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Report of the consultative meeting
for the development of a Council of Europe
mid-term youth sector strategy 2030
(Strasbourg, 15-16 May 2018)

Item 9.1 on the agenda

TOWARDS A STRATEGY FOR THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE YOUTH SECTOR

Results of the consultative meeting for the development of a Council of Europe mid-term youth sector strategy 2030 (Strasbourg, 15-16 May 2018)¹

Deep, coherent, value-driven and effective learning pathways for democracy

Background: from “Agenda 2020” to a Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030

The “Agenda 2020” is the Council of Europe’s medium-term strategic document on youth policy. It was adopted at the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (Kyiv, 10-11 October 2008), and set out the principles and priorities of the Council of Europe’s youth policy and programmes for the period until 2020.

At its 36th meeting (Budapest, 27-29 March 2017), the Joint Council on Youth took stock of the state of play of the implementation of “Agenda 2020” and adopted a roadmap for the development of a new Council of Europe youth sector strategy from 2020 to 2030.²

One of the key steps in developing the new strategy was a consultative meeting on 15 and 16 May 2018, convened in the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg.

Aim of the consultative meeting

The consultative meeting aimed to explore parameters and provide key content inputs for the development of a new Council of Europe youth sector strategy from 2020 to 2030.

Over 50 people, all closely connected to the development and implementation of the youth sector’s programmes, participated in the consultative meeting. Participants were from the youth sector’s co-managed statutory committee (the Joint Council on Youth); the Trainers’ Pool; the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR); the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCY); the network of youth centres holding the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres; the European Youth Forum; the European Youth Card Association (EYCA); the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA); and the Council of Europe Conference of INGOs. Other participants were beneficiaries of the European Youth Foundation and of the Council of Europe Youth Department’s programmes.

During the consultative meeting, participants took stock of the current strategy (Agenda 2020), drew lessons from its achievements and shortcomings, and defined the added value of the Council of Europe youth sector in addressing the key challenges facing young people and promoting the values and principles of the Council of Europe through policy and programmes by, for and with young people. The input of participants was also key in examining the current European landscape for young people and identifying some preliminary and provisional ideas for a possible future strategic framework for the Organisation’s youth sector (what to maintain, what to develop, how and where to innovate).

¹ The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe or its member states.

² <https://www.coe.int/fr/web/youth/youth-agenda-2030>.

Meeting report and next steps

The current report aims to sum up the participants' deliberations, presenting the main outcomes and ideas which could contribute to the next Council of Europe youth strategy.

In October 2018, the conclusions of the consultative meeting will be examined by the Joint Council on Youth, which will decide on the next steps in the strategy development process.

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Introduction

The material in this paper builds from the perspectives and issues generated during a consultative meeting held in Strasbourg in May 2018.

In 2008, Agenda 2020, the youth policy of the Council of Europe, was adopted, framing a vision for the Youth Directorate/Department for the following decade. That decade has witnessed significant *change* in the condition and circumstances of the lives of young people in Europe, in institutional policies and practices across the youth sector in Europe, and in the wider political and economic context. It has also been a time of significant *continuity*, with regard to many of the challenges facing young people, the issues that affect them and the distribution of opportunities and experiences available to them.

This changed and changing landscape demands careful re-appraisal of the vision and mission that informed Agenda 2020. It requires consideration of new tasks and pathways for the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and the youth sector it serves but, *equally*, it needs to reflect on what needs to be sustained, perhaps even strengthened and re-asserted, in new times.

Agenda 2020 was guided and governed, though with flexibility for innovation and development in response to emergent issues, by the themes of human rights and democracy, diversity and inclusion.³ This paper, drawing from the deliberations of the consultative meeting, suggests some next steps in the process of composing a strategy for the Council of Europe youth sector for and beyond the next decade, one which continues to embrace a commitment to diversity and inclusion, as well as responsiveness to the challenge of change, and one that remains embedded in, and committed to promoting standards in the overarching and underpinning values and principles of the Council of Europe: human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The next youth strategy of the Council of Europe youth sector is anticipated to serve a number of purposes (see Appendix 4). Beyond providing direction in priorities and practice to the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, it will be a barometer for the Council of Europe's youth sector partners in the field and a communication tool for reaching out to those who need to understand it better.

Relevance

The changing social and political landscape for young people in Europe

Six broad 'clusters' of issues were identified during the consultative meeting that suggest the relevance of a new strategy for the Council of Europe youth sector in a Europe that is characterised by significant change as well as notable continuities affecting young people.

Two significant developments have taken place over the past decade that will continue to affect the lives of young people:

1. **Technological** – Not only do various forms of the 'digital divide' affect opportunities and experience for young people, but technological evolution has had a major impact on the ways in which young people conduct their lives as well as the ways in which others seek to relate to the young.
2. **Demographic** – The changing demographics of Europe, particularly on account of ageing societies, are having an impact on all social groups, but particularly the young, calling for new approaches to inter-generational relations and the distribution of resources.

³ Agenda 2020 was enshrined in a [Declaration](#) by the 8th Conference of Ministers responsible for youth, held in Kyiv, Ukraine in 2008. It has three governing strategic goals: human rights, democracy and the rule of law; living together in diverse societies; and the social inclusion of young people.

