The Congress
of Local and Regional Authorities

19 th SESSION
CG(19)15
5 October 2010

Integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Committee on Culture and Education
Rapporteur: Eunice CAMPBELL-CLARK, United Kingdom (R, SOC[1])

Summary

The transition of young people to adult life is not always an equal and smooth process: some benefit from new opportunities whilst others experience vulnerability and exclusion. The Congress believes that local and regional authorities must rise to the challenge to reduce this "youth divide" and to promote the social inclusion of all young people, regardless of their social, ethnic and cultural background.

However, due to multiple difficulties faced by young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, policies and methodologies cannot be transposed wholesale from one group to the next or even sometimes from one individual to the next. Hence the need to invest in youth work and youth policy to develop a framework capable of delivering programmes and practice which will produce positive outcomes for these young people and develop their self-belief and confidence.

The main purpose of these projects and working methods developed by local and regional authorities, by youth NGOs and by young people themselves, is to lift young citizens out of the social exclusion in which they live and to empower them to reach their full potential, as well as to take their proper place and play a meaningful role in society.

---

[1] L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
NR: Members not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress

A. DRAFT RESOLUTION[2]

1. The transition of young people to adult life can be a very unequal process: while some benefit from new opportunities, others experience vulnerability and exclusion. The challenge to local and regional authorities is to reduce this "youth divide". In doing so, they need to find a balance between proactive policies and reactive support mechanisms in ways that will benefit the most disadvantaged and promote the inclusion of all young people.

2. When devising these youth policies and support mechanisms, local and regional authorities should remember that the active participation of young people at local and regional levels in policies which concern them, as actors and not just objects of youth policy, is a key objective of the Congress as laid down in the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. The array of youth parliaments and councils across Europe bears out the importance engaged young people attach to their participation in decision-making processes. Young people's voices must be heard when policies are formulated – they can contribute to the identification of problems and solutions as well as to the definition of appropriate responses.

3. Young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods face a variety and often a combination of difficulties: exclusion from the labour market, drop-out, lack of self-belief and alienation, as well as substance misuse, criminality, lack of decent housing or homelessness, poor mental health, financial exclusion and reduced participation in community life.

4. Local and regional authorities have a duty to guarantee citizens' human rights, including social rights, and ensure these rights are accessible to all through the formulation of relevant, evidence-based policies. In view of the multiple difficulties facing young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, a "one size fits all" approach is inappropriate: policies must be flexible, reflect the differing needs, ideas and expectations of each individual; they must not only address social and economic problems but also the political, cultural and spiritual dimensions; and rather than have one specific objective, they should work towards a range of desirable outcomes. They must also be devised with the full participation of young people in the spirit of the Congress Revised European Charter on Participation. A framework should be developed to strengthen local capacity for devising and delivering programmes and practice, to produce positive outcomes for and generate self-belief in young people.

---

5. Policies seeking to achieve the social inclusion of young people from disadvantaged areas should be opportunity-focused and support young people's integration into society, for example by promoting access to education and training, facilitating their entry into the labour market, by providing decent housing and healthcare, access to public services, social rights and services, to basic services such as transport, leisure, culture, access to media and communication tools, as well as to legal and financial services such as loans.

6. Whereas motivated and organised youth readily participate in the formulation of policies, it is more difficult to engage young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. To convince such young people of the capacity of policies to improve their situation requires more time, effort and imagination.

7. Policies and programmes should be designed with the full participation of young people and adapted so as to enable young people from disadvantaged areas, who find it more difficult to engage, to identify with and believe in policy goals, and to be motivated to take responsibility for those goals so as to actively engage in their own transition, gaining new skills, motivation and confidence along the way.

8. *In the light of the above, the Congress invites local and regional authorities to*:

a. set up or strengthen municipal and regional youth departments, so they have the capacity and competences to undertake the research necessary to design effective, evidence-based policies and programmes;

b. provide adequate resources to ensure effective implementation and evaluation tools. Evaluation should consider both inputs and outputs, the policy effects on individual cases should be assessed, and conclusions drawn for future action;

c. engage in dialogue, consultation and collaboration with young people from disadvantaged areas and involve them in planning and decision-making processes, both to motivate them and to ensure policies and programmes respond to their needs and expectations;

d. provide accessible and meaningful opportunities for disadvantaged youth to promote their social integration by establishing frameworks for co-operation and development, proposing advice and guidance, as well as organising activities, and in particular supporting, either financially or in kind, youth-initiated and youth-run projects with a social, economic or human purpose, with a view to building their confidence;

e. provide facilities, such as youth or community centres, or recreation areas, and give young people from disadvantaged areas a say in how these spaces are organised and used;

f. explore the possibility of setting up mentoring or 'buddy' systems to help young people from disadvantaged areas gain in life management skills, or offer away-from-home opportunities, including in different countries, in order that they experience and learn from new horizons and are able to see themselves as part of the global society;

g. promote gender equality in youth work and devise methods to prevent and combat violence against women and girls in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in order that they may reach their full potential and integrate into society;

h. ensure information is available to all those working to support social integration (local politicians, local managers, practitioners) and to young people using all appropriate means, whether through social networks or more traditional methods;

i. raise awareness of the Revised European Charter for the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and ensure its implementation.

