societies".

Indeed, the issue of the respective burdens and benefits of different generations with respect to welfare systems is a potentially conflictual one. It has already made an appearance in the public debate in Italy, where the proportion of old age pensions in the GNP is approximately 15% (against an EU average of 10%), but given the persistent demographic trends all over Europe (except in Turkey), it should be taken into consideration early and seriously.

Many countries have proceeded to a decentralisation of youth policy competence with a view to introducing a greater flexibility and ensuring better and quicker response to local needs. However, as a French observer notes, the effect is the acceptance of ghettos concentrating together marginalised families, most often from minority background and offering no future to young people, stigmatised only because they happened to live there⁷¹. Youth policy is now facing a dramatic need for re-conceptualising the scope of its responsibility for youth transitions. In Pat Allatt's terms "rather than a shared commitment between state and parent, increasingly the resourcing of the young is reallocated to the family, whatever its changing form" which leaves little hope for young people whose families dispose of insufficient economic, social, cultural and affective resources⁷². Inventing forms of socialisation into citizenship, alternative and complementary to the

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 245

⁷⁰ *The delayed entry into adulthood: is it good or bad for society?* IN *Jovens em mudança*, Actas do Congresso Internacional "Growing up between centre and periphery". Lisboa, 2-4 de Maio de 1996., Edições do Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa No 10, 1997, p.185

⁷¹ *Les politiques de la jeunesse en France : Crise des modes de régulation traditionnels et essoufflement des "nouvelles" réponses étatiques*. Dominique Duprez IN *Jeunesses et sociétés*, Armand Colin, Paris 1994, p. 307

⁷² *Conceptualising Youth: Transitions, Risk and the Public and the Private*. Pat Allatt IN *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change in a European Context*, J. Bynner, L. Chisholm and A. Furlong (eds.), Ashgate 1997, p. 92

dwindling socialisation through entrance into the labour market, is a matter of urgency concerning youth as a whole.

A statement found in a research paper on Polish youth holds true for most countries in Central and Eastern Europe:

... the government has not yet adopted a clear position on matters affecting youth, and its decisions are often uncoordinated and haphazard. As a result, young people are discouraged from becoming involved, and they no longer believe that they can shape the reality around them. They become passive and helpless, convinced that it is no use trying. Apathy and passiveness have their roots in the inefficient education system, which does not encourage students to achieve success and tends to kill their initiative. As a result, children's early experience of living in society often makes them withdrawn, unconcerned, and indifferent⁷³.

3. Virtually absent: a new meaning for "participation"

In virtually all European countries young people are severely under-represented in political structures and institutions:

in Switzerland, of all candidates for the National Council in 1991, 17 % were under 30 and none was elected.⁷⁴ The Swedish Youth Board surveyed in 1995 the political influence of young people aged 18 to 35. Although this group constitutes one third of those entitled to vote, it is represented by only 1 % on the boards of government agencies.⁷⁵

Surveys confirm that young people are not interested in "classic" party-led, ideology-based, election-driven policy-making but are, instead, often sensitive to the "big issues" of global politics such as the environment, nuclear weapons, the protection of animals, the defence of human rights, the fight against racism, assistance to developing countries etc.

For example, 44 % of the current generation of citizens in the UK in their twenties hold the view that politicians are in politics mainly for their own benefit⁷⁶.

The general European trend should, however, be interpreted carefully as it may turn to be easily reversible.

For instance, the Fourth IARD youth survey (1997) reports a striking phenomenon of radicalisation of young people's political affiliations with an increase of the vote for "ideological" parties (from 49.9% in 1992 to 65.4% in 1996), especially those to the right. This development is reportedly matched by a "collapse of the Catholic vote, the decline in commitment towards the community and the rediscovery of politics in terms of interest and as a matter of

⁷³ *The Situation of Children and Youth in Poland*. International Youth Foundation, 1992 (<http://www.iyfnet.org/why/poland.html>)

⁷⁴ *Switzerland*, P. Rothlieberger IN *A Statistical Portrait of Youth Exclusion*, A Siena Group Monitoring Report, ISTAT N°1/1997, p. 222

⁷⁵ *The Winding Road to Adulthood*, National Board for Youth Affairs, 1996, p. 25

⁷⁶ *Twenty Something in the Nineties*, ESRC Briefing, 1997

discussion rather than a place of experience and action”⁷⁷.

The expression of this interest is more often participation in demonstrations and campaigns, and also membership in movements.