Beyond these two drivers of change, the contemporary ‘landscape’ occupied by young people in Europe was seen as falling into four spheres, though there is clearly considerable overlap between them:

3. **Personal** – Various forms of the ‘youth divide’ and issues around social exclusion have produced, as one consequence, the continued *vulnerability* of different groups of young people, whose circumstances are exacerbated by a *lack of support*. This has manifested itself starkly by increasing policy concerns about the *health and well-being* of young people, notably their mental (ill-)health arising from anxieties and uncertainties. Conceived more broadly, there is clearly a need to contribute to and build on young people’s capabilities and confidence through ensuring, where possible, purposeful and positive opportunities and experiences – a bedrock of the Council of Europe’s youth policy philosophy over many years.
4. **Social** – Within the social sphere, there remains a huge question about young people’s access to social rights, something already promoted through the Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights. Though a great deal of other work has also been done by the Council of Europe youth sector in this area, there remains so much more to be done around *access to education, training and employment* (and addressing the situation of young people depicted as ‘NEET’ – NOT in education, employment or training), *opportunities for non-formal education and youth work*, and *combating inequality, precarity and poverty*. Addressing social exclusion and discrimination and promoting *tolerance and social cohesion* lie at the very heart of the work of the youth sector in the Council of Europe, work that has become even more challenging in the context of *increasing diversity* in Europe, and *the migration and refugee ‘crisis’*, in which the young are unsurprisingly over-represented.
5. **Civic** – For many young people, especially those considered by others or who perceive themselves as more ‘marginalised’, their *sense of social exclusion* produces a *lack of trust* in many institutions and results in *disconnection* from civil society. This can be compounded by an absence of civic education and limited opportunities for participation. In terms of mainstream civic structures, young people can feel that they *lack voice*, though increasingly there are *alternative platforms* for expressing their views (particularly through what is sometimes referred to as ‘digital citizenship’) which need to be better understood, prospectively promoted to ensure their reach and relevance to all groups of young people. Restoring trust, maintaining connection or re-connecting young people to civil society, enabling young people to build civil society for themselves, and strengthening commitment to youth participation in civic and social life remain central challenges for the Council of Europe youth sector.
6. **Political** – The political context in Europe has changed dramatically since the construction of Agenda 2020. There has been the greater frequency of episodes of *terror* and increasing concern over the *radicalisation* of some groups of young people. Europe has witnessed *the rise of the far right*, the (re-)emergence of *populism and nationalism* and the start of what has come to be known as the *post-truth era*. Some have argued that *democracy is failing* in many parts of Europe and that – for a variety of reasons – there has been a *closing down of space for expression and debate*. This calls for renewed and indeed new efforts to advance the democratic imperative and to challenge racism, discrimination and other activity that jeopardises and undermines fundamental human rights. Young people are reported to routinely lack confidence in established party-political systems and often do not participate in elections (though there are exceptions). On a broad front, there is a need to strengthen young people’s readiness to be (and become) more politically active and to equalise the place of under-represented groups of young people – notably young women and young people from minority ethnic groups – in political decision making and governance.

These six issues provide a starting point for considering both those elements of Agenda 2020 that need refreshing and sustaining, and elements within a new strategy that can address the new circumstances of young people in Europe in ways that are consistent with the core values of the Council of Europe (human rights, democracy and the rule of law) and the methods and ‘focal concerns’ of its youth policy: participation, information, access to rights, youth work, mobility and social inclusion [see Figure 1, below].

Working Together

Collaboration at the heart of Council of Europe youth sector policy and practice

The working methods of the youth sector that is shaped by the Council of Europe - through its Youth Department, the European Youth Centres, the European Youth Foundation, the statutory bodies (the European Steering Committee for Youth and the Advisory Council) that constitute the Joint Council on Youth, and the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth (hereafter the Youth Partnership) – provide the collaborative context through which its work is done. Even beyond these core collaborations, there is the Council of Europe's Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility through the Youth Card and its work with the European Youth Card Association (EYCA) in order to create better mobility solutions for young people. There is also the Partnership Agreement between the Council of Europe and the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), whereby strategies for youth information have been developed to enable and ensure that young people are empowered to make informed choices. The high-level co-management system – where decisions are made jointly by representatives of youth organisations and governments – is replicated in the equal representation of these partners in the preparation of events and training programmes and the production of materials and publications.

The co-management system of the Council of Europe youth sector is proclaimed to be characterised by both depth and longevity, contributing high quality experiences that stand the test of time. This 'assumption' was tested and debated during the consultative meeting, with support for it as follows:

- the representativeness of young people through a robust selection process both through the European Youth Forum and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe;
- real empowerment for those involved (both Advisory Council members and member state representatives) through the process and practice of joint decision making;
- visibility and multiplying effects (Advisory Council members 'multiply' through, for example, their organisations, peers, networks and social media);
- it is a school of both representative and collaborative democracy that promotes and develops mutual understanding between Advisory Council members and member state representatives;
- it is courageous in distributing real power;
- Advisory Council members secure recognition beyond the Council of Europe;
- it is a school on youth participation and how to involve young people: member states learn how to increase and strengthen youth participation 'back home'.

