



Youth policy in Estonia



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Report by an international group of experts
appointed by the Council of Europe

European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ)
26th meeting, Budapest, 25-27 October 2000

French edition:

La politique de la jeunesse en Estonie

ISBN 92-871-4597-0

Cover: Graphic Design Workshop of the Council of Europe

Photo cover: © Council of Europe

Inside photos: © Council of Europe

Council of Europe Publishing

F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex

ISBN 92-871-4598-9

© Council of Europe, July 2001

Printed at the Council of Europe

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Preface

This evaluation report is a response to the Estonian Review of National Youth Policy (2000), presented by the Ministry of Education. Both publications are the sixth of their kind, preceded by Finland (1997), the Netherlands (1998), Spain and Sweden (1999), and Romania (2000). The review processes are carried out by the Council of Europe, and are presented there all together for discussion.

The Estonian review has been evaluated by an international group of experts, including:

- Ms Raymonda Verdyck, Belgium, Chair of the group, representative of the CDEJ
- Mr Petr Levitski, Russia, representative of Advisory Council
- Ms Siyka Kovacheva, Bulgaria, youth researcher
- Mr Herwig Reiter, Austria, youth researcher
- Mr Dan Trestieni Ion, programme adviser at the Council of Europe, co-ordinator of the group
- Mr Ola Stafseng, Norway, youth researcher, Rapporteur

The group went on two study visits to Estonia, at the end of April and the beginning of July, and there will be more about these visits and working procedures in chapter 1.

The group would like to give their warmest thanks for their hospitality and friendliness to the large number of institutions and individuals who received us and discussed our questions with us. A special and hearty thankyou goes to our main hosts for the two visits, Toivo Sikk and Tiina Häng at the Ministry of Education, for always being ready for questions and discussions, for good meals and pleasant company.

Summary

This report is the readers' evaluation of the Estonian national report, resulting from the study visits and a wide range of follow-up questions and discussions. The group finds the national report to be a valuable and competent document about Estonian youth and youth policy, making the objectives, structures and measures transparent for an expert group of outsiders.

The tasks of the group are to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Estonian youth policies, and to offer critical remarks on issues that should be elaborated or developed further. At the same time there is serious recognition that Estonia is a country in a period of rapid transition and change, which makes all forms of evaluation difficult.

Estonia appears, in general, to be well prepared for its own ambitions of becoming a modern, European country as quickly as possible, compared to most other transitional countries. There are two important framing factors for their youth policy, the first being the heavy impact of education and educational values, and the second being the heritage of important but, in budget terms, expensive national institutions. This means that the "free space" for new policies or initiatives is or has been limited in a time of reconsolidation. But just at the time of the review exercise, 1999-2001, a set of new structures and measures for the renewal of youth policy seemed to be released.

Perhaps because of the strong educational traditions, this report finds that youth participation, influence and "education for democratic citizenship" have a weak standing up till now in Estonian youth policy, and a "youth voice" is lacking in the national report. This report is also critical of the ways Estonian youth policy is handling the existence of Estonian and "non-Estonian" youth,¹ partly from a human rights point of view, partly because research data contradict most of the assumptions underlying these issues.

In the main conclusions and recommendations the report is very positive about the present "state of the art" in Estonian youth policy, in the sense that important heritages from the past have been saved, and the tracks laid out for the future seem quite rational. Estonia has also, with remarkable

1. According to the Estonian authorities, the notions "Estonians" and "non-Estonians" are expressed in Estonia through the aggregate notion of "ethnic community" (ethnic majority – Estonians, ethnic minorities: Russians, Ukrainians, Tartars, Finns, etc.).

rapidity, entered various types of European partnerships on an equal footing. But in the present plans there are huge tasks outstanding, especially in the reconstruction of the division of labour in the youth field between state, county and municipal levels.

Finally, the report emphasises that this is a European report, in the sense that this exercise should be a mutual learning process for Estonia and Europe, and lead to improved agendas for a European youth policy.

1. Introduction

It is important to be very aware of the fact that Estonia (in parallel to Romania) is the first transitional state to undergo the evaluation exercise of the Council of Europe. Until now the national reports and discussion procedures have been based on states with a long standing within the Council's democratic and youth policy agreements and co-operation. After ten years of determined enlargement of this co-operation, Estonia offers a unique opportunity for a mutual exchange of experiences and viewpoints on the prospects and limitations of what a transition state means in youth policy, not only for Estonia, but for the Council of Europe and other member states. This does mean, however, that there is a need for sensitivity on how to approach the observations, interpretations and discussions, in order not to disturb the further learning of all participants.

1.1. Objectives

This report is not an evaluation in the strict sense of the concept. The main evaluation has been done by Estonian authorities through their national report. It is not possible for the international team to follow the same routes and repeat the same work. But it is possible to approach it from a different level of (meta-)context, considering how Estonian authorities understand or perceive the situation of their youth and their youth policy measures, and also their self-understanding as authorities or constructors of the youth policy executive bodies.

Based on this understanding, this report should first of all serve as a mirror for the Estonian authorities, and also for all others in Estonia involved in youth matters. As a mirror it should reflect how a group of experts from outside read and interpret their self-evaluation, and the questions and answers relating to the report and other issues. The task is to develop these reflections into some sort of critical framework, enabling the identification of strengths and weaknesses in Estonian youth policy. This aspect of the report will hopefully result in an advisory document for Estonia.

A second purpose of the report is to contribute to an increasing standardisation and professionalisation of the reviewing of youth policy in Europe. This arises from the fact that numbers of report have been done, and new reports should now make it easier to read and discuss them in a more comparative way. This function of the report has two opposing characteristics, as it is a

report on the individual and distinctive case of Estonia, at the same time as serving purposes of generalisation.

The third function of the report is linked to the previous one, but the emphasis is more clearly on policy development. This implies that the report should be a review of a single state, but in ways that lead to learning processes between individual states, and to mutual learning between European and state levels, in other words, what can Europe learn from Estonia, and what can Estonia learn from Europe?

1.2. Theoretical assumptions and working procedures

A Council of Europe report on youth policy in the year 2000 does not start from scratch, whether it concerns the concepts of youth policy or of youth itself. Several years and decades of experience have accumulated into platforms of the self-evident or given, whether this be on the policy side or in the ways of defining youth. Such platforms can and should always be challenged, but that is generally the nature of scientific reports. Since this is not a research report, there is some need for clarification of some of the basic considerations or theoretical assumptions on youth and youth matters.

Firstly, the relationship between young people and youth policy can be treated and conceived in a relevant and analytically useful way through the guiding themes from the United Nations International Youth Year in 1985 – participation, development and peace (Stafseng 1998, 1999). The specific meanings and implications of these themes have undergone further elaboration and added experience since then, making them into even stronger pillars at global and national levels. “Participation” has moved from a strategic idea to a more basic view on youth as agent and as a human resource (“youth as a resource”). “Development” has been strengthened as a basic perspective on the mutual relationship between the individual and society, that the society in developing the young individual is developing itself, and vice versa. “Peace” is not only a youth perspective on warfare and armament, but has come closer to everyday lives as critical youth policy statements related to human rights, xenophobia, prejudices, civil wars, etc.

Secondly, that youth can be conceived through theoretical universalities, and observed through empirical particularities, where youth policy can be seen as a “mediator” between the restraining and/or enabling interests and forces of society. This leads to the assumption of “youth as a construction”, in the double sense that young people are constructing themselves, and the particular society is constructing its youth. Young people can then at the same time become victims and agents in ongoing discourses of their society, and the actual youth policy agendas or frameworks can be perceived as one, but not the only one, of these discourses.

Within this evaluation procedure, this means that it is not possible for any fixed approach, but instead for some relativistic curiosity. In one country it is possible to find a weak official discourse on youth, but strong levels of discourse in the society as a whole, and then quite the opposite in the next country.