9. With regard to their youth policy relating to young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the Congress further invites local and regional authorities to:

a. work with the voluntary and community sectors, health authorities, schools, social and prison services, local businesses to provide specific, youth-focused services and guidance;

b. facilitate access to decent living conditions and housing and provide information, support and guidance to those who are homeless;

c. co-operate with health authorities to ensure access to free healthcare and information, as well as support and guidance on well-being and healthy lifestyles;

d. deliver drug and alcohol education and information programmes and activities, for example in schools, youth clubs or by means of mobile services in disadvantaged neighbourhoods;

e. ensure free access to education, libraries and cultural institutions, free learning materials and free or subsidised transport to educational establishments;

f. work together with civil society, social partners and local businesses to provide work experience opportunities to develop work skills and increase employability;

g. ensure that any training provided for young people is closely linked to job opportunities and job creation, for example in small or medium enterprises and on municipal projects in the construction sector. This training should enable young people to develop their critical faculties and capacity to reason and gain a better understanding of themselves and the world;

h. provide information, advice and guidance in careers, training and educational possibilities – both formal and non-formal – to facilitate the transition from school or joblessness to active life;

i. promote active democratic citizenship by helping young people to develop citizenship skills, encouraging them to participate in citizen initiatives, associations, organisations such as charitable or sports associations, political parties and trades unions;

j. facilitate access to ICTs to promote e-participation.

10. In the framework of the preparation of a recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on "youth policy approaches: access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods", the Congress invites its members to provide details of relevant good practices from their municipalities and regions for the expert seminar to be organised in December 2010 on the same theme.

B. EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Preface – setting the scene[3]

1.   For the past three decades there has been consistent evidence that transitions for young people towards the adult world are "extended, complex, contingent and reversible. 'Stuff happens' to them as they navigate their way through and many get lost in transition".[4]   The consequence is a 'youth divide',[5] with some young people benefiting from new opportunities but others experiencing vulnerability and exclusion; unless preventative and compensatory public measures are attentive they risk compounding this situation, as some young people take all (learning, training, work, volunteering and constructive leisure) and others flounder at the margins.

2.   Young people's transitions are a path demanding numerous sequential decisions, each one affecting subsequent options and possibilities. Public interventions may both reinforce and resist the messages coming from peers, family and neighbourhood, but the path remains riddled with uncertainty. Some groups of young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods remain more exposed and susceptible to risk: those with few or no qualifications, from minority ethnic groups, with disabilities, and from family contexts of unemployment and offending. There is always the challenge of pitching both proactive policy and reactive support in ways that would benefit the most disadvantaged.

3.   The final contextual point is that young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods rarely face difficulties in splendid isolation. Just as more equipped young people embark on transitions with individual aspiration and resilience and family and school support, so the transition pathways for less advantaged young people are impeded by combinations of drop-out, lack of self-belief, alienation and perhaps substance misuse, criminality, homelessness and problems with mental health. It is that sustaining cluster of disadvantage that needs to be checked and, if possible, put into reverse towards destinations of integration and citizenship.

Introduction – some background thoughts

4.   The territory of social inclusion, integration and cohesion is peppered with a thousand debates, models, concepts and thoughts about practice. An early entrant at the European level was the European Commission's DGXXII 'citizenship study'.[6] This was one of the first to establish the four (political, cultural, economic and social) pillars of active citizenship, each of which demands attention when considering strategies for the integration of young people. Moreover, it also raised the crucial questions of input issues (the volition and competence of young people – what motivates them to get involved and what skills do they need to become involved) as well as outcomes (what knowledge, skills and attitudes have they acquired through having been involved).

5.   More recently, as debates have raged over the relative balance to be struck between young people's need for autonomy and their need for support, the issue of access has been promoted as arguably the guiding theme for 21st century youth policy. This requires both appropriate information (so young people know where to turn) and differential levels of advice and guidance (so young people make optimal use of the possibilities before them).