More critically, however, there was a mirror image or 'flip side' to these assertions:

- the alleged limited representativeness of the Advisory Council (with no space or little place for non-organised youth or new youth organisations, a selection process that is too narrow, and poor information flow between Advisory Council members and their constituents);
- there is limited 'inter-sectoral' co-operation (for example, between the co-management actors and the wider youth work field) and 'inter-sectoral' involvement (suggesting a need to involve a wider constituency of actors and experts in the youth field);
- the skills and knowledge to become a member of the Advisory Council produce a form of exclusion or exclusivity, raising the question of who is responsible for the capacity building of prospective AC members: youth organisations or the Council of Europe?
- the continuing lack of visibility and information about 'co-management' within youth organisations and beyond.

Furthermore, co-management procedures are immensely and intensely time-consuming. This notwithstanding, they represent an illustration of the overall claim of the Council of Europe youth sector – that investment in working with, as well as for, young people pays off (see below).

A new strategy needs to ensure that sufficient space is maintained to continue with such professional intensity, the thorough review and reflection of existing knowledge and practice prior to moving forward to the next steps.

Multiplier effects

A European and local strategy

One long-standing claim with regard to the value, efficacy and impact of this 'professional intensity' has been its multiplier effects that, in turn, provide the justification for the investment of resources, time and effort.

From the consultative meeting, however, some concern was expressed about the Council of Europe youth sector's capacity to describe and delineate exactly what was meant by 'multiplier effects'. It was acknowledged that perhaps experiences of 'cascading' and 'multiplication' were not documented sufficiently. Notwithstanding the considerable costs of formal impact studies, there was a case for more systematic recording and reporting of the many ways in which lessons learned and practices developed *within* the Council of Europe youth sector came to be disseminated *beyond* it. This would, in turn, assist a better understanding of the nature of 'multiplier effects' and more exactly how they might be gauged.

Furthermore, even if 'multiplication' essentially suggested some kind of numerical formula there was considerable resistance to any reductionist, arithmetic approach to thinking about multiplier effects:

- *people* are the multipliers and we should look at what they are doing;
- the Council of Europe youth sector invests in (young) people – it is the quality of investment that should be counted;
- we need to provide sufficient knowledge, skills and values/attitudes in what we do. People will use them when they are ready. Something will happen at some point, sooner or later.

There was full acknowledgement of the challenges and difficulties regarding not only 'measuring' multiplier effects but also ensuring the application of the right measures – those that were meaningful and relevant to the youth sector. Multiple approaches were invariably required to transfer experience, knowledge and skills gained through involvement in the Council of Europe youth sector environment back to an individual's or organisation's domestic context, where resources and infrastructure were often far from enabling, thereby limiting the potential for the dissemination of knowledge, policy and practice.

The European Youth Foundation would maintain that the multiplication effect is already central to the assessment of the use of its grants, but perhaps that process of assessment would merit further scrutiny.

The consultative meeting concluded that there was insufficient documentary evidence as to how, for example, experiences of training or material within publications actually cascaded to local environments.

There is, therefore, a case for greater selective attention to more clearly defined local-level target groups, in order to consider the extent to which they have been 'reached' through particular Council of Europe youth sector initiatives. And there should be more effort to showcase how multiplier effects have diffused its principles and practice to wider constituencies within and perhaps beyond the youth sector. In other words, a new strategy will need to construct both a more robust internal framework for exploring its claims to producing significant multiplier effects, and mechanisms for communicating those effects to its partners in the field.

Inter-institutional relations

A shared context for development? Maintain, develop, innovate

Since the publication of Agenda 2020 in 2008, the broader youth sector in Europe has become much more of a market place. New players have entered the market and more resources are available (notably through the expansion of the youth chapter of the European Commission's Erasmus + programme). In short, there is more competition and a more complex field. In youth policy, youth research and youth (work) practice, the climate is now quite different from a decade ago.

To talk, therefore, about a 'shared context' is not unrealistic but it is more aspirational than before and demands harder work, possibly more caution, and perhaps more 'constituency-building' (based on common values and interest, mutuality and trust) than was previously the case.

The question of inter-institutional engagement was one of seven working groups during the consultative meeting⁴ that sought to consider ‘achievements and shortcomings’ since the start of Agenda 2020, with a view to informing Youth Agenda 2030. There was, inevitably, considerable overlap and many of the issues reported in other working groups will be mentioned below.

The primary achievements in inter-institutional relations since around 2010 (the European Commission’s own youth strategy, entitled ‘Investing and Empowering’, had been launched in 2009⁵) were identified as follows:

- strengthened forms of communication and co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, notably but not only through the Youth Partnership;
- the stability of the Youth Partnership’s agenda since 2014: knowledge development on youth participation, youth work and social inclusion;
- a greater identity for youth work, initially through the work of the Youth Partnership, but now more prominently within both of the institutions;
- the linking of the work of the Council of Europe and the European Union (EU) during EU Presidencies, producing increased coherence and more synergies;
- a more consolidated approach to youth research, policy and practice across the Youth Partnership, the Council of Europe Youth Department and the European Commission Youth Unit.

Predictably, various shortcomings were also noted, particularly the imbalance of resources for the youth sector between the two institutions, the failure to maximise the potential of existing mechanisms and instruments for co-operation, and the lack of any higher-level dialogue between the Council of Europe and the European Commission on youth issues beyond discussions about the work programme of the Youth Partnership. Unsurprisingly, questions were asked as to why there had not been more robust dialogue between the two institutions during the preparation and design of the new EU youth strategy and the forthcoming Council of Europe youth strategy respectively. In the working group on ‘Evidence’, this point was echoed more specifically around the establishment of the Youth Wiki by the European Commission when the Partnership was already supporting an under-developed and under-resourced European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKYCP), which already offered relatively detailed country profiles on youth issues throughout Europe.