The World Values Surveys 1990-92 carried out in most European countries reveal that politics is of importance to only 6 % of young people (17 to 30) while 11 % of the general population hold that view. However, half of young Europeans are members of voluntary associations; in Denmark the number is as high as 85 %. Sports and leisure activities take the lead (26%), followed by trade unions (19%), religious groups (13%), educational groups (12%) and youth organisations (8%). Furthermore, 90% of those surveyed are in favour of environmental protection and the defence of human rights.⁷⁸

French sociologist Alain Touraine devotes his latest book to the analysis of the rapid disintegration of societies constructed along the lines of a collective political project, where social norms are embodied in institutions and transmitted through a structured process of socialisation. The State as a principal agent of progress and justice is attacked from the one side by the economic globalisation reducing traditional social and cultural links to commercial interactions, and from the other, by the fragmentation of cultural identities and the raise of new forms of communitarian integritism. Society, which was once the framework of the participation of the individual in the creation of the material and cultural conditions of existence, has ceased to be a producer of norms. This stage of evolution is characterised by two phenomena: *desocialisation*, i.e. the disappearance of social roles, norms and values and *depolitisation* - the inability of political order to determine the social order. Economic relations are no longer built upon social relations; education can no longer pass the norms of behaviour (discipline, work ethics, correspondence between merit and reward) required by the world of production⁷⁹.

In the light of the above theoretical framework, the widely discussed withdrawal of young people from political engagement and participation finds, at least partly, a sociological rationale. Disenchanted and lacking confidence in the weakening political institutions⁸⁰, poorly represented in “power positions” young people prefer to invest their efforts in securing a place in the world of production and consumption (by means of education and employment but also through involvement in crime). Political decisions have become difficult to justify in the eyes of the younger generation of European citizens in terms of social utility or national interest. This applies not only to “ordinary” politics but also to matters such as

⁷⁷ *Fourth IARD Report on Young People in Italy. Synopsis of the Main Results, Istituto di Ricerca S.c.r.l. Via Soncino, 1997*

⁷⁸ Results quoted in *Second Report on Youth in Austria*. Federal Ministry for Youth and Family, Vienna 1995, p. 20

⁷⁹ *Pourrons-nous vivre ensemble?* Alain Touraine, Fayard 1997

⁸⁰ Only 39 % of young Swedes consider that they can influence Sweden's future (The Nineties Report - currently running project. Description at <http://www.bikupan.se/ung/report90.html>).

warfare. In Spain, France, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands over 70 % of young people oppose compulsory military service (In 1994 the Turkish ministry of defence estimated that there were 250.000 evaders of conscription and deserters. Pacifists speak about 400.000, although the country lacks the legal framework for conscientious objection). Socialised in humanistic, environmental and pacifist values, young people are confronted with a reality where states produce and sell weapons, tolerate appalling rates of environmental pollution, and deal commercially with countries and organisations disrespectful of human rights.

Researchers and practitioners are only starting to raise questions about the possibility of considering new forms of social and political participation attracting the young - Internet fora, consumer campaigns - as an alternative to classic forms of participation. Young people are withdrawing in ever-greater numbers in cyberspace where they feel members of fluid and multiple "communities". The very sense of belonging to a community deviates from its spatial origins to encompass forms of solidarity and participation based on a choice, rather than on background or location.

Some critics evoke the dangers of direct democracy and demand educational systems that are more efficient in upbringing multifaceted, reactive, analytical and adaptive individuals capable of resisting the de-culturing pressures of the market and de-individualising "security" of cultural fundamentalism. Others note that private investment in consumer publicity outplays public investment in education and that markets are more reactive to individual choices than representative institutions and bureaucracies.

But central questions concerning the above phenomena are still to be addressed: Can markets become an arena for the formulation and enforcement of social choices? Could consumer activism take over where democratic processes seem inadequate? What are the limits of "fine tuning" of consumer choices with respect to complex social issues such as solidarity, individual and collective rights? Can "consumer democracy" be made subject to collective "checks and balances"? How and to what extent should young people be educated to behave intelligently as consumers, considering economic, social and environmental impact of their choices?

If the only actor that can bridge the worlds of economic and cultural production is no longer society but the Agent, understood as individual capable of understanding the world, emancipated but not alienated from it, defining him/herself through his/her personal history and not as a part of a collective project, is it not the role of youth research and youth policy to identify and develop those structures and mechanisms that could ensure the upcoming of the Agent?

IV. SUMMARY

Life trajectories are becoming non-linear, i.e. at almost any moment in life one can "start from scratch" his/her family life, professional career, in other words, take decisions that are "normally" taken while one is "young". Furthermore, the typical occupations of "adults" and "youth" are increasingly often switched over: school and university students work in ever growing numbers (the Scandinavian countries show the strongest trend in Europe in

this respect) while adults go back in education for further professional training or post-compulsory courses. As more and more adults return to school and university, these places cease to be age-bound, and the worlds of school and work become less separate and sequential. The era when youth looked forward to work and adults reminisced fondly about their school days is over. Now young people look back to their working days and adults ahead to schooling. The new maturity is reflected in lower ages of first sexual experience of teenagers, but also in the extraordinary return to juvenile labour which has occurred over the past twenty years, especially in the United States but also in other developed nations. In some cases, teenagers are working more hours than they attend school. Researchers remark that traditional adult and youth lifestyles are becoming increasingly similar under the influence of a series of cultural developments.