A third point is that there is more than one concept of youth. In most of the post-war decades in Europe youth meant adolescents or, in reality, teenagers. During the last fifteen to twenty years the youth concept has been enlarged to include older and older cohorts, sometimes specified as post-adolescents, prolonged definition of youth ages or young adults. For particular reasons, the transition states avoided these experiences until the changes after 1989/90, and these changes in youth realities (and concepts) have probably occurred too rapidly to become identified in relevant ways. But today the whole of Europe is confronted with two different youth phases, and the significant lines of distinction between them are unclear both from a theoretical point of view and in their further implications.

Even if the theoretical contributions need to be elaborated, the youth policy field can independently set up some necessary criteria for policy measures, for instance up to what age limit are policy measures for the right to a good and adequate youth life relevant, though at the next broad stage youth policy measures also have to include strategies for "becoming adult".

As a fourth point, after a differentiation of youth phases, there are sets of other important differentiation factors at each stage, by dimensions such as wealth, gender, ethnicity, urban/rural, etc. An emphasis on the heterogeneity of youth leads to two different perspectives and questions. Firstly, the question of advantaged and disadvantaged youth related to such differing factors, and also concerning the awareness in youth policy of these questions. Secondly, social differences also lead young people into subgroups and subcultures, that form patchworks reflecting the liberality or illiberality of modern society, as well as life chances and risks (Furlong and Cartmel 1997).

Fifthly, the local/global dimensions of youth lives have been the emerging scenario of all scientific and policy discussions over recent years. What exactly global/European means, or where the distinctions are between local/national, are the subjects of complex discussions. But, in any case, the basic assumption must be that youth belongs to more than one sphere or life world at the same time, and experiences different, competing or opposing modernities simultaneously. And the practical outcome for European youth policy is a statement justifying present youth policies as national/local and European at the same time.

About working procedures and methods

The international team has been composed of different kinds of expertise, but has at the same time been working as a comprehensive unit. The starting and finishing point has been the national report, which had not been completed at the time of the start of the team's mission(s), but was supplied bit by bit. The report has been sincerely and critically studied and discussed by the team at every step, in order to clarify interpretations and relevant agendas and questions for the study visits.

The programmes for the study visits were also adjusted by the Estonian authorities, according to the wishes of the team. Two study visits were made, the first at the end of April and the second at the beginning of July. The first visit was concentrated on the capital Tallinn and central/national institutions and agencies. The second visit was performed as a round-trip, covering the north-eastern areas with a majority population of Russian origin, the eastern parts covering rural/peripheral areas, ending in Tartu before returning to Tallinn. A large and varied number of institutions and individuals were included in these meetings, with continuous hospitality and the willingness to encourage the Estonian community to be open to the questions of the team.

As part of these procedures, the team also punctuated the visits with internal meetings, and also new separate meetings with the main hosts (Ministry of Education), in order to clarify and specify central issues and findings. As an essential part of the working methods, we should stress that the team always referred back to its main instrument or source of perspectives on Estonian youth policy – the national report.

It is important to emphasise this for more than one reason. The study visits and meetings, a lot of additional materials, and current observations were bringing a lot of new information and diverse impressions to the table, and could also easily have side-tracked curious people. So it is important to underline at these crucial stages that the national report was the main, official document of reference for the team. This also demonstrates the difference between this work and a research visit, since the references of this report include a lot of additional sources, which are meant to support and clarify the discussions, but never to move the focus away from the national report and to develop an alternative report. This does not exclude the team and this report from an increasingly critical view of the national report, whether this is due to a better understanding of the background of what it is about, or to important missing issues.

There is also an additional, “extracurricular” reason for this reminder about the limited or focused aims and tasks of this mission. The Estonian hosts did

not try to hide the fact that they wanted to show this group of foreign visitors very much the best of Estonia. And they were successful, in the sense that the team, most of us for the first time, discovered a beautiful country with an extraordinarily rich history and culture, though at the same time, not least among youth, at the edges of the most hypermodern Europe. Compared to all that the team experienced and learnt, the return to the report appears quite dry and poor. But nevertheless, that is the task, and other wishes have to be left for another opportunity.

1.3. Guiding questions

Given the previous comments, it is also easier to incorporate the few main questions guiding the team into some of the more detailed agendas that will be further elaborated under separate headlines:

- To what extent does the national report reflect the youth situation and the youth policy of Estonia?
- What are the distinguishing features of Estonian youth policy, in the context of a transition state with some established past/present/future objectives and structures of youth policy?
- How balanced is the situation in Estonian youth policies with the heavy impact of education, nation building and integration on the one hand, and youth participation, human rights, European multiculturalism, etc. on the other?



2. Youth policy at a European level

Even if the first function of the evaluation of the expert group relates to a specific country – here Estonia, it should not be forgotten that the national reports and evaluations are part of a bigger European project. It was the Council of Europe who, in 1997, initiated the project of systematically collecting information on youth policy in the member states of the Council. The CDEJ (European Steering Committee for Youth) serves as the (only) intergovernmental organ of the youth field of the Council of Europe. One of the main tasks of the CDEJ is to prepare the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth. The CDEJ is the principal authority in the youth field and prepares the decisions of the Committee of Ministers concerning the implementation of the objectives of this field.

It is obvious that the aforementioned project of national youth reports is and will be even more so in the future, a highly valuable instrument for designing youth political measures at a European level. It is also obvious that, inasmuch as European integration continues, ever so many more political decisions transgress national levels and that holds also for youth issues.

In the past, the CDEJ has invested a lot of effort in youth mobility: how could barriers be overcome, how could mobility be increased? The interest in the concept of youth mobility had to do with the insight that the labour market of the future would demand much more social and geographical mobility than for former generations of young people. Other central European youth policy issues are education and training, social exclusion and racism, minority youth, associative life, housing and participation (Vanandruel *et al.* 1996; Avramov 1998; Helve and Bynner 1996).

Clear as the relevance of each of these topics may be, bringing them together in one coherent European youth policy has failed up to now. A definition of what a European youth policy really is has never been made and, given the diversity of the member countries and the specificities of national youth policies and traditions – particularly since 1989, this should not be amazing. Where are the common denominators on youth between Denmark and Georgia, the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation, Sweden and Estonia? There are common elements, though, and it is determining this commonness, in spite of all the differences, which the national reports and evaluations are meant to achieve. Youth researchers should play a decisive role in this process (Stafseng 1999; du Bois-Reymond and Hübner-Funk 1999).

Two main approaches are promising in the move towards a European youth policy. One is youth policy as human resource policy: consider young people as a resource, not (only) as a problem. Regarding youth as a problem is still the stance of many European youth programmes which focus almost exclusively on more and better education and qualifications – implying that (too) many young people lack those qualifications. Concepts of the learning society and lifelong learning, in combination with a broadening of definitions of qualification (informal qualifications; informal learning), should overcome such restricted views (Alheit *et al.* 1998; Walther and Stauber 1998). The other approach under discussion is European citizenship which would give the youth political agenda a political education profile: the fight against social exclusion, work on concepts of multiculturalism and intercultural learning. Here the stress lies less on qualification and the labour market and more on the responsibility of society to guarantee basic human rights (Lauritzen, in CYRCE 1999).

It remains to be seen if these two approaches can eventually be reconciled and can become the main pillars for a European youth policy. The ministers responsible for youth have at five ministerial conferences and informal meetings in Strasbourg (1985), Oslo (1988), Lisbon (1990), Vienna (1993) and Luxembourg (1995) agreed upon the following priorities for a European youth policy, namely:

- the participation of the young in society, especially through youth organisations and an intensified co-operation with all partners in the youth field;
- equal opportunities of access for the young particularly regarding mobility and youth information;
- regular interest in the social situation of the young in Europe – promotion of a global and integrated youth policy.

At the occasion of the Bucharest conference (1998), the youth ministers agreed on the following three main fields of action in youth policy:

- participation and citizenship;
- fighting social exclusion;
- non-formal education,

with the topic of access to the labour market running through all these fields.

Coming back to the case of Estonia (and previous and future participant countries), not only the Estonian authorities will learn from the European youth policy discussion, but European authorities will also learn from the Estonian example. Those European countries who have gone through the procedure of reporting and being evaluated have a much stronger stand in the European discussion and assemblies than those who have not, because of their insight gained into the complex relationship between the national/local and the international/European dimension of youth policy. Already this learning approach is now seen by the participants as something very positive.