What did emerge forcefully from the consultative meeting was a view that, whether unilaterally or in partnership with others, there were critical items for a Council of Europe youth sector agenda that were either established items that needed continuity and maintenance or further development and perhaps diversification, or new issues that demanded innovation and perhaps experimentation.

These issues are captured in the grid below. These are clearly not exclusive though some are repeated in different spaces, suggesting their particular importance. Table 1 provides an indicative direction of the substantive issues that may need to be given some priority within a future Council of Europe youth sector strategy and the different ways in which they may need to be addressed. It is a truism that not everything can be tackled and some sense of strategic priority, balanced in relation to the expertise and values of the Council of Europe youth sector, will need to be agreed by its youth statutory bodies.

⁴ The others were: **Democratic partnership**: promoting a unique experience of engagement with young people’s organisations and partners; **Promoting young people’s engagement** with the core values of the Council of Europe; **Youth Policy**: Developing a reference framework and common standards; **Evidence base**: providing expertise in the field of youth research; **Advocating quality**: developing quality standards; and **Mainstreaming youth**: proactive cross-sectoral co-operation with the Council of Europe

⁵ For a summary of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018, with links to more detail, see https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en

Table 1:
Issues identified during the consultative meeting on Maintenance, Development and Innovation

Policy Knowledge/Research Practice	Continue/Maintain	Develop/Diversify	Innovate/Experiment
SOCIAL RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Equalities ○ ENTER! Access for young people from disadvantaged areas to social rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Social Inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Well-being ○ Right to privacy ○ Digital rights
REVITALISING DEMOCRACY		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Citizenship ○ Enabling environments for civil society ○ Participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ e-Democracy ○ ○ Internet governance
ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Autonomy ○ Democracy ○ Citizenship education ○ Non-formal education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Youth work 	Sustainable development Media and information literacy Critical thinking
HUMAN RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to social rights ○ Right to education, training & employment ○ Gender equality ○ Anti-racism ○ Young people with fewer opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rights to: ○ Formal and non-formal education ○ LGBTI issues ○ Peace-building ○ Health ○ Housing ○ Faith ○ Respecting complexity ○ Indigenous input ○ e-Democracy ○ Youth work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to: ○ Secure employment ○ Social protection ○ Enabling environment for civil society ○ Effect of cryptocurrencies ○ Artificial intelligence ○ Robotisation ○ Education on the environment ○ Human Rights Education in non-democratic settings ○ Links to formal education

In the light of the recently announced European (Commission) Youth Strategy⁶ – in May 2018 – with a mission to Engage, Connect and Empower European youth and a set of statements and aspirations that touch more deeply than ever on a range of themes historically promoted through the Council of Europe, working out what defines and distinguishes the work of the Council of Europe youth sector from other institutional players in the youth field will be particularly important.

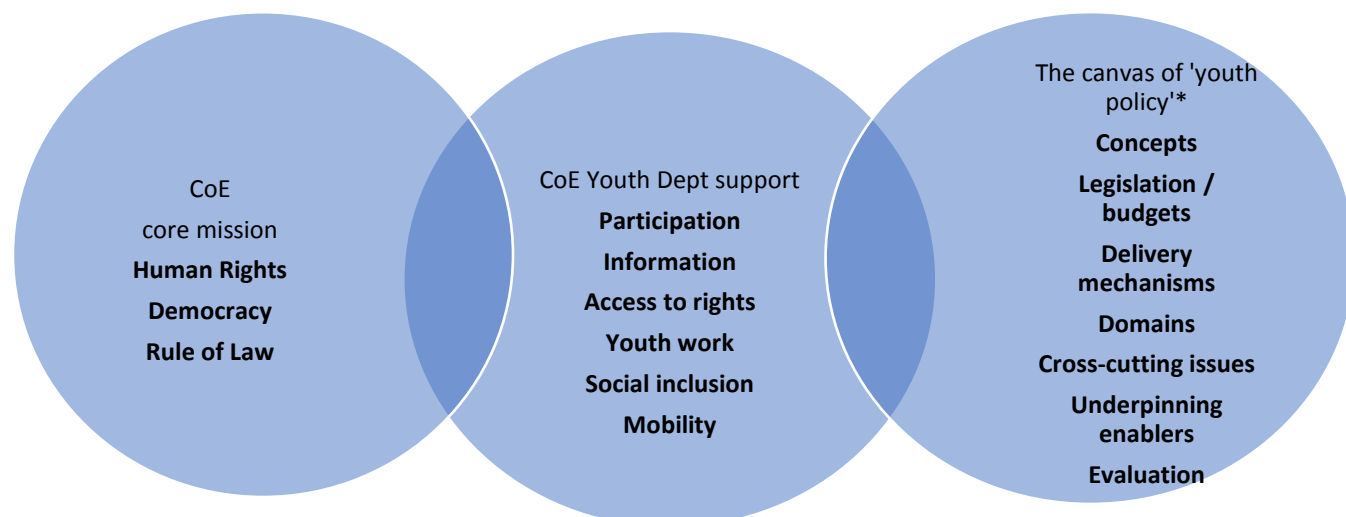
Distinction

The Council of Europe youth sector's place in Europe today

Given the proliferation of actors within the youth sector throughout Europe, the distinctive place of the *Council of Europe youth sector* needs to be confirmed. Rather as, in 2017, the Council of Europe crystallised the key 'youth policy' themes on which it had special expertise in supporting member states (see Figure 1), the consultative meeting sought to clarify what was distinctive about the contribution of the Council of Europe youth sector in responding to youth issues in Europe.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/eu-youth-strategy-adopted_en