6.   There is growing evidence that the young people best placed to make the most of the opportunities they encounter are those with a requisite blend of human, social and identity capital – qualifications and recognition from achievement in both formal and non-formal learning, networks and trust across a social milieu, and the capacity for different forms of self-presentation (and, arguably, self-promotion) in different contexts, according to what seems to be required. Young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods are often in short supply of each and all of these.

---

[3] This report has been compiled by Dr Howard Williamson, Professor of European Youth Policy, University of Glamorgan, Wales, United Kingdom.

[4] Merton, B. (2007), *Learning from the Edge: Engaging and Motivating Young Adults – a review of policy and practice 1997-2007*, Leicester: Young Adults Learning Partnership, p16.

[5] Jones, G. (2002), *The Youth Divide: diverging pathways to adulthood*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

[6] European Commission (1998), *Education and active citizenship in the European Union*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

7.   The final significant debate has been about the attachment of young people to their communities and neighbourhoods and across the generations. One effect of processes of individualisation has been for the links between young people and their immediate environments (extended family, and the economic and social infrastructure) to have been severed. Young people have often been cast adrift, expected to make their way in the world more independently. Euro-speak about 'flexicurity' and the 'entrepreneurial self' carries risks of 'blaming the victim' for failing to take responsibility for their predicaments. There is a prima facie case for seeking to restore a stronger mutuality between young people and those around them.

8.   Many of these issues have been recognised in policy development at the European level. Suffice it to mention here the youth policy development work of the European Commission (the 2001 White Paper on Youth, the 2004 Youth Pact and the 2009 Communication[7]) and that of the Council of Europe (its international reviews of national youth policies since 1997, and Agenda 2020 and the Parliamentary Assembly debate in 2008[8]). All place considerable and significant emphasis on the participation, engagement and integration of young people, especially those from more disadvantaged circumstances.

9.   What is clear from recent work on 'social capital' (networks of trust and contact) is that, for young people in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the 'bonding' social capital to which they are often attached may, though offering some security and support in offsetting some aspects of disadvantage, in fact serve as a form of entrapment rather than advantage,[9] what they need is 'bridging' social capital – vision, hope, belief and stepping stones to alternative futures. The critical challenge is one of converting policy frameworks that recognise the issues mentioned above into concrete programmes and practice, and ultimately into effective positive outcomes for young people.

Questions that need to be answered – regarding both young people and approach

10.   The 'integration' of young people is both a pervasive policy objective and, usually, a core aspiration of young people themselves. But, especially in the context of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and young people who may have faced a string of dashed expectations and broken promises,[10] there are some key questions – for policy and practice, and for those young people – that need careful attention.

11.   The first critical issue concerns the motivations of young people to engage with interventions, opportunities and possibilities extended to them. Much will hinge on their subjective meaning and relevance to the young people concerned. What's in it for them? Where will it lead? In the addictions field, there is an established 'cycle of change' in which there are moments when individuals are far more likely to be receptive to treatment and support; similar moments have to be identified in the lives of young people.

12.   It is a boring truism but young people are not a homogenous group. Nor is the 'sub-population' of young people in disadvantaged areas. Some will be ready to engage in new initiatives, but others will remain sidetracked by other priorities or already embedded in alternative cultures, such as offending behaviour or substance misuse. Their needs will, inevitably, be different. They will encounter new possibilities from different past experiences, within different current circumstances, and with different prevailing attitudes.

13.   What becomes important here is ensuring that appropriate space is built into programmes to ensure sufficient time and patience for the building of relationships, establishing credible channels of communication and understanding, and constructing a platform for progression and development. There is nothing worse than shattering the hopes of these young people yet again.

---

[7] European Commission (2002), *A New Impetus for European Youth*, Brussels: European Commission; European Commission (2004), *European Youth Pact*, Brussels: European Commission; European Commission (2009), *Investing and Empowering*, Brussels: European Commission.
[8] Council of Europe (2008), *Agenda 2020*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2008), *Refreshing the Youth Agenda of the Council of Europe*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
[9] See McLeod, J. (1995), *Ain't No Making It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighbourhood*, New York: Westview Press; Williamson, H. (2004), *The Milltown Boys Revisited*, Oxford: Berg.
[10] Williamson, H. and Middlemiss, R. (1999), 'The Emperor Has No Clothes: Cycles of delusion in community interventions with "disaffected" young men', *Youth and Policy* 63 (Spring).

14.   There is then the question of the balance to be struck between reactive and proactive approaches to the social inclusion of young people. The reach of projects and programmes is critical. It is relatively easy to respond to the demands and interests of already motivated young people, quite a different challenge to reach out to more sceptical young people and persuade them of the value of taking part. Furthermore, there needs to be some understanding of the place of any initiative between the individual young person and future destinations (in the labour market, family life and civil society): what is the nature of the stepping stones?