3. Objectives and structure of Estonian youth policy

As this report has to be written before the final version of the national report is present, there are some difficulties and reservations in these procedures. These are especially important in the sections of this report where more formal sides (objectives) of Estonian youth policy have to be described.

The clearest lack of written information is about the general and formal youth policy statements, as for example given by the Parliament (Riigikogu), the Government, or as the mandate(s) for the Ministry of Education (as coordinating ministry). The requests for such statements have been an important part of the study visits of the team, and several answers and various information have been received. The solutions for reporting have to follow these lines:

- the issues have to be handled somewhat superficially as long as exact references cannot be given/used, together with the use of notes from oral information, and translations of diverse materials by the team and the rapporteur at the end;
- the use of diverse materials (see references under Estonian National Report, as supplementary materials), still through translation, but also anticipating that these will be sources for the final version of the national report.

These reservations might lead to a wrong impression of realities. The remarks should not be interpreted as if the team could not find a youth policy, but rather in the light of a fluid and rapidly changing/reforming context where everybody had some difficulties with the construction of a comprehensive and stable policy framework. Different authorities, and not least the Ministry of Education, have at the present time to respond to various new initiatives, in other words new acts or foundations during 1999-2000, or a new scheme running 2000(2001)-2004.

3.1. Objectives

The objectives of Estonian youth policy are not easy to “decode” from massive impressions of general transformations of how a new state wants to perform and run its affairs. There roughly seem to be two phases, the first in the early nineties (since 1991) for a rapid establishment of the independent state without all details prepared, and a second vivid phase going on at the moment of the evaluation exercise (1999/2000 and onwards), where Estonia is establishing more long-term frameworks for public affairs and policies.

Youth policy seems at first to be tied up in these general transformations without any independent or autonomous status as a youth policy field, and at this general level with certain implications for form as well as substance:

- The Estonian state seems to use acts or something like decrees as political steering mechanisms, in a way that is breaking down issues into elements like “register of youth associations recognised and supported by State”. Another steering mechanism seems to be a separation of executive state functions from ordinary administration, setting up (public) foundations, for example the national “Centre for Youth Work” (which is quite new in 2000).
- At the substantial level Estonia is aiming at the reconstruction and development of their nation in all respects. This implies that any matter such as education, culture, language, social integration, etc. is defined within these general aims, and that youth policies in general have to be a part of these main directions, even if the consequences could conflict with the needs of a modernisation of youth.

The specific objectives of youth policy education and educational measures have the clearest and highest priority. This also means general education with high expectations and aspirations, while employment and/or vocational education/training, for example, have an exceptionally weak position.¹

The leading role of education is also emphasised by the distinguishing fact that very much of what is called youth work is defined, presented or performed as extracurricular activities (hobby schools, etc.).

A second category of specific objectives are (artificially) constructed within this report, as particular illustrations of what it means to be in a transitional state, here interpreted as Estonia going through a legislative modernisation in the fields of (children and) youth. The examples are the Child Protection Act (in accordance with the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child); the Civil Code Act defining legal age limits of rights, as also by the Family Law Act; the Employment Contracts Act regulating legal age limits for entrance to paid work (protection against child labour); the Criminal Code defining age limits (normally 15) for types of sanctions on criminal acts – supplied by a special Juvenile Sanctions Act; the Military Service Act defines who is obliged to do military service. The Education Act is a voluminous legislation supplied with a number of sub-acts, also including the Hobby Schools Act.

Two remarks are relevant. This use of acts expresses or reflects the wills and wishes of the society, but not necessarily the effects. However, their

1. A reform has started in Estonia, involving multilateral agreements between employers, trade unions and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry concerning the curricula and the technical facilities of vocational education.

character and composition are elements of what we mean by objectives. Secondly, the legal measures demonstrate how Estonia is approaching the modernisation of the state and civil society, through legal status and rights of children and youth, measures that were a distinctively weak point in former times.

The Youth Work Act is the more central instrument of youth policy, quite new since 1999, and it covers a wide range of activities or purposes. But the act will contribute more to the coming chapters than to the objectives, even though this is the place where the comprehensive and cross-sectoral youth policy is described.

3.2. Structure

Within the Youth Work Act the mandate of the Ministry of Education is also described in ways that make the terms a bit ambiguous. This means that "youth work" partly refers to "youth work" in a traditional sense, but partly also refers to what other countries call "youth policy".

The Ministry of Education is the Government's co-ordinating ministry for youth policy and for the programme "Youth", while other ministries to be co-ordinated include:

- Ministry of Social Affairs (social assistance);
- Ministry of Internal Affairs (juvenile police, work with juvenile delinquents);
- Ministry of Culture (youth sports);
- Ministry of Defence (preparing youth for military service);
- Ministry of Justice (co-ordinating the legislation, criminal prevention).

At the political level youth policy initiatives or issues are formulated by the Parliament (Riigikogu) and its Cultural Affairs Committee. In order to enable inter-ministerial co-ordination the Ministry of Education was, until 1998, running a special (youth socialising) task force, replaced after 1999 by the Youth Work Council, where the actual ministries are represented together with youth associations and local authorities.

To a certain extent the tasks at this level are the funding of inherited state property, working as national or central institutions or centres for youth. On the other hand to develop a funding system for all aspects of a modern youth policy (from youth associations to youth studies and the training of youth workers), and at the same time to distribute responsibilities and budgets according to the act between state, county and municipal levels. These reasonable ideas about a decentralised structure are formulated parallel to a general political discussion about rationalisation (reduction) of the existing

15 counties and 247 municipalities, where the authorities admit serious shortcomings as to what can be achieved outside the more central areas.

There are centres, agencies or foundations outside the state administration, like a “Youth for Europe” agency or the recently founded Youth Work Centre, taking care of essential youth policy (development) tasks. Estonia at the moment is missing a sufficiently representative national umbrella organisation like a National Youth Council.

It is easy to see that most of these structural or institutional arrangements are quite new, that they are elements in a transformation process, and that neither each element nor the relations between them are settled yet. The international team has been quite aware of the normality of this state of change, and the needs of time for this creative process before the whole framework can stabilise and be explained at a general youth policy level.

3.3. Concepts of youth

There is one main definition of youth in Estonia, as a social category within the age limits of seven and twenty-six years. The definition has an extensive and administrative character, without a strong political flavour, and reflects most of all the age groups involved in some form of state-sponsored activity, notably the education system.

Subordinated to this main definition we find several more specific definitions of who or when some forms of protection are needed, which mainly reflects that the age span also includes children in the definition.

With this background it is difficult to avoid a dominating paternalistic notion of youth, we could even say pessimistic. There is neither a “youth voice” in the national report, nor political voices speaking independently from the administrative authorities.

Within the notion(s) of youth, there is almost no emphasis on the differentiation or heterogeneity of youth, by, for example, dimensions such as gender, class, generation, or the differences between “young adults” at 25 years and “younger teenagers” at 14. There is one heavy emphasis on diversity, however, between “non-Estonian youth” and “Estonian youth”, referring to the composition of the population with 65% of ethnic Estonian origin, 28% ethnic Russian, and approximately 7% “others”. To some extent also the differences between urban and rural youth are emphasised.

4. Estonian practice of youth policy

4.1. Estonian culture and transitional state

Estonia has approximately 1.5 million inhabitants in an area the same size as Denmark (with about 5 million inhabitants). The country has a history rich in agriculture and forestry, but appears today as heavily urbanised, with 30% of the population living in rural areas, compared to nearly 70% in 1940. Nearly half of the population live in the four biggest towns, while 92% of “non-Estonian” youth live in urban areas. It is also questionable what living in “rural” areas means when the pressure on the housing market, for example in Tallinn, leads to preferences for houses in the countryside combined with work in the capital.

With this population structure it is not surprising that there is a political discussion about the administrative structure, dividing the country into 15 counties, 205 rural municipalities and 42 towns (municipalities).