Figure 1: The distinctive contribution of the Council of Europe Youth Department and its partners to supporting youth policy development and implementation in member states



* see Williamson (2002), *Supporting young people in Europe: principles, policy and practice*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe

To that more comprehensive end, two different groups, one consisting of 'beneficiaries' of the work of the Council of Europe Youth Department, the other of governmental representatives, were asked to address three questions. Table 2 captures the essence of their responses:

Table 2: The distinctive character of the work of the Council of Europe Youth Department

	Beneficiaries	Governments
1 On what do we work with the Council of Europe Youth Department rather than with others?	Human Rights frameworks, standards and publications Co-management, partnerships and authentic 'trialogue' Support for CSOs and NGOs Understanding and support for youth policy and practice	Values Trust Co-management Innovation Pan-European coverage – an inclusive platform for dialogue
2 What does the Council of Europe Youth Department offer that others cannot?	NGO training, support, recognition, capacity building Collaborative methodology Equality Democracy in practice Safe, developmental spaces Networks – social capital	Knowledge Adaptability Tools, expertise and standards An external view on internal youth policy and practice Institutional co-operation Capacity building and policy assistance measures 'Models of good behaviour' A 'unique spirit' for youth policy development
3 What does the Council of Europe Youth Department guarantee us that no one else can guarantee?	Involvement in the whole process – planning, execution and evaluation Expertise and networking A strong emphasis on 'root and branch' participation (much more than 'just' co-management)	Co-management (the guarantor of youth voice and participation) Transparency and equal partnership 'Specificities' – responses very focused on context Quality, continuity and sustainability Critical reflection

The 'co-management' structure of the Youth Department is often the most heralded as its mark of distinction but clearly, from the list above, there is much more that is considered distinctive in the work of the Youth Department. Both governmental representatives and 'beneficiaries' of the work of the Council of Europe youth sector testified to a range of distinctions that merit elaboration in the following clusters:

- **Principled** – The work of the Council of Europe youth sector is grounded in clear *values* (of human rights, democracy and the rule of law). Its work is *trusted* and *transparent*, grounded in a commitment to equalities. For governments, it is *responsive* to requests for support and assistance while simultaneously *respectful* of national traditions and specificities. For youth organisations and young people, it recognises them as partner agents and actors for social change. It is anchored within a 'trialogue' of youth research, policy and practice.
- **Procedural** – Beyond the exercise of co-management, the Council of Europe youth sector promotes *institutional co-operation*, and the collaborative development of training courses, study sessions and other events. The *long-term planning* that distinguishes its work provides a guarantee of "quality, continuity and sustainability". The Council of Europe youth sector also courageously provides *innovation* and undertakes *pilot projects* on issues and trends that are often "not yet visible in member states" (the No Hate Speech Movement campaign is an exemplar, par excellence, in this regard). Grassroots movements are closely involved in its work, and its initiatives routinely accommodate 'excluded' groups such as young Roma, refugees and asylum seekers. These procedural qualities were referred to rather clumsily but appropriately as the Council of Europe youth sector's "participatory build strategy".
- **Policy-oriented** – The Council of Europe youth sector offers an *external view* on, and *support measures* for, national youth policies (through, for example, international reviews of national youth policy, advisory missions, 50/50 training courses). It is also 'standard-setting' not solely in relation to principles but also to practical action for, with and by young people, in terms of being '*opportunity-focused*' (rather than 'problem-oriented') and advocating "*quality and user-friendly spaces* for young people".
- **Practical** – The Council of Europe youth sector possess a variety of *tools* and *expertise* for both the *capacity building* of individuals and organisations within the sector, and the development and implementation of youth policy. It has a network of *knowledge and skills* (a "big variety of stakeholders") that extends well beyond the personnel and infrastructure of the Council of Europe Youth Department but is supported and connected by them, producing a *cohesive and coherent* whole.

All these distinguishing features of the Council of Europe youth sector are underpinned, according to observations during the consultative meeting, by a 'unique spirit', 'models of good behaviour' and a 'secure platform' for experiential and other forms of learning. This range of 'distinctions' needs to be enshrined prominently in any future strategy.

Resources

Methodologies and instruments

The Council of Europe youth sector is privileged to have some first-class human and physical resources. Beyond the core staff team of the Youth Department and the Youth Partnership, it benefits from the 'social capital' emanating from the CDEJ (the European Steering Committee for Youth, comprising government officials) and the Advisory Council on Youth (composed of representatives of youth organisations), as well as from the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR) and the correspondents for the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCY) (both co-ordinated by the Youth Partnership), and the Trainers' Pool provide the Council of Europe youth sector with an extensive body of experience and expertise in the youth field that is second to none. Beyond that, in terms of physical resources, it has the two European Youth Centres, in Strasbourg and Budapest, as well as a network of other youth centres throughout Europe on which it has conferred its Quality Label for Youth Centres.