15.   Yet those destinations should not govern the criteria for judging the efficacy of the initiatives, otherwise there is a serious risk of what one commentator referred to as 'hitting the target, but missing the point'. Inappropriate or unrealistic targets can easily produce 'perverse behaviour' which, in this context, means that projects have little choice but to cherry pick the least disadvantaged of the most disadvantaged. That leaves the most disadvantaged even more distant from integration and participation.

16.   Finally, there is always the tension between targeted or more universal practice. To what extent should there be an open door rather than more precise entry criteria? Does the former produce a useful or a wasteful mix; do the latter ensure intensive intervention for those most 'in need' or a stigmatised ghetto? There are arguments both ways, but these need careful resolution.

Intended outcomes

17.   There are no magic bullets for the youth integration agenda. Nor should there be single, specific objectives. Instead, it is useful to consider the range of desirable outcomes that are conceivably likely to be achieved through responding to, or connecting with, the ideas and expectations of young people in disadvantaged areas. First, at an individual level, one can anticipate the prospect of desistance from more negative behaviour and associations, through participation in and experience of new horizons, ideas, commitments, networks and interests. One can further surmise the wider neighbourhood benefits that are likely to accrue, through these young people becoming more motivated to take on community engagement and social responsibility.

18.   Both of these outcomes provide the springboard through which young people acquire both the confidence and competence that engenders and reinforces self-belief that new directions are possible and achievable, especially when new experiences have opened up a broader mosaic of contacts, beyond the previously narrow attachments within neighbourhood and peer group.

Things that could be done - practical examples of projects

19.   Before considering some practical examples of initiatives promoting and supporting the integration of young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, it is instructive to consider briefly the kind of overlapping framework within which all such projects can be located. Otherwise they can appear to be disparate and disconnected measures with apparently little in common between them. This framework accommodates social, economic, political, cultural and spiritual dimensions. The classical social space provides for association, activities, a level of autonomy, advice and support and access to other services and opportunities. It would enshrine youth clubs and projects, voluntary activities, and platforms for dialogue and conversation. More economic measures would provide learning and training in vocational skills, encourage social enterprise and support entrepreneurship. Closer to the political arena would be initiatives concerned with young people's democratic participation, involvement in decision-making and the practice of active citizenship. The cultural domain would be more focused on expressive activities in the realms of music, arts, sports, language and dance. Facilities for rock bands, DJ-ing, skateboarding, graffiti-writing, or break-dancing would epitomise projects in this area. Finally, there is growing evidence, within a spiritual arena, of the contribution that faith groups can potentially make to the integration of young people, though ecumenical rather than fundamentalist structures tend to pursue this objective.[11]

---

[11] See Billings, A. (2009), *God and Community Cohesion: Help or Hindrance?*, London: SPCK.

The projects

20.   In Saint-Priest in France, a group of young people committed to skate-boarding were supported both procedurally and financially by the municipality to plan and implement their own skate-park. This was a project 'born out of an expressed need': following both complaints from local people about the presence of skaters in inappropriate places and, after contact from the municipal authorities, demand from young skaters that they should have an appropriate space to pursue their leisure-time interests. The young people were then involved in taking the idea forward to fruition – a concrete example of local active citizenship.[12]

21.   Another example from the realm of sport, but connecting to formal learning in school (see below) is the Indoor Soccer and Homework Guidance project set up by one young man in the Netherlands. In five disadvantaged areas of Nijmegen, Said Achouitar established weekly indoor soccer training coupled with compulsory school work guidance. Today around 200 children aged 9 to 16 take part and, beyond the soccer and formal learning, there is training in social behaviour skills (community responsibility) and respect for older people. A recent development has been the formation of a foundation to develop this work and the establishment of a vocational training institute to involve former 'trainees' in supporting new trainees, especially through a buddy 'peer-to-peer' system to consolidate co-operative learning.[13]

22.   In the context of school, higher education and the labour market, some projects from the Malmo region of Sweden are illuminative and instructive, not least because their original experimental nature has now transformed into 'regular activities' (personal communication). The Integration Co-ordinators – named after the two social pedagogues with a multi-cultural focus who have run the project – have sought to oil the wheels of integration within the school setting for new pupils with a foreign background. The point of departure for all practice is that 'the problem doesn't lie with the young people, but within the structure of the school'. Practical work has been undertaken with parents (familiarising them with the Swedish school system), the school (eliminating latent institutional negativity towards immigrant pupils) and pupils themselves (on democracy and children's rights). Significant changes in both the school's structure and culture have been achieved.