Estonia has a long history as a nation, while political independence had a short history – 1918-40, which is perceived as regained since 1991. But even under occupation by other states, Estonia has a distinguished cultural history, with an emphasis on arts, literature and (general and higher) education. The search and fight for the autonomous nation have over long periods been moved from (non-existing) political arenas to literature and language, whether the authors were published legally or illegally, living in Estonia, in exile abroad or in concentration camps in Russia. The author Jaan Kross has often been discussed as a candidate for the Nobel Prize, and one of the first priorities of the new Estonian state was to build a great, monumental National Library.

Estonia has close relationships with Finland, and they are normally able to read and understand the Finnish language. In September 2000 the Estonian Prime Minister also declared Estonia to be a part of Scandinavia, which caused some critical comments from the Baltic neighbour states. One of the highest priorities in Estonian politics at the moment is their application and preparations for membership of the European Union.

Estonia has a lot of specific problems inherited from decades as a Soviet Republic, after only nine years of (re-)constructing their independent state, and still being in transition. But compared to any other of the eastern-central European transitional countries, Estonia, together with the Czech Republic, is one of the exceptional countries with relatively “small” problems, with

regard to figures for GNP, unemployment, etc. Estonia is also facing transition and change with a relatively well-educated population (by long tradition), and a relatively well-qualified workforce.

But after these comparative considerations, there are doubtless many serious problems to be solved in the country. Branches of the economy have been closed down, and those losing their jobs are not the same as those who get jobs in emerging branches, a generation problem. The differences between the general unemployment rate and the youth unemployment rate are smaller than in most other European countries. There are serious demographic problems, in the sense that young adults are not contributing to the birth rate, and there will be a future imbalance between the number of those who work and earn the money, and the number of those (elderly) who need to be paid for. These figures show uncertainties about personal and collective futures, but also discrepancies between income levels and prices for daily living, not the least in housing, which are crucial factors for entering parenthood.

The changes from a closed community to an open society also have costs and benefits at the same time. The Baltic countries have become important transit areas for various forms of international crime traffic, with some local implications too. And a relatively high proportion of Estonian young people seem to think seriously about emigration for shorter or longer periods (Helve 2000).

The general impression, however, is that the average young person in Estonia is closer to modern, European youth than most of their contemporaries in other transitional countries. In this respect there is no significant difference between Estonian and "non-Estonian" youth living in Estonia.

4.2. Leading principles and practice of youth policy

Estonian youth policy seems to be at a crossroads where at least three (levels of) aims can be identified, and they are not easily in harmony with each other:

- After some years of consideration, calculation and consolidation, there is still a certain amount of public property remaining to be taken care of and paid for by the state budget, such as highly valuable (national) institutions, centres or activities inherited from former times (hobby centres, summer camps, etc.).¹ As they are located in the youth policy budgets, they represent a solid burden that must be financed before other priorities.

1. It seems to be that Estonia in Soviet time had a popular coastline and nature, leading to a concentration of institutions for culture, sports and youth activities in the area, which were all inherited by the state at independence. These properties included a large proportion of "youth property" of varying quality, and in quantity much more than needed for Estonia alone.

- As Estonia is ambitious about international co-operation and European integration, it is also necessary to adapt the main youth policy measures to a Western standard, for example state support to youth associations, to international youth work or the training of youth workers, even if there are no particular demands from grass-roots levels.
- As the first two levels are matters of pragmatic necessity, the “free” choices and obvious challenges cannot appear before the third level. This includes, for example, the needs for modernisation of youth work, the development and financing of (new forms of) youth work at a decentralised, local level, according to the Youth Work Act. But these new priorities seem so far to lack the backing of financial resources, even though serious problems will begin to occur from 2000/2001 if this continues.

When the aims are described in this way, they can be seen as partly conflictual, but partly also as a practical and pragmatic agenda with narrow limits for new principles or practices. This is probably so normal in public administration that it is trivial, so the serious problems of the youth policy agenda come out of the main character of the activities belonging to these first priorities. They are heavily pedagogical, and they are built on the assumption that young people spend the afternoons, evenings and some of the (summer) holidays on extracurricular activities. It is important not to perceive these preferences as old-fashioned, because they represent a preservation and continuation of certain kinds of highly professional activities, training and education. For Europeans it is probably necessary to compare it with the Japanese principle of *juku* to understand the full meaning (Neary), where ambitious school education has to be continued with ambitious leisure activities that partly train other talents, partly are seen as complementary to school activities.

This emphasis on an educational ideology of youth work, appearing more or less like an extended school day, will need some critical comments (later on). But it is important to underline from a general point of view that the Estonian priorities are admirable, and at the same time it is not surprising that this happens in Estonia. “To throw out the child with the bathing water” has been the most normal habit of transitional countries in central and eastern Europe. Obviously, Estonia has taken care of its best professionalism and competence in these types of extended or extracurricular education. This is linked to an extraordinary perspective in European comparison, perhaps with a winning idea, on what good education really means. From a general point of view there are many reasons to perceive Estonia as extremely elaborate and clever in these ways of thinking, but on the other hand in difficulties when these fields of activity are brought to or defined as youth work, instead of being defined as extended educational activities.

The new Youth Work Act defines youth work as:

“ (1) Youth work is the creation of conditions for young people for activities which facilitate their development and enable them to be active outside their families, curricula and work on the basis of their free will.

(2) The content of youth work is the social, cultural and health education of young people which promotes the mental and physical development of young people.” (Ministry of Education 2000).

Even if this act is an opening to an unpredictable future, there are at least two risk lines in this way of conceiving youth work. Firstly, the statement might not be strong enough to develop beyond a heavy pedagogical and instructional tradition. Partly also the wide age definition of youth (7-26) will lead to easier access for children to the practices coming out of these concepts of youth work. Secondly, as computerisation of education takes place in wider spheres of youth life than in schools, there are risks that relevant activities will not be defined within youth work, because nobody could guarantee that computers “promote the mental and physical development of young people” (see later on “Tiger Leap Foundation”).

4.2.1. *Leisure and youth associations*

There are traditions, also from previous times, of organised or arranged leisure activities, such as hobby schools or centres, summer camps, etc. As previously mentioned, some of these are continued as state hobby schools with the intention of transforming them more into youth centres, and they represent quite a high proportion of the budget of the ministry.

The traditions in Soviet times were the Pioneers for children and the younger group (10-15), and the Young Communist League for those older than fifteen. Almost “everybody” used to be a member, at least during school time. All these associations were abolished at the beginning of the nineties, and the floor was opened for ordinary (Western) youth associations. But no adequate state support system existed before the year 2000.

Sports and cultural associations are not included, but so far 5% of young Estonians are members of these new associations, most of them with relatively few members, and several associations have problems to meet the target of 500+ members in order to get state support (see National Report p. 50). This is to some degree discussed as a matter of (lacking) money, especially in rural areas.

But this is, however, quite typical for transitional societies (Vanandruel *et al.* 1996). The usual explanation is that membership in associations is perceived as something similar to the old regime, as something forced on the individual. The new freedom and emerging individualism are not compatible with

associations for young people. This is probably also valid for Estonia. But the more difficult questions concern the realism of building up an associative sector based on Western models if the society does not share the same long history of how these associations developed. There are no such reflections or discussions in the national report.

But the report tells us about the missing umbrella organisation for these associations, which means that there is no National Youth Council at the moment. There have been several initiatives during the nineties, but they have so far failed. At the moment there is a Youth Forum that has not the legal or legitimate basis to have this function.

It is remarkable that there are two para-military youth associations, "Young Eagles" for men and "Home Daughters" for women, under the Defence Union and with a certain emphasis, priority and support by the state. They are among the few bigger associations, and they are perceived as educational and training units for the military services, in quite traditional gendered perspectives. It is also mentioned in the national report that there are plans to make the "state defence subject matter" to be a compulsory matter in all educational establishments. On the other hand, the report also says that more than half of the conscripts (80% in Tallinn) do not show up for the required military service.