Such human and physical resources have enabled the Council of Europe youth sector to produce a striking professional legacy:⁷

- innovative standards (notably through a number of recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on issues relating to young people);
- new instruments in the field of youth co-operation, such as: Framework Partnership Agreements in the youth field between the European Commission and the Council of Europe; Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility through the Youth Card; Partnership with the European Youth Card Association (EYCA); Partnership with the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA); Partnership work through sub-regional co-operation;
- intergovernmental co-operation on youth policy (notably through reviews of national youth policy, advisory missions, making a ‘youth dimension’ contribution to national action plans, summer universities, dedicated seminars);
- landmark campaigns in the youth field, such as the “All Different All Equal” campaign and the “No Hate Speech” Movement campaign;
- specific educational approaches for intercultural learning and human rights education, empowering young people to participate in society through the programmes of the European Youth Centres (Training courses, Study sessions, Expert groups and seminars, Symposia, The Youth Peace Camps, the Living Library methodology, etc.);
- dedicated human rights publications and training materials, including the ubiquitous *Compass* (and *Compasito*), education packs, the T-Kits (training kits/tickets), the youth work online magazine *Coyote*;
- the promotion and recognition of non-formal learning;
- the promotion and recognition of youth work, notably through active contributions to the European Youth Work Conventions and workshops on the history of youth work;
- the promotion and recognition of youth policy at European and national level, including through the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKYP), research studies, Youth ‘knowledge’ books, the journal *Perspectives on Youth* and the co-organisation of the First Global Forum on Youth Policies.

This impressive range of ‘output’ has addressed myriad issues and engaged a host of actors and participants, of which the following are no more than illustrative:

- Human rights
- Access to social rights
- Democratic citizenship
- Youth participation
- Roma youth and combating antigypsyism
- Young refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons
- Young people in vulnerable situations
- Young people with disabilities and mixed abilities
- Gender equality
- Heteronormativity, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia
- Intersectionality and multiple discrimination
- Environment and sustainable development
- Youth information, counselling and coaching
- Intercultural learning and appreciation of diversity
- Combating racism and discrimination
- Islamophobia
- Peace-building and conflict transformation
- Flight and migration
- Global solidarity
- Role of youth work in supporting young people facing violence, discrimination and exclusion
- Young Muslims in Europe

⁷ Further elaboration of this catalogue of achievements may be found in the Secretariat Memorandum for the Joint Council on Youth 36th meeting, Budapest 27-29 March 2017, European Youth Centre: Item 8 on the agenda – State of Play “The future of the Council of Europe Youth Policy: AGENDA 2020” (Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe) Some key highlights and achievements.

- Social inclusion
- The recognition of non-formal learning and youth work
- Transition to autonomy and the labour market
- Access to sports
- Intergenerational solidarity.

The European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest, with their in-house educational staff, are pivotal for the implementation of many of the activities outlined above, providing the 'secure' and participative space for learning and development as well as the necessary educational support, to which 'beneficiaries' at the consultative meeting paid tribute.

Furthermore, over the past eight years, from its mainstream budget, the European Youth Foundation has made around 2,000 grants to European youth NGOs for a wide range of projects and initiatives. The European Youth Foundation continues to develop innovative ways of engaging with the 'field' (notably the recipients of its grants), including its methodology for recognising the time given by volunteers to implementing youth activities throughout Europe.

The financial resources of the Council of Europe youth sector are, however, finite and, within the current economic and political climate across Europe, arguably more precarious. Any future strategy will clearly need to 'cut its coat according to its cloth'. On this account, a future strategy will have to be prepared for some variability in response to prospectively changing budgetary circumstances.

New agendas may have to replace rather than supplement some existing trajectories of the work currently undertaken, if other issues are identified as priorities within any future strategy. The European Youth Centres have significant running costs attached to their work, but they also produce an income through the renting out of their facilities to external clients when they are not used for educational activities. The European Youth Foundation makes a modest but important and often pioneering contribution to practical programmes of training and youth work practice within the triangle of maintenance, development and innovation (see Table 1 - above).

During the consultative meeting, an important observation was made recurrently that it is not so much the resources themselves that are available to the Youth Department, its statutory bodies and wider Council of Europe youth sector but the 'unique' ways in which they are used:

The approach is unique. Other institutions may do similar things – training, publications, symposia – but it is the process and quality of participation and assurance that is unique.

Once again, claims and assumptions were made about how the resources available to the Council of Europe youth sector are marshalled to produce distinctive forms of involvement and experiential learning. In times when 'belt-tightening', doing 'more for less' and 'doing things differently' are often demanded, a new strategy will require deeper and stronger evidence that full and proper use is being made of those resources in order to substantiate those claims.

Harnessing the power of the Council of Europe youth sector Enlisting and sustaining a community of practice

Reference was made during the consultative meeting to the idea of the Council of Europe youth sector constituting a 'community of practice'. Communities of practice have been defined as a process of social learning when:

People who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time, sharing ideas and strategies, determine solutions, and build innovations.

For the Council of Europe youth sector, there is certainly a shared *domain* of interest: a framework of policy and practice that provides opportunity and positive experience for young people. There is a *community*: stakeholders in the Council of Europe youth sector interact and engage in shared activities, support each other, exchange information, and learn from one another. And there is a *practice*: the Council of Europe youth sector has developed a shared repertoire of knowledge, methods and resources for conducting its work.