23.   A second project from the same area is The Mentor Company Project. This was established in 2002, providing the opportunity for school pupils with a foreign background to pay four visits and have at least two weeks of paid internship at one of eight participating companies. This initiative has, since 2004, been integrated in the schools' regular educational programme. The objectives of the project are to motivate young people, decrease the prejudices of employers and forge networks and dialogue between immigrant pupils and local companies. All three appear to have been achieved, with some value-added impact as companies have sometimes taken on the young people for longer and even permanently. The young people themselves, and their younger siblings, have displayed a stronger sense of engagement and commitment to learning.

24.   Third, the Nightingale project has developed mentoring between university students and children aged 8-12 from areas characterised by social exclusion. The mentor and mentee meet once a week over a period of a year. The immediate goal is to promote 'an increasing understanding, respect and tolerance for each other's different social and cultural backgrounds' but the longer term objective is, ultimately, to produce a more representative balance of university students through the recruitment of more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is hoped that the mentoring experience will cement and sustain more committed aspirations to higher education – and thereby to a greater probability of social inclusion.[14]

25.   Some of the most excluded young people are those who have experienced being in prison. In Estonia, in a number of prisons holding young people, a range of small (literacy, music, sports and arts) initiatives have been developed to support young people still in prison to prepare for their release – by both addressing past behaviour and anticipating future (different) behaviour. Supported by the European Union YOUTH programme, the longer-term outcome of this work is difficult to determine but more immediate qualitative responses from the participating young people suggest its beneficial

---

[12] Source: the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (Committee on Culture and Education) (2008), *Integration of young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods*, 28 October 2009.
[13] Source: personal correspondence, but see also http://www.sbfc.nl.
[14] Source: personal correspondence, but see also http://www.urbact.org.

impact. Young people testified to improvements in their communication skills, greater determination and resilience to resist temptations to return to a life of crime, and greater faith in their own positive capacities. Positive project experience would appear to have 'given strength and will to start searching for possibilities to move on with one's life'.[15]

26. Becoming more active and included in current life lay behind the development, in the Bukki Hegyhat region of Hungary, of a Teenager Parliament, under the auspices of the Orhegy Association. Structured according to 'parliamentary' conventions in Hungary, and open to all young people aged between 10 and 30, the Teenager Parliament has evolved to organise and co-ordinate youth programmes in the region, one of the most disadvantaged in the country, as well as supporting and facilitating the work of youth voluntary groups in the settlements. Its overarching aims are to provide non-formal learning experiences, build tolerance, prepare young people for democracy and strengthen inter-generational, inter-cultural and international dialogues and collaboration.[16]

27. A very comprehensive report from Cornwall in the United Kingdom captures a diversity of initiatives concerned with the integration of young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Twelve projects are described, which include a number of activity-based initiatives (especially in expressive fields such as dance and theatre, and in outdoor education), volunteering programmes, police cadets, substantive policy measures around health, housing and enterprise, local participation, and personal advice and support. All these case studies are anchored within an awareness of the rich social capital that often still exists in rural communities, despite their material poverty and the consequential 'social exclusion' of young people. The overarching premise is that regeneration and new possibilities occur 'when local young people can access assets for community wellbeing and public benefit'. Furthermore, 'local problems are predominantly a product of the failure of the public and private sector delivery systems and of the socio-economic structure of society and not the individuals in rural societies themselves'. The vibrancy and impact of the range of projects described are testimony to that.[17]

28. What we can detect from these examples is that there are multiple rungs on the 'ladder of engagement'. Styles of youth work span a continuum from self-developed and self-directed 'independent' youth work, through more shared and interactive practice, to approaches that are more externally-imposed and structured. Target groups vary, though there appears, predictably, to be a particular focus in many disadvantaged neighbourhoods on young people from immigrant and minority communities. Approaches range from the exclusively proactive to those that are reactive to demands from young people. Sometimes attention is directed to more structural features of disadvantage (such as labour market discrimination and exclusion) and sometimes towards more individual characteristics (such as confidence and aspiration). The contexts of projects vary enormously, taking place not just in leisure time, but in connection with schools, families, employers and prisons. Perhaps most significantly, most projects seek to 'triangulate' their activities, linking young people to other dimensions of their lives – whether this is family, learning, employment, criminality, expression, generations or community. In this respect, a defining common characteristic of projects is the enhancement of social capital: putting more disadvantaged young people in closer contact with networks of possibility and opportunity. It is through these *connections* that the social integration of young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods can be fomented, through building their individual confidence, promoting their understanding, building platforms for dialogue, and establishing frameworks for co-operation and development.