The ministry has some clear ideas about what kinds of new or alternative forms of youth work they want to see developed during the coming three to four years, as an implementation of the Youth Work Act: special projects for unemployed youth, youth information centres, open youth work, street work, projects for young drug users, etc. There seems also to be a discussion on how to develop the associative sector, perhaps with wider concepts of "associative life", youth movements, etc.

4.2.2. Education, qualification, non-formal education

The Estonian school system is relatively modern and easy to compare with most other European countries. Pre-school institutions are common, and involve about 60% of children between one and six years, or more than 70% of five to six year olds. Compulsory education lasts from seven to seventeen years, and 3-4% of these age groups do not attend school. There are some approximate indications that the reasons could be a lack of arrangements for special education, or other ways to integrate disabled children and youth.

The most common post-compulsory educational track is the upper secondary, general education (*gümnaasium*). Some 70-80% of current cohorts are following this track, with a higher proportion of women than men. Also

higher education seems to be preferred by women, after a rapid increase for both genders during the nineties.

The uncertainties of the educational statistics seem to be the following:

- a relatively high proportion of the cohorts become drop-outs from basic education;
- vocational education and training (VET) has some weaknesses of a diffuse character. The system of apprenticeship seems to be lacking or missing, or is at least not a part of the public education system. A decreasing proportion of the 16+ age group continue their education in VET institutions, down to 26% in the late nineties;
- the direct transfer from compulsory education to VET has an even lower and decreasing status and attraction than the figures tell about the proportion who actually attend this track, according to survey material. The same material could be interpreted as if the most attractive vocational tracks are becoming occupied by those who at first took their upper secondary general education. The general picture of educational aspirations shows that up to 70% of youth plan for university or other higher education (Helve 2000, p. 211).

Two comments are: firstly, that the general levels of education among the vast majority are impressively high, while the distances between the many “winners” and a large enough minority of “losers” must be rapidly growing; secondly, there is no research to find out about eventual discrepancies between qualification demands in the labour market in comparison with the qualification structure of the educational system.

Such research could lead to more general consideration of social differences and new social class formations, for example the contribution of the educational system to a more meritocratic society. On this basis we could also get a better understanding of how the extracurricular activities and non-formal education are working, if all public inputs are working in the same elitist directions, or if there is some concern about social equality or compensation in the use of measures and resources.

There is one ongoing discussion about social differences, concerning Estonian and non-Estonian youth. It is remarkable, however, that some tendencies towards differences at the beginning of the nineties, have, during the time of independence, changed to striking and significant similarities between the two groups in their conduct and aspirations within education.

One of the most remarkable fields of Estonian education is the investment programme for information technology, organised through the Tiger Leap Foundation. This is quite forward-thinking and impressive in its character, financial levels and ideas. From a formal point of view the foundation is

external to the ministry, but there are clear policy connections and a location in the same building as the ministry. But their activities and measures are not mentioned in the national report. This gives the impression that the IT (or ICT) development in education is perceived as a purely technical field, or that this is an example of what is normally meant by sectorisation in youth policy. What is lacking here are those comprehensive perspectives connecting formal and non-formal education in the strategies for the information society, where youth policy and youth work will/should also play new roles within education – or in relation to education (Council of Europe 1997).

These remarks are also relevant in a wider perspective. There are many viewpoints on non-formal education in Estonian youth (work and) policy, but there are no discussions in the material if the main cultural orientations are basically traditional and classical. If so, the normal situation in most other countries is that educationalists take critical or antagonistic positions toward IT generally, and in formal and non-formal education particularly. These challenges belong to a youth policy agenda, since the practical and communicative “media literacy” of this field develops in an interaction between private life, leisure and peer life, and (formal) education (Siurala and Stafseng 1997).

This discussion could also be relevant, and easier to motivate, under the next headline.

4.2.3. Youth participation and influence

The written and oral reporting of Estonian authorities leaves a quite ambiguous impression about views on youth participation. Participation and influence of young people are clearly not in the first rank, but this could be perceived as incidental in a period of transformation and emergence of new guidelines for youth policy. From this perspective it is possible to observe that the Ministry of Education is aware that they are missing a “youth voice” as counterpart and counselling body, and in the meantime there is a Youth Forum in this function, and also a Youth Work Council for wider co-ordination tasks. It is also easy to see that the Youth Work Act is an explicit contribution to the autonomy and influence of youth, and that the Ministry of Education, in the construction of the Youth Work Centre, has also equipped this centre with a representative council of (young) users. It is also interesting to observe that Tallinn as a municipality is setting up a local youth council, and that similar arrangements are reported as the tendency at other local levels.

Even if it is possible to find embryos or hybrids this way for a future of stronger participative ideas in youth work and policy, the report leaves a main impression of adult policies from above. The situation reminds

one broadly of something typical of post-colonial communities: the generation(s) who were suffering in the past and who were fighting for liberation and autonomy, have in the post-colonial era a new fight to bring young people into this collective memory and consciousness. No society would or could do this otherwise. But it is not necessary to see youth participation and influence as an obstacle for these aims, even if the issue could be difficult to analyse and discuss further.

A more narrow and instrumental alternative would be to look at the heavy impact of educational ideology on Estonian youth policy. The history of participation and influence as important measures in youth policy has been a stage of experience and progress in other countries, starting with leisure activities, youth associations, youth work in general, and at the moment knocking on the door of education. Educational institutions have, in general, very weak traditions of philosophies of participation or influence by students, or more generally youth. But nevertheless, one of the most crucial agendas of educational policies in Europe at the moment, is about “education for democratic citizenship”, with clear implications for participation and influence.

The challenges and demands of this agenda are absent in the national report, showing that Estonia seems to have some missing links to this European agenda. This could be an interesting field of development at a first level, within the limited scope of education. At a second level, these issues concern Estonian youth policy with a more obvious relevance. It might be easier to develop the (critical) perspectives on “education for democratic citizenship” in countries where youth policy appears more independent from education, more like a critical actor “from outside”, creating “checks and balances” in public policies.

The context of these discussions is not limited to participation and influence, as matters of citizenship and education belong to the threshold of “the information society” and “knowledge economy”. When Estonia appears in a convincing way as very ambitious in its policies for information and communication technologies in education, then these youth policy issues will become the important “software” of these policies. And then it will not be easy or possible to be “very modern” and “very traditional” at the same time.

4.2.4. *Human rights*

Citizenship, participation and influence are interrelated as youth policy concepts, with citizenship as a leading policy concept in the present European agenda, whether this is about youth or education. There are various reasons behind this agenda, political as well as sociological. But the main background

context is a general concern about the present and future emergence of globalised, multicultural and mobile societies at macro-levels, and the growing individualisation and individuation at micro-levels.

Citizenship has different meanings, dependent on various connotations and traditions of thought. It is possible to make a simplified distinction between two traditions. Within one set of meanings citizenship is related to the rules and rights to have a passport, and seen more or less as synonymous to nationality (in German *Staatsanhörigkeit*). Traditionally this is a "German" position, where citizenship rights were also defined by *ius sanguinis* (law of blood descent) or as a consequence of ethnicity. The other tradition could be seen more as a "French-British" position, where citizenship is related to universal human rights, and more as a political, educational and dynamic concept for a society of cosmopolitans. This position will also lead to criticism towards any form of discrimination of individuals belonging to the same legal territory (nation-state). To some extent this distinction could be seen as the difference between minimum and maximum requirements for the idea of citizenship, but it is rather that we are describing oppositions, or contradicting notions.

But what does this discussion have to do with being young in Estonia and with Estonian youth policy? First of all and most important it implies that all young people are growing up in an atmosphere that is characterised by ethnic differentiation, the consequences of which will probably be seen within the following years. On the other hand for many young people in Estonia being young also means being non-Estonian (30-35%) and, as the national report does not try to hide, that means being excluded from some forms of official political participation. On the other hand the consequences for Estonian youth policy are also to some degree obvious. The intended disadvantage of non-Estonians does not leave many doors open.¹ One is the door leading to the attempts to make non-Estonian young people as Estonian as possible by providing Estonian language courses, by organising integration camps and stays in Estonian families etc..² By basing Estonian citizenship on the principle of *ius sanguinis* (law of blood descent), according to which a child at birth acquires the citizenship of its parents, children with parents without Estonian nationality holding temporary or permanent residence

1. The Estonian authorities maintain that "in Estonia everybody has the right to choose their citizenship and all civic rights (except for the right to vote in the elections of the Parliament) are provided for all the people living in Estonia regardless of their citizenship. The Estonian legislation does not differentiate between people on the basis of their ethnic origin or citizenship".