These ideas are all very relevant to defining the work of the Council of Europe youth sector. The trilogy alluded to above (domain, community and practice) bears powerfully on its internal structures and relationships which are extensive, inclusive and wide-ranging – from the biannual meetings of the Joint Council on Youth, the annual meetings of PEYR and the EKCYP correspondents, meetings of the Youth Department's Trainers' Pool, preparatory meetings for training courses, expert meetings, seminars, anticipated publications and other events. All routinely engage representatives of governments, youth organisations and youth research – the so-called 'magic triangle' that has strengthened the youth sector significantly in recent years.

Indeed, for approaching 50 years the Council of Europe youth sector has steadily developed and consolidated its community of practice, expanding its networks and repertoire professionally, geographically and intellectually. It has promoted its 'co-management' approach through the shared decision making of its statutory bodies (governmental representatives and youth organisations), brought youth research and 'knowledge-based' practice firmly into its orbit, and developed innovative methodologies in pursuit of its core agendas.

A new strategy for the Council of Europe youth sector should both seek to celebrate its particular 'community of practice' and give consideration to the view expressed during the consultative meeting that an even more outward-looking, promotional position may need to be adopted if the 'community of practice' of the Council of Europe youth sector is to be further strengthened. In particular, this would include, for example, working more closely with municipalities (local authorities) and being as attentive to new institutional players in the youth field as it has always been in relation to emergent issues facing young people in Europe. It should not be forgotten that the Council of Europe youth sector was the first European institution working with (rather than about) *inter alia* young Roma, LGBTI young people, young refugees and young people from minorities. The Council of Europe youth sector must not lose sight of this powerful fact but, with the changing institutional landscape for youth work and youth policy, it may also need to cast its professional net even more widely than it has done in the past.

Demonstrating success

Indicators and measures of outcome and impact

A theory of change seeks to establish the end goal of a process and then to work backwards to identify the steps required to reach that goal. In earlier reflections on the achievements of Agenda 2020, the Council of Europe youth sector was very able to list *outputs* from the work of the Youth Department – such as feedback of individual participants, the number of training courses, study sessions, meetings and publications. What it seemed less capable of doing was to pinpoint or document *outcomes* and, ultimately, the wider *impact* of that work.

The consultative meeting was asked to populate its grid of important issues for the Council of Europe youth sector to address with suggestions as to how any such work might be recorded and 'measured'. There is, often for good reason, reluctance to acquiesce to pressures for outcome measurement, especially when work is heavily process driven. One is reminded of the old adage that 'not everything that is important can be counted, and that not everything that can be counted is important'. One is also attentive to the fact that poor quality *input* is likely to produce poor outcomes, whereas good quality input is unlikely to produce bad outcomes, even if better outcomes may be difficult to specify both in terms of place and time of their emergence.

Nevertheless, there is pressure from many quarters to strengthen attention to outcomes and impact, to generate some sense of 'science' beyond what are sometimes alleged to be little more than acts of faith.

The consultative meeting did not produce a great deal of guidance in this direction. It did, however, reflect on whether or not the Council of Europe Youth Department – through its valued and often rather expensive processes – was in fact working with the 'right' people and reaching the 'right' target groups in order to produce 'real' impact, particularly in relation to the minority and marginalised social groups that are invariably claimed to be its priorities if human rights and social justice for them is to be realised.

These are important and challenging questions to ask, though they are open to wide interpretation. The Council of Europe youth sector cannot reach every young person in Europe, certainly not directly. It is

always reliant on intermediaries and interlocutors of different complexions: governmental officials, young politicians, youth workers, and (some) young people themselves. A balance in the attention to be given to those different stakeholders – in recognition of the *different* contribution to outcomes and impact that they may make – needs to be determined before questions of ‘accounting’ and ‘accountability’ can be addressed. A further balance needs to be struck between responding to the ‘real’ (expressed) needs of young people on the one hand and, on the other, promoting the vision, mission and values of the Council of Europe to young people and the youth sector. Both require professional judgment, within any guidance provided by a new strategy.

The response of the four groups that worked simultaneously on questions as to whether or not the Council of Europe youth sector was on the ‘right’ path was eclectic and often repetitive. They can, however, be grouped under the headings of Realism, Reach and Representation:

- **Defining the challenge (being ‘realistic’):** What exactly are the ‘real needs’ of young people? Does the Youth Department really have the capacity to address them? Can the Youth Department respond to the ‘real needs’ of young people (i.e. housing, employment, health)? It is not always a question of reaching the ‘right’ people but also of adopting the ‘right’ approaches to moving from transnational to local levels. The Youth Department has to rely on its constituencies (i.e. member states, youth NGOs, participants in training courses, users of its materials, beneficiaries of grants from the European Youth Foundation) to spread the word; it cannot do this itself. Arguably, some said, the Youth Department could develop a more focused position. Others suggested that, far from improving working ‘upwards’ (towards, for example, political recommendations), the Youth Department should be supporting mechanisms to bring its values and standards to practice at the local level. [NB. The two directions of travel are not necessarily in conflict with each other].
- **Understanding the limits of ‘reach’:** The Youth Department only reaches ‘the usual suspects’ (namely more articulate, included and confident young people), some at the consultative meeting alleged, though this was a hotly contested issue in subsequent debate. How feasible is it for the Youth Department to *reach* many of the young people towards whom it directs its work, particularly given how powerful *language* often is as a barrier to participation and information? [NB. The Council of Europe youth sector certainly does not engage *only* with ‘the usual suspects’; its track record speaks to that. There may, however, be legitimacy in questioning the proportionate engagement with different groups of young people.]
- **Considering the argument for broader ‘representation’:** Some participants at the consultative meeting argued that the representation of young people is too narrow; there could be stronger representation of particular groups of young people, beyond the parameters of youth organisations. [NB. This point needs to be contextualised both in relation to the positively evaluated composition of the Advisory Council *and* in the context of many other mechanisms invoked by the Council of Europe youth sector to engage with different groups of young people.]