The passage to adulthood has become in many ways more uniform and compressed. The life courses of different classes of youth, as well as the two sexes, have become much more alike, with the time between leaving school and entering into the responsibilities of family and home drastically reduced between 1945 and 1970. Rather than being a 'moratorium,' a condition of becoming, today's youth is much more a state of being: being a worker, being a consumer, being a spouse, even being a parent. It is true that since 1970 there has been a strong tendency to delay marriage and parenthood, but this does not mean delaying the experiences and relationships that earlier generations associated with heterosexual maturity. The dramatic rise in cohabitation and single parenthood is further evidence that the life course has flattened out and that the boundaries between youth and adulthood, which once loomed so massively, are no longer what they once were.⁸¹

Young people find it increasingly difficult to "settle" in jobs and families for the well-known reasons of lack of financial resources and the shrunken labour market, but also for reasons of cultural change, and delay significantly transitory choices that are supposed to be made while one is (biologically) "young" and within a limited period of time. This makes it less evident to clearly identify youth as a transition stage, i.e. a life phase with unique and important characteristics.

It seems that society is failing to recognise youth as a crucial stage in life where important decisions and choices are made determining the unfolding of the rest of individual's life. As if any mistake made in the youth phase can be "corrected" (a family can be "reconstructed"; new qualifications obtained through the proliferating adult education courses).

This blurring of boundaries between youth and adulthood, between preparation for "active life" and "active life" itself, does have positive effects on individual liberty and identity. However, the "juvenisation" of adult society, most obvious in cultural expressions, as noted by a number of observers, tends to produce more important effects. The most striking of them is the growing indifference to the central importance of the youth phase for the

⁸¹ *Vanishing youth: The uncertain place of the young in a global age*, John R. Gillis IN YOUNG, vol. 1, N°1 1993

shaping of personality but also for the forging of biographic elements which determine the entire social trajectory and status of the individual.

Furthermore, the growing domination of market forces over the forces of social order in the structuring of social interaction, engender distortions in the relationships between generations. The young are at the centre of market interest as consumers (products and messages are directed mainly to the young despite their declining share in the population) and producers (in the front-edge sectors), while social and political institutions maintain the primacy of experience (i.e. age) in the distribution of positions. The expansion of liberal economy endangers the social order based on generational division of power whose resistance takes the form of blindness to specific youth problems. The tension between society and economy is therefore at the root of the relative public disinterest in youth issues as subject of policies and target for public investment.

The above argument draws on age as a principle of social division and conflict of interest. Its central thesis is that policies shape transitions, instead of being shaped by them. Educational, employment and welfare regulations can in fact delay or accelerate the process of "growing up", i.e. the acquisition of an adult status through financial independence and autonomy.

Youth is a stage of life carrying an enormous developmental and integrational task. The vast majority of young people accomplish successfully their passage into adulthood, making meaningful choices and maintaining a sense of purpose and personal integrity despite difficulties related to declining labour opportunities, and the general uncertainty about their future. For an important minority, however, the "risk" society, whose manifestations were broadly described in this paper, appears to be the negative counterpart of the information society.

On the other hand, young people exist actively as citizens (producers, consumers, learners and political actors) and can therefore claim welfare entitlements and rights reserved till now to older generations. When these rights are refused, young people's relations to adult institutions become increasingly problematic. In Bernhard Rathmayr's wording "Young persons are no longer willing to go along with limited possibilities of participation and self-determination...Redefining the relationship between young and grown-ups seems to have reached a half-way mark: the young no longer let themselves be determined by the authority of adults, grown-ups are not yet ready to offer partnership and solidarity"⁸².

The mainstream society worries about the projections of these developments on the future identities of today's young people, notably related to the evolution of the role of work and consumption in the construction of social identity, and fears unpredictable radical turns in choices that could endanger social continuity.

The progressive disappearance of "social order" and the support frameworks

⁸² *Grown Up Children*. Bernhard Rathmayr IN Second Report on Youth in Austria, Federal Ministry for Youth and Family, Vienna 1995, p. 32

and certainties attached to it, make individuals, and particularly the young, extremely vulnerable and is at the root of growing "social pathologies" such as delinquency, drug-taking, hostility to foreigners, suicide. Lower level of education correlates strongly with these phenomena. Developing and putting in place educational technologies and frameworks aiming at the empowerment of individual, is a way of preparing young people to face the complexity of ever more dynamic economic and cultural environment.

The dilemma of contemporary youth policy administrations is rooted in the need to find a new balance between their identity as a part of the "establishment", and the interests of its "client" group. They need to critically question the technocratic approach to youth "problems" and put the issue of the structural origin of inequalities firmly on the agenda. This shift of perspective is imposed by the "absolute necessity for democratic political institutions to protect and encourage the individual as an Agent in its aspiration for combining instrumental rationality and cultural identity in constructing his/her personal history"⁸³. To accomplish that, youth policy actors need to reach beyond the problem-centred approach and recognise youth life trajectories as a complex product of the interaction between individual agency and social structure.

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⁸³ *Pourrons-nous vivre ensemble?* Alain Touraine, Fayard 1997, p. 201