2. At least as far as the training in Estonian language that is necessary for naturalisation is concerned some reports criticise the quality and the availability of these courses and that they are not free. Besides, they are accompanied by a general lack of qualified teachers, financial resources and training material (see Barrington 2000, p. 276-277; Karatnycky 1998, p. 248).

permits are disadvantaged by birth because full access to civic rights remains denied.¹

As far as the national report on youth policy is concerned it is striking that especially in some of the sociological articles,² ethnic differences seem to serve as explanations although the assumptions related to such explanations are more than doubtful. For example, in the chapter on youth election activity and political preferences groups with completely different rights to vote were compared by referring to their ethnic differences. The very weak explanations for the findings are related back to ethnicity as an explanatory variable and result in very tendentious statements that raise the question as to in what context the study was carried out.

4.2.5. *Conclusions on principles and practice*

Some important issues in the report are not commented on further here, for instance on health and welfare among young people. There are obviously some serious problems in these fields, and clear needs of modernisation of basic views and services. But these issues do not seem to be well recognised within the main youth policy agenda, which should be changed in the future. The same could be said about employment and the labour market, and especially about housing and demographic problems.

However, Estonia appears within some traditional fields of youth policies to be in a phase of eager, impatient and creative change and (re-)construction of its public sector and institutions. It is probably helped more by the aspirations and initiatives of young people themselves than is really recognised in the documents or ongoing research.

This means that when each sector of youth policy is reviewed in isolation, they seem to be based on relevant and good ideas about the past, present and future. There are directions or elements to discuss or criticise, but the main comment is that each sector seems to have good insights into their own transition and transformation processes.

1. Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Estonia in 1991 says:

"1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members."
2. The official part of the national report is in these matters much more differentiated, more informative and even more critical than the rather descriptive sociological part.

Given that background, it is also easier to observe the lack or weak existence of a general youth policy framework connecting the isolated sectors and institutions into a comprehensive patchwork. This is mainly a question of the relationships between policy and politics, or practice and general objectives. It is not easy for outsiders to judge the reasons, if, for example, the administration has come so far in spite of political backing, or if the political system itself has constructed its own obstacles to comprehensive policies. An example of the last alternative is the fragmentation of elements of youth policies into various acts, or administrations into various foundations and agencies separate from governmental administration, but not really becoming “NGOs”.

One example of the relevance of this comment can be found in education. According to the report and all available statistics and with an isolated view on education, the Estonian educational system is exceptionally well-functioning compared to any other transitional country, and will also survive well in comparison with most Western countries. But the measures of success will then be based on academic achievements and “a culture for winners”, and a system that is relatively one-sided, rewarding the academic routes from early youth ages. The critical point here is that this is clearly not a problem seen from the inside of the education system. Not even the fact that perhaps 20-25% are not passing the basic compulsory education, or the lack of vocational tracks, are necessarily failures of education, but could easily be explained as the faults of the individuals. If these figures should be perceived as problematic, as they clearly should, the serious problems have to be formulated from outside, from the public and private sectors of society who are receiving and taking over the cohorts passing through the system and ages of education – and then especially those lacking relevant certificates or competences. This is one of the tasks of a cross-sectoral and comprehensive youth policy, overcoming fragmentation and isolated perfection – and the export of problem factors to other sectors.

Another example can be found within the core field of youth work and policy. At the state level we can find several authorities and agencies, like the Youth Department in the Ministry of Education, another link to the double number of staff in the Youth Work Centre, a third link to the Youth for Europe agency, and a fourth link to state hobby centres – and their heavy presence in the annual budgets. Through the reading of the national report and the study visits there is no problem in seeing that they all have a job to do, but what is meant by a comprehensive youth policy is to find a more general developmental and co-ordinated idea or plan for the connections between these agencies, a discussion about resources (budgets and staff) spent at state levels in times of decentralisation, and a developmental idea as to which of these tasks could in the future become a part of today’s missing youth NGO field(s).

These examples serve as hints as to what can be gained administratively by a more comprehensive, integrated and co-ordinated youth policy framework. But this is a political point too, in the sense that youth policy also has to be based on ideology or ideologies that are comprehensive and consistent. Such explicit ideologies are missing in the report, and this can open the youth policy field for implicit or invading ideas or ideologies that are not valid or relevant. One example could be the heavy impact of education on youth policy. These educational aspects could more incidentally be filled with military training, patriotism, nation building, folkloristic activities, etc., and could without any discussion become quite traditional. While an open and explicit discussion about central ideas in youth policy could lead to modernity as the basic educational aspect, by discovering the "Tiger Leap Foundation" as the locomotive for future youth life. The second example of what is meant by "invasion" of ideas into the open ideological agenda concerns the serious problems of educational inequalities. Nothing seems at the moment to be so heavily investigated as the differences between Estonian and "non-Estonian" (Russian origin) youth in the educational system, with the clear conclusions that non-existent differences are more striking than the differences (Kenkmann and Saarniit in Helve 2000). This shows that a stronger ideological platform on youth policy is also a protection against wrong or misleading ideas that could have some relevance in quite other areas.

4.3. Estonian youth and Europe

Estonia has been very active in international co-operation during the transition years. Some advantages from previous times also made it possible to be better prepared than many other countries. During the former independence Estonian youth and the more general cultural field were well connected to important movements in Europe, and during the Soviet time Estonians were active in the official and less official routes for international contacts. In fields like sport, culture or youth research it has been possible to continue and build on already established acquaintances since 1991. The immediate familiarity with the Finnish people and a very strong emigrant colony in Sweden have also been helpful in the transition process.

In the process of (re-)construction of a modern youth policy, Estonia has used previous advantages together with a conscious European orientation. At state and all local levels various bilateral and multilateral channels have been used for study visits and exchange of staff and youth groups, with clear purposes of gaining experience and forming opinions on wise solutions for youth work and policies.

As well as some early and stable bilateral agreements on co-operation by the Ministry of Education, the Nordic channel has been important through the

formal enlargement of the intergovernmental Nordic Council of Ministers to include the Baltic countries and partly the Baltic Sea countries in these structures of co-operation, with a particular emphasis also on youth policy. Estonia has also from the very first moment taken its responsibilities seriously in all aspects of the Council of Europe's youth policy co-operation, and it is no surprise that the country is among the first five or six member countries to go through this national review exercise. Young people in Estonia can also profit from a well organised participation in the Youth for Europe programme since 1997, where some impressive statistics show very serious involvement.

In general, at the level of authorities and at the level of young people, it seems to be a climate of mutual understanding and trust between Estonia and Europe, without any observable friction.



5. Remaining questions; critical comments

Questions and critical comments have already been raised in the previous chapters, and they are elements of the final discussion, but they will not be repeated here unless they also belong to more general discourses.

There is a general, sociological difficulty in this final summarising discussion of the “state of the art” in Estonian youth policy. Within the very insufficient scientific literature on countries in transition, it is possible to find some interesting viewpoints on the needs for building up a middle class of some size and rationality if these societies are to succeed in their further development. Apart from the fact that such issues would be totally “politically incorrect” within a framework of a Council of Europe’s youth policy exercise, there are no available experiences to build on for an analysis or discussion of this kind. But nevertheless, the only fair and interesting discussion on Estonian youth policy could be to evaluate measures and results as if the aims are the making of a (new) middle class. These aims might be relevant, fair for the future and successful if we look at practices, but still impossible as premises for this review. But this “politically incorrect” position could be defended by Estonian authorities in this process.