Two further points of significance arose at the consultative meeting. One was the view that impact was secured significantly through the empowerment of individuals who had participated in the Council of Europe youth sector’s ‘community of practice’. They were now embedded in numerous systems in the youth field and beyond, taking the ‘message’ forward in this way. The other was that much of the work that had originated within the *Council of Europe*, as it became diffused, came to be associated with the European Commission (or, indeed, other institutions), particularly when ‘making it happen’ locally was often achieved through securing EU funding in order to develop projects that had taken root and shape through experiences under the banner of the Council of Europe.

More work needs to be done on this question. Outcomes and indicators of success have been a matter of thought and reflection for the Youth Department for over 15 years.⁸ There is now more urgency to sharpen thinking on this front in any future strategy for the Council of Europe youth sector.

⁸ See Williamson, H., *Supporting young people in Europe Volume III*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe 2017.

Conclusion

Key imperatives for achieving depth in a new strategy

Since the establishment of Agenda 2020 at the conference of Ministers responsible for youth in Kyiv in 2008, three critical changes have taken place that will need to be carefully and explicitly accommodated in a new strategy.

1. Although a new strategy can be relatively short, avoiding too much detail in order to retain the possibility for flexibility and re-interpretation in the light of emerging challenges and circumstances, there is now an expectation that any strategy will pay attention to *what counts as evidence of outcome and impact*.
2. The institutional, political and professional territory within which the Council of Europe youth sector is located has become more populated, more complex and more challenging. Several countries in Europe are now less interested in and less receptive to its work. In this context, the Council of Europe youth sector will need plausible and persuasive argument that its approach yields *distinctive benefits* that do not accrue from the experience or intervention of other stakeholders, and that it helps young people support the Organisation's values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
3. Ultimately Youth Agenda 2030, or whatever it is to be called, has to continue to *promote* the value of the depth and breadth (the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the community of practice) of activities undertaken within the Council of Europe youth sector, despite its resource implications, *position* this work in a new political, social and professional landscape in Europe, and *prove* that the returns that accrue from building pathways to the exercise of human rights and participation in democratic life merit the creative human and financial resources that have hitherto been invested in it.

This report has been written by
Howard Williamson

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Concept of the consultative meeting

See: <https://rm.coe.int/concept-note-consultative-meeting-15-16-may-2018/16808aee83>

Appendix 2: Programme of the consultative meeting

See: <https://rm.coe.int/summary-of-the-general-rapporteur-consultative-meeting-on-a-council-of/16808aee84>

Appendix 3: List of participants

See: <https://rm.coe.int/list-of-participants/16807ba35d>

Appendix 4: purposes of the next strategy of the Council of Europe youth sector

[Abstract from the introduction to the consultative meeting by Antje Rothemund, Head of the Council of Europe Youth Department]

WHAT IS THE STRATEGY FOR?

- Maintenance (communicating existence and contribution)
- Guidance (ensuring clarity and consistency)
- Cohesion (strengthening collaboration and consensus)
- Legitimacy (political and institutional)
- Stakeholder/shareholder commitment + ownership
- Vision and mission for the development of identity
- Focus and limits (providing the “capacity to say No”)
- Priorities
- Expectations
- Mobilisation of (human and financial) resources

HOW WILL THE STRATEGY BE USED?

- To explain the Council of Europe’s youth agenda
- To understand the Council of Europe’s role in youth policy
- For institutional location and identity
- To define actions and priorities
- To provide parameters for implementation
- For argumentation/lobbying, attack and advocacy
- For cross-sectorial co-operation
- For dialogue with donors
- For recognition and alignment

WHO WILL USE THE STRATEGY?

- Council of Europe Youth Department
- Member states (CDEJ, line ministries; Permanent Representations)
- Advisory Council, European Youth Forum, national youth councils, youth NGOs
- Partner and beneficiary NGOs, youth workers, communities of practice

WHAT KIND OF CHANGE TO FACILITATE?

- Development of policy and practice in response to young people’s expressed needs and concerns
- Adaptation to on-going social and cultural change

- Responsiveness to strategic priorities by member states
- Strengthening perceptions of 'youth policy' by all youth sector stakeholders
- Stronger conversion of rhetoric to reality in the promotion and defence of the human rights agenda, and the fundamental values and standards of the Council of Europe, throughout Europe
- Improvement in quality development; including a diversification of methods and ways of working
- Diversification and widening partnerships and beneficiaries
- Better understanding of the ways in which shareholders make use of our resources and materials
- More robust definitions and measurements of 'success'
- Improvement in methods of communicating success
- Strengthening knowledge and skills transfer