UP2YOUTH

Youth - actor of social change

newsletter 01/2008

Content

Newsflash

Doing it differently: agency in transitions to parenthood, employment and citizenship

The second UP2YOUTH thematic workshop took place in Lisbon in November 2007. Researchers from all over Europe working on one of the three topics young parenthood, ethnic minority youth or participation were invited to present and discuss their findings. The aim was to deepen the analysis with regard to complementary approaches and to broaden it with regard to regions and countries not involved in the UP2YOUTH consortium.

Identities and agency: young people, difference and social cohesion

The workshop was opened by Ann Phoenix from the University of London. She was invited as a keynote speaker as her research focus on the relationship between social inequalities, especially with regard to ethnicity and gender, and young people's identities is closely related to the objectives of UP2YOUTH. On the structural side she has been working on the intersection of inequalities. On the agency side she has been investigating processes of identity building within the daily routines of young people. In the following we present a summary of Ann's keynote speach.

> "If you want to do something, it's totally up to you, apart from the fact that it's not. … I wish children could have a say in things, after all we are the adults of the future " (female, 13)

This quotation from a 13 year old young woman interviewed in the framework of a study on consumption relates to the contradiction in young people's agency under conditions of late modernity. On the one hand, there are longstanding common findings that some young people are concerned to act on their social worlds and to effect changes e.g. in volunteering, campaigning and youth social action groups such as on environmental issues. On the other hand, their agency is influenced and constrained by social structure. Based on an overview of a broad range of research (which unfortunately can not be made due reference to in this summary), the key argument of the speech was: "Young people craft meaningful biographies from the constraints imposed by changing social structures and communities of practice."

Ann Phoenix started from an understanding of identity as the place or pivot where social structure and its symbolic representations is lived out as forms of both subjectivity and community. Identities are not only constrained by structure but also a resource for subjective projects which are increasingly multiple and de-centred. And: identities are linked with social action also in terms of collective identities as group membership allows for the exploration of individual identities. Depending on young people's social positioning, however, the emerging explorations are

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not always in conformity with socially sanctioned values and practices. Thus identity-making is a simultaneous process of belonging and the production and reproduction of us/them-boundaries.

In the individualisation processes associated with late modernity identities have become understood as optional inasmuch as individuals are theorised as having the freedom to construct their identities on what is important for themselves. But they are also affected by dispersed but pervasive insecurity. Disconnected from common shared social identities that provide mutual recognition, identities have become fragile projects which require constant reshaping and redefnition.

With regard to the recursive relationship between structures and agency reference can be made to the objectives of UP2YOUTH: What becomes important for individuals depends on the positions in the social hierarchy that are available and accessible to them. This includes people's knowledge of their own social position and the value attributed to it as central and relevant or marginal. There is a broad range of empirical evidence and examples, especially with regard to gender and race, according to which the situatedness of identities, and the awareness of it, result in specifc strategies in relation to the self and thereby contributes to differential positioning These examples show how different these processes of doing difference are.

> 'Even if I don't do anything else in my life, I've got this one thing that I'm gonna have for the rest of my life and I brought it into the world. I could stay on the dole for the rest of my life but I've still got something that I've done. (female, age 19, parent at 18, 1child)

The consciousness of a devalued position leading to defensive strategies is visible in research both on young women having to suppress their feelings in order to be seen as a "nice girl". Young black men to negotiate their identities between being the "darling of popular youth sub-culture" or the "sinner in the classroom" while being conscious of the disadvantages the latter implies for their further life perspectives. Another example of "constrained agency" in identity projects is the higher rate of early pregnancy of young women growing up in public care. For them, a baby is the only way of securing "never ever to be on my own again".Negotiating the social positioning associated with race, gender or class often involves distrust and informal segregation between young people from different ethnic groups and so has implications for social cohesion.

An area in which the relation between collective identities and agency under conditions of late modernity becomes highly visible is consumption. In consumption, young people have constantly to negotiate insecurity, to balance commonality and individuality as well as to achieve public visibility – and thereby confrm specific identities. This requires social action which is rarely recognised as

such by adults. Consumption and identity relate to risk society: consumption allows for constructing individual biographies while at the same time it is limited by standardised products and so reinforces insecurity. Boys are more likely than girls to deal with the pressures of consumption by buying branded items. Girls also experience pressure to consume, as well but distinguish between brands and style. They also identify and refect on power relations in processes of defning inclusions and exclusions from style groups.

> 'When I get here I haven't slept for 72 hours and I am 16 years old ... And when I arrive instead of asking me have you eaten, have you slept, you are asking me to swear on my mother's life … a mother who I couldn't even say goodbye to when I was leaving'." (male, age unknown, serial migration study)

Yet, refexiveness does not weaken the pressure and anxiety of not being popular. Consumption therefore can be seen as a status system relying on specifc sets of rules and symbols. It refects social divisions and, in addition, requires hard work and social action and has the potential to create