5.1. Youth life and youth policy in the documents

As the national report has been in development and growth during the working period of the international team, some final statements had also to be left to the concluding phase of this commentary. In its final version the national report appears as an impressive documentation, showing that Estonia has a capacity and competence distributed among many agencies and persons to be proud of. There are some dangers, however, that after this vigorous effort there follows only more work, no rest.

The documentation shows most of all a competent awareness, consciousness and knowledge of the working conditions for youth policy authorities and agencies in Estonia. The report is strong on adult perspectives, and they are quite necessary, but it is still unclear what kind of youth life young Estonians are living. According to the report this life should be a hard, competitive, meritocratic everyday life, with a rather tough treatment for those who fail (delinquency, orphans). The average material standards of living appear through some data to be quite decent (Helve 2000), while other information about income levels leaves more ambiguous impressions. But as Estonia as a whole seems to be moving towards increasing prosperity, there

are indications that the younger population is also earning its part when they are employed.

These impressions might be wrong in reality, but this vague picture means that there is too little concern about economic and social inequality. This implies firstly the already mentioned production of inequalities within the younger cohorts when they are past school age and systems. They belong to the main target groups of existing youth policy. The youth concepts and target groups are weaker or non-existent for the second focus on inequalities produced within and between generations when the young should become adults, and meet entrance problems to the labour market, their own household and family life, housing, etc. One of the clearest impressions from the national report is that the demographic prospects of Estonia should become one of the more essential issues for future youth policy.

Even though Estonia in general and also the national report have vivid discussions and an explicit awareness of the transitional state and its problems, there is a remarkable absence of topics related to civic society. This refers, in general, to questions concerning the relationships between the state, a market economy and the "third sector" or civic society. These matters are also particularly a core dimension of youth policy, but it is difficult to find serious attention to these issues in Estonian youth policy, whether it is concerning the associative sector, some development ideas for youth NGOs, citizenship, or youth participation. Estonia appears in these matters as a prolongation of the traditions of "the strong state" instead of fostering dialogue and participative principles in their youth policy.

This could also be the understandable background of another serious problem of Estonian youth policy, the status and treatment of "non-Estonian" young people. It might be a more general and structural problem here, when this side of youth policy is executed by another ministry, the Minister (without portfolio) of Ethnic Affairs, who does not belong to the list of ministers co-ordinated by the Minister of Education in the youth field. It is also remarkable that these youth activities are the only ones attracting foreign sponsorship, from the UNDP and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The national report and other material (Helve 2000) show that there is weak or no evidence behind the official concern on the differences between these two categories of youth. Even one of the more sensitive questions, about attitudes toward doing military service, which in 1992 showed strong differences, had by 1996/98 developed to full similarities between Estonians and youth of Russian origin (Helve 2000, p.216).

The actual criticism will be organised in two steps. The first step is a reminder of concepts like participation, development, peace and their actual elaborations (see chapter 1.2) as backbones of youth policy. If there are some seri-

ous problems concerning Estonian and “non-Estonian” youth, it is not understandable that the issue is left to a ministry based on prejudices and fixed opinions, instead of being handled within a youth policy dialogue, through hearings, or by setting up a special “Russian youth council”, or other ways to develop the issues as part of a civic society approach. But as already mentioned, this could reflect a more general, missing dimension of Estonian youth policy.

The second step concerns the more formal question of human rights. When the difficult prehistory is taken seriously, we could, for example, ask why the adult generations have not constructed something similar to the “truth commission” in South Africa, in order to elaborate the past into a survival mode for the future. But one thing is what is valid and necessary for the generations who were in the middle of this prehistory, quite another thing is to formulate an independent and valid position of youth policy. And if some of the main objectives of youth policy are to contribute to democracy, citizenship, civic society, etc., and to fight prejudices, xenophobia, intolerance, etc., then Estonia has a serious problem if approximately one third of their youth population are second rank citizens¹. Human rights are simply not something you train or educate for, you have them or not.

5.2. Success of Estonian youth policy

After a few turbulent years Estonia has consolidated its own platform for being part of a modern, European youth policy.

Perhaps the most important move has been the saving of valuable property (buildings, camps, facilities) from privatisation or abolition, by being more concerned with continuity and change than starting from scratch or zero. A part of the success is also the ability to reconstruct and construct administrative and professional structures in the governmental and state systems, with a relatively good standing in public policies.

At the moment the Youth Work Act is probably the most valuable instrument for further development of a co-ordinated and comprehensive youth policy, for the development of NGOs and new forms of youth work, and for decentralisation and the building of local youth work and policy.

An important element of the success is also the good investment in international channels, contacts and co-operation, where civil servants, youth workers and other professionals have good and mutual access to relevant

1. Comment of the Estonian authorities: “In the Republic of Estonia there are no second rank citizens, but there are citizens of other countries or people who have no citizenship (who have not yet determined their citizenship) who can benefit from the Estonian social welfare system and other rights that have been agreed upon with other countries in respective agreement.”

peers. Also for young people the access to international exchange has been well developed.

Estonia has also, as shown through the national report, good resources for knowledge-based policies through well established youth researchers, who have a good standing among relevant colleagues and institutions in the rest of Europe.

5.3. Centralisation – decentralisation – Europeanisation

There are some shortcomings mentioned in the cross-sectoral and comprehensive youth policy at the national or state level. But the greatest challenges for the coming years will be the realisation of the ideas of county and municipal youth work, and the accompanying models for the comprehensive and cross-sectoral work at local levels. This means how to bring together schools, traditional and modern youth work, child welfare, health institutions and professionals in a form of co-operation that breaks down the borders between them, and opens these fields for young people's active participation and influence on their own conditions.

Given the size of the Estonian youth population, these ideas have to be followed by a general reform in the structure of the units of public administration, and also a financial regime that does not exist today, if any implementations are to take place. Also the success of a decentralisation of the public sector will depend on how Estonia solves its citizenship problem, since the segregation of the population means that there are large areas where a majority of the population does not have full citizenship rights today. This is a general problem, but also a particular youth policy problem – as an obstacle for the contribution from youth policy to democracy building (at local levels).

What follows from these comments, are some remarks on the centralised character of present youth policy and youth policy (financial) resources. However, there are at least two reasons to hesitate on simple or easy answers to these questions. Firstly, during the working time of the international team we observed a political decision to move (decentralise) the Ministry of Education from Tallinn to Tartu. One of the main criticisms of this report is about the need for a stronger power and co-ordination effort by the Ministry of Education within the governmental structures, in youth policy matters. This is probably not easy without a physical presence in the capital, even if this may not be a crucial factor. Secondly, the eager ambitions in Estonia for integration routes towards Europe and European institutions, are arguments for strong national or central institutions and agencies in the bridging strategies for Europe. There are no immediate objections against such notions or strategic ideas.

But there are reasons to warn against assumptions of an automatic correlation between centralisation and Europeanisation, when these strategies or measures become more elaborated. If Estonia continues to learn from its close colleagues in Finland, it will discover that more and more of the practical “Europeanisation” is going on at regional and local levels of the youth field – as the really interesting trends. This is once more an argument for a better integration of international dimensions and measures of Estonian youth policy within a comprehensive ideology and strategy, and not only leaving these matters to an executive or technical agency.