29. The examples provided above are but a handful of practical illustrations of projects involving young people that were either designed explicitly to cultivate social integration in more disadvantaged areas or had this impact as one of their outcomes. There are, of course, many more, for 'social inclusion' – especially of young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds - is a pressing imperative of public policy across Europe. But from these particular examples it is possible to draw a 'map' delineating certain shared and clustered features of initiatives that are likely to produce these desired effects.

---

[15] Source: Enn, U. and Kivinukk, E. (2008), *Youth Work in Prisons?,* Tallinn: Estonia National Agency; see also http://euroopa.noored.ee/files/Noorsotoo_vanglas_ENG.pdf.
[16] Source: personal correspondence.
[17] Source: Aynsley, D. and Whyatt, G. (eds) (2008), *Integration of Children and Young People in Cornwall's Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods*: a report by CERES for the Council of Europe's Committee on Culture and Education.

Making it happen – structures and strategies

30.   There are numerous parameters to the framing and shaping of integration projects. Some are mutually exclusive, others overlap with each other. Some are essential pre-requisites to effective progress and development, others are optional extras or equivalent alternatives. The grid for the social integration of young people has both vertical and horizontal links, crossing the domains of young people's lives and requiring the conversion of strategic thinking into effective operational practice. As Karen Evans has suggested, what is espoused in policy is not always enacted, and what is experienced by young people is not always what those who had enacted policy had in fact intended.[18]

Voice

31.   At the heart of these interventions, whatever their origins, is the concept of youth participation. This much vaunted concept is open to many forms of interpretation (and misinterpretation). Nevertheless, it is the foundation of the youth White Paper of the European Commission[19] and central to the youth policy work of the Council of Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.[20] There are now concerted efforts to identify the 'quality' features of such practice, especially in relation to the involvement of young people in decision-making processes and the effectiveness of youth participation,[21] something about which little is really yet known.[22]

32.   There are always arguments about both the nature of youth participation and the 'types' of young people who engage in the myriad youth councils, parliaments and forums that now exist. Clearly, harder work is needed to reach and listen to young people who are less likely to beat an active path to opportunities for participation. Yet we can see from the example of the skate park in Saint-Priest that an appropriate response to the expressed wishes and needs of a group of disadvantaged young people can reap dividends for subsequent active engagement, civic responsibility – and social integration. Platforms for hearing the voice of young people – compliant with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but so much more - are a critical prerequisite to their social inclusion.

Reach

33.   A second key factor is the 'outreach' programmes undertaken by schools and colleges, or developed by more street-based youth workers.   Physical 'reach' must be accompanied or supplemented by psychological reach: young people need to believe the offer they are receiving or the response they are hearing. There is a long tradition in many countries of building learning and youth development within the community from bases of formal learning. It is recognised that, without such measures, some young people will get left behind in formal educational achievement. The work being done in Malmo, supporting the aspiration and achievement of young people from immigrant backgrounds, is illustrative of this approach.

---

[18] Evans, K. (1998), *Shaping Futures: Learning for Competence and Citizenship*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
[19] European Commission (2002), *A New Impetus for European Youth – White Paper*, Brussels: European Commission.
[20] See *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*, Charter without the status of a convention, adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, May 2003.
[21] Source: personal correspondence. Pink Hilverdink, Policy Adviser at the International Center of the Netherlands Youth Institute, has been gathering information on research on quality indicators in local youth participation. The Netherlands, Sweden, Latvia, the Flemish and French Communities of Belgium, Finland and the United Kingdom have all been pioneering relevant studies. See also Hallett, C. and Prout, A. (eds) (2003), *Hearing the Voices of Children: Social Policy for a New Century*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.
[22] See Kirby, P. with Bryson, S. (2002), *Measuring the Magic? Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision-making*, London: Carnegie Young People Initiative.

Space

34. The young skaters in Saint-Priest were subject to complaints from local people for 'occupying' the wrong space. It is a common issue, not just between young people and other members of communities, but also between different groups of young people, where conflict can result.[23] Hence the need for, and provision of, the 'youth and community' spaces that exist in many parts of Europe – youth centres, community centres, creation centres, hobby education centres, and cultural centres. The precise focus of their activity is a matter for local determination but beyond what is provided, there are key issues of how things are organised and how decisions are made. Many such neighbourhood associations are notorious for contributing to the further exclusion of young people, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet without equitable access to such space, it is those very young people who will continue to be the source of concern and complaint in the neighbourhood – and their prospects for social integration will be further diminished.