6. Recommendations

6.1. Recommendations for Estonian youth policy

On the basis of these comments and discussions, we would like to give Estonian policy makers the following recommendations:

- 6.1.1. In spite of previous recommendations in other national reviews, Estonia is also a follow-up of the internal national self-evaluation without comparative reflections. We would recommend that in their further follow-ups Estonia should evaluate its youth policy measures in a European perspective, with a certain emphasis on participation, youth as a human and developmental resource, and citizenship.
- 6.1.2. Some strategic and technical rethinking is necessary, in order to sort out the necessary independence of the relationship between educational aims and activities, and a youth policy for a modern future of Estonian youth.
- 6.1.3. Estonia and its Ministry of Education should consider inviting OECD to undertake an evaluation of its educational policies, as a parallel to this national review, and as a logical follow-up. Because the data and expertise on education were limited in this exercise, we can only stimulate curiosity as to how Estonia could protect some of the outstanding advantages of its educational system, but at the same time begin some obviously necessary reforms – seen from a youth policy perspective, and with an emphasis on non-formal education and vocational education.
- 6.1.4. There are two branches of Estonian youth policy with urgent need of improvement, for internal reasons and in order to protect Estonian credibility in Europe: these are the essential measures that need to be taken to develop a youth NGO partnership and dialogue with clear civic society aspirations, and some clear youth citizenship strategies in order to solve the present human rights problems in the youth population of Estonia.
- 6.1.5. Considering the tremendous tasks emerging from the aims of decentralisation of youth policy, these challenges could also be a starting point for using some techniques in the development of an NGO partnership and the participative dimensions of future youth policy: this could take the form of an annual “action scheme” for a comprehensive youth policy, and an annual “youth policy account” as the evaluative follow-up, as a kind of essential, corporate activity between

state authorities and representatives of young people. There are various models that can be found in other countries, not necessarily to copy them, but to build better policies by learning from their experience. These techniques could possibly also be used in wider political processes, in order to bring more politics and ideology into the present administrative and professional youth policy.

- 6.1.6. As Estonia (together with Romania) will be the first transitional country to run this national review exercise, the national authorities should use this opportunity to invite the other transitional member states of the Council of Europe for a special conference in Estonia, as an additional "evaluation" by those countries sharing similar experiences (see also recommendation 6.2.1).
- 6.1.7. Youth research supported by youth policy authorities should in the coming years give priority to studies on social inequality and exclusion, the social division of welfare and (new) formations of social classes in Estonia, within reasonable comparative perspectives. The comparative dimension is also crucial because most European countries are developing superficial myths about how the new, globalised and diversified societies are examples of an unequal society, but this is much more complex. These youth studies should also be detailed enough to illustrate who are the winners and losers as a result of Estonian youth policy measures.
- 6.1.8. The youth policy concept of Estonia should, for the immediate coming years, become extended to include the age groups and particular life phases in which young people are striving to "become adult", and perceive these phases of youth as something more than education. There are sufficient examples already mentioned in this report.
- 6.1.9. The composition of issues to be represented in the map of co-ordinated and comprehensive youth policy by the Ministry of Education should be reconsidered. It could be a good idea to move military training into the background, but to include the development policies for information and communication technologies in education, and the international youth exchange.

6.2. Recommendations for a European youth policy

On the basis of our experiences from Estonian youth policy, some recommendations can also be addressed to European bodies concerned with youth policy or research:

- 6.2.1. With the review of Estonia (and Romania), the Council of Europe is receiving the first report from one of the transitional, new(er) member states, and it will be important to make full use of this report,

especially its added value concerning youth policy in transitional countries. Various kinds of follow-up should be considered, including as regards the methodology of an eventual review of another country.

- 6.2.2. European youth workers and youth policy makers should look carefully at the Estonian hobby schools and their pedagogy. After many years of cultivation of open youth work there could also be some added value in looking at ways of enabling young people to learn something specialised in their leisure activities. Offering a variety of methods is better than simply following fashion.
- 6.2.3. The Directorate of Youth and Sport should look carefully at the case of Estonia and its limitations in the construction of associative life and youth associations. This is probably typical for transitional countries, and opens up the way for more fundamental discussion and strategic planning concerning the implications for co-operation between non-equal member states in the youth policy field.



7. Building blocks for a European youth policy

The international report on the review of Sweden introduced a chapter on “building blocks for a European youth policy”, which invited subsequent reports for consideration and to build on experience. The complete chapter is included here as an appendix. And we agree with these statements after our experiences with the case of Estonia.

Within the basic theoretical assumptions there is a relevant addition to make after the Estonian experience, partly related to the paragraphs 7.1.2 and 7.1.5: this is about the formal-normative notions of human rights in relation to more dynamic, educative or political notions of citizenship in the general understanding of youth and civic society. These are rather complex sets of concepts, and given the experiences from Estonia they should be discussed and tested in respect of various realities, and become empirically elaborated for this “European youth policy”. There are some clear normative statements on these issues in this report, and if they are still valid after this exercise they must also have some consequences for the European youth policy agenda.

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Appendix

From the International Report on Sweden:

“7. Building blocks for a European youth policy

Basic theoretical assumptions

We do not want, and cannot, work out a wholesome ‘theory of youth and Europe’; that is much too ambitious and is a project in itself where many youth politicians and youth researchers are involved. What we want to do here, at the end of our evaluation on Swedish youth policy and in view of the whole project of national reports and evaluations by international expert commissions, that is to assemble some ‘building blocs’ for such a theory of youth and Europe.

1. We will have to enlarge the theoretical framework of European societies in transition. That means: to connote the relationships which exist between the different European countries and states as well as the relationships between different national societies and developments of globalisation. For example, Sweden has a very special position *vis à vis* the Baltic states which other continental countries don’t have. What is that relationship like and what does it mean for Swedish as well as European youth policy? It is also evident that each European country relates differently to trends of globalisation, but that all European countries have some problems and some opportunities in that respect in common.

2. All European countries are confronted with multicultural compositions of their (young) population. We should systematise the different approaches of the member states to deal with this fact, and we can learn about productive strategies to overcome problems and divides. One much discussed and tried-out strategy is the notion of intercultural learning. We would like to add the notion of informal learning. Both forms of learning pertain to school as well as non-educational youth sites.

3. A theory on modernisation of European education is all the more necessary because all European countries have similar problems in their formal educational systems (motivation problems; irrelevant and/or outmoded curricula; problems with the preparation of the young for flexibilised and unforeseeable labour markets, etc.). Notions of intercultural and informal learning, in combination with ICT and lifelong learning, must be incorporated in such a theory.

4. As youth researchers have pointed out, youth is not a holistic category, and it is not an unambivalent one either. Youth is determined by local-national roots and traditions as well as by transnational trends. Youth is gendered, and youth is an integral part of an intergenerational relationship. Youth must always be put into a life-course perspective, and it must be noted that formerly clearly distinguishable life phases tend to merge or be (made) reversible in late modern societies (i.e. the post-adolescent phase tends to extend well into the third or even fourth decade of age; the phase of studying can lie after a phase of work etc.).

5. Youth in European context should always be thought together with the concept of civil society. It is this notion which must guide (youth-)political measures to combat social exclusion.

Basic methodological assumptions

We would also like to make some suggestions concerning methodological aspects in preparing evaluation reports of national youth policy reviews. In doing so, we have to admit that we ourselves complied only partly to those principles; partly because of lacking time and resources, partly because we got insight in the relevance of such principles while doing this evaluation.

1. A basic principle is that of a comparative approach; national youth and youth policy cannot be evaluated *in abstracto* but every evaluation departs from some situation against which the youth and youth policy of another country is measured, with which it is compared. For example, while discussing Swedish associated youth life, the experts commented on that feature of Swedish life quite differently, according to their different backgrounds and experiences with youth and youth policy. In that respect, no totally objective evaluation is possible. But in as much as more national youth policies are evaluated, better explication of criteria becomes possible; the Spanish evaluation makes some valuable suggestions (see preliminary version, p. 9). The Swedish National Review has worked with 'strong' and 'weak' points in their self evaluation which is also a good methodological principle.

2. It should be seen to it that the national reviews take into account explicitly the different perspectives on youth and youth policy of politicians, youth researchers and young people themselves. Such explication helps the international expert team with their evaluation.

3. Eventually broadly agreed-upon criteria should and could be developed for evaluation of national youth policies and for constructing a European youth policy."

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Two major factors frame contemporary Estonian youth policy: the traditional importance of education and educational values and the need to manage the useful but expensive national educational and leisure institutions inherited from the country's communist past. However, within the last few years a set of structures and measures for broadening the scope of national youth policy have been conceived. Huge tasks lie ahead, particularly concerning the dilemma of ethnicity and citizenship, and the division of labour in the youth policy field between the state, regional and municipal levels. Analysing critically the successes and difficulties of a country in transition, this publication contributes to the European debate on the principles, content and standards for modern youth policy.

ISBN 92-871-4598-9



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