Dialogue and collaboration

35. Few, if any, young people are particularly concerned about the structures for the delivery of services they receive. What does matter is that relevant structures are both coherent and consistent in the offers they extend or in the responses they make. Too often there is over-duplication or glaring vacuums in what is available. To avoid either, it is imperative that municipal authorities and local (youth) NGOs ensure that they are engaged in dialogue, consultation and collaboration. In turn, this produces consensus and shared ownership of the framework within which provision is made. The examples from both Malmo and Cornwall are suggestive of a complementarity in the initiatives that have been developed.

Individual support

36. Whatever the value of collective measures to promote social integration, many young people benefit – at least initially – from more individualised attention and support. Youth declarations that seek greater autonomy can sometimes cloud this need: young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds need to acquire a certain level of self-confidence and competence as a basis for effective 'life management'[24] and moving forward more autonomously. Hence the value of mentoring and buddy systems. There are numerous models for enabling and ensuring appropriate individual support, but there are few guaranteed recipes, though there are clear messages from research about what does not work, namely too rigid focus on particular outcomes and performance management.[25]

Learning Platforms

37. It is quite remarkable how many similar projects are constantly re-invented, apparently with little reference to previous initiatives. Of course, every particular local project has to contend with its distinctive contextual challenges but this does not mean that lessons from similar measures that have taken place elsewhere are irrelevant. As Marris and Rein argued long ago in their discussion of 'dilemmas of social reform':

> The whole process – the false starts, frustrations, adaptations, the successive recasting of intentions, the detours and conflicts – needs to be comprehended. Only then can we understand what has been achieved, and learn from that experience. Even though no one ever again will make exactly the same journey, to follow the adventures of the projects offers a general guide to the dangers and discoveries of their field of action.[26]

[23] See Riepl, B. and Williamson, H. (eds) (2009), *Portraits of Peer Violence in Public Space: Experiences from Young People in Four Localities in Europe*, Vienna: Austrian Institute of Youth Research.
[24] See Helve, H. and Bynner, J. (eds) (1996), *Youth and Life Management: Research Perspectives*, Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press.
[25] See Colley, H. (2003), *Mentoring for social inclusion: a critical approach to nurturing mentor relationships*, London: RoutledgeFalmer; Colley, H., Boetzelen, P., Hoskins, B. and Parveva, T. (eds) (2007), *Social inclusion for young people: breaking down the barriers*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
[26] Marris, P. and Rein, M. (1972), *Dilemmas of Social Reform*, Harmondsworth; Penguin, p.260.

38.   Opportunities to share experience, to compare and contrast achievements and difficulties, need to be established, not least to distinguish 'real' stories from the 'flagship' projects that are sometimes more of a public relations exercise than an accurate account of practical intervention.

Issues demanding attention

39.   There is a plethora of issues that face effective practice, from project development, through the procedures to be adopted and established, to questions of output and impact. In short, there are eternal dilemmas about the relationship of principles and aspirations to delivery and practice. Below are some of those that are most recurrent and demanding.

Youth involvement, participation, consultation – who, when, what, why and how?

40.   The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life sets out a solid foundation for applying participative principles in sectoral policy development and institutional decision-making.   It indicates the instruments that can be used to promote youth participation taking account of the 'diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of young people'. Yet the precise nature of youth participation needs to be extremely carefully tuned if both its potential and its limitations are to be properly understood by all concerned. Different mechanisms for engaging with the voice of young people carry different strengths and weaknesses, and all approaches are likely to attract both praise and criticism. Youth participation is a critical component of social integration but it demands careful reflection if it is to be developed and supported appropriately.[27]

The training of 'youth workers'

41.   Not all social integration projects have adults working with them, but many do. And although the concept of 'youth work' differs widely across Europe,[28] there is always the matter of the professionalism of those who work with young people. This is not, it is important to add, a question of professionalization, which remains a controversial item: it is about whether or not practitioners – paid workers or volunteers – are properly prepared and equipped for the task they are being required to do. This raises issues about training and whether or not there are, at minimum, some baseline training needs in relation to both knowledge and skills.

Information

42.   In a world of proliferating information sources and channels, especially within youth culture, there are two key issues in relation to the social integration of young people. First, there is the matter of information for the infrastructure supporting social integration programmes: the local politicians, managers of services, and front-line practitioners.   What are the best mechanisms for the dissemination and discussion of 'good practice'?   Secondly, what are the best channels for communicating with young people: how do they get to hear about possibilities and opportunities that may inspire their motivation and interest? And once young people are involved, what needs to be done to allow them to tell their story and promote their own ideas and experiences? It is easy to embrace post-modernity and advocate the use of social networking sites and Twitter, but more 'traditional' methods of paper recording and reporting, and human contact and communication may also be important in certain circumstances.

Support for young people

43.   In both reaching out to more disadvantaged young people and in responding to their unsolicited requests, the volume, nature and timing of subsequent support is of critical importance. There are no formulas here, but what is offered will significantly influence the trust and credibility established with the young people concerned. A poor offer, one that is badly timed, or one that does not meet inflated expectations, is likely to produce further disengagement rather than cement integration. Therefore discussions of financial support, or the provision of advice and guidance, have to be very carefully pitched if the objectives of social integration projects are to be fulfilled. Young

---

[27] See Crimmens, D. and West, A. (eds) (2004), *Having their say - Young people and participation: European experiences*, Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing. Of particular significance for this paper is Chapter 9: Mori, L., 'Young People as Outsiders: The Italian Process of Youth Inclusion'.
[28] See Verschelden, G., Coussee, F., Van de Walle, T. and Williamson, H. (eds) (2009), *The history of youth work in Europe and its relevance for youth policy today*, Strasbourg; Council of Europe Publishing.

people who are often sceptical about new interventions and promises need 'critical people at critical moments',[29] who command their trust and credibility.

Progression

44.   Whatever the merits of a skate park, a music project, or a sports initiative, there is always the question of progression. Where do the young people go next? They cannot rollerblade or play Fender Stratocasters forever. We still know little about the long(er)-term effects of social integration programmes and the extent to which they have contributed to the sustaining of the inclusion of young people from more disadvantaged neighbourhoods. How can approaches be constructed to enable and ensure that these young people secure access to further opportunities in learning, civil society and the labour market?

Evaluation

45.   Given the multiple dimensions that are at play in both the development and the outcomes of social integration projects (not to mention the processes within them), their evaluation is notoriously difficult. What is to be evaluated and over what period of time? Yet in a climate of scarce resources and the paramountcy of 'evidence-based' policy making, the pressures to evaluate programmes will remain. Therefore it is important to ensure that evaluation tools are proportionate to the scale of the project. Furthermore, they should accommodate both quantitative and qualitative measures, consider both inputs and outputs (sometimes the quality of intervention will, arguably, be more important than the specificity of outcome), include questions about process and relationships, and take account of both immediate and longer term destinations. There is a growing body of literature about the role young people themselves can play in various stages of evaluation, from design, through execution, to dissemination.[30]

Conclusion

46.   Few would argue that, in the context of the 'youth divide' in Europe, there is a moral – as well as political and economic – imperative to invest more effort and energy into promoting the social integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. There is a long history of potted efforts but only a more recent history of any overarching European reflection and strategy. The challenge now is to move beyond the theory and the strategic framework to strengthening local capacity, commitment and operational delivery.

47.   It will always be easy to slip into reactive measures constructed as a knee-jerk response to problems and pathologies presented by young people (crime, drugs, homelessness, and drop-out). Young people deserve something better. Early intervention is easy rhetoric but difficult to put into practice, for identifying relevant groups of recipients without producing stigma and 'labelling' is still a tricky question.

48.   What is clear is that the guiding principle should be on opportunity-focused and not problem-oriented intervention. The overarching belief needs to be that, given meaningful and relevant opportunities and possibilities, young people will bring a positive contribution to the table and, in the process of participating in and developing a project, will reinforce the benefits they receive. The practical projects discussed briefly in this report are suggestive of this effect, even if understanding of longer term effects remains elusive.

---

[29] See Social Exclusion Unit (2000), *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Report of Policy Action Team 12 – Young People*, London: The Stationery Office.

[30] See The Routes Project Team (J Clark, A Dyson, N Meagher, E Robson and M Wootten) (eds) (2001), *Young People as Researchers: possibilities, problems and politics*, Leicester: Youth Work Press. Of particular significance for this paper is Chapter 6: Robson, E., 'The Routes Project: Disadvantaged Young People Interviewing Their Peers'.

49.   All young people both deserve and need a basic framework of opportunity and experience. The complex modern world calls for young people to have access to, and to take advantage of, a wide-ranging 'package' of opportunity and experience, including formal education, non-formal learning, new technologies, careers guidance, away from home experiences, sport, music, culture, international contact and so on – and to do so through a culture of dialogue, participation and critical reflection. If they do not, they are unlikely to develop the capacities for full and constructive engagement in the labour market, civil society and family life. Young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are least likely to secure this 'package' through more private means and through family support: hence the greater importance and role of public and community institutions in assisting their inclusion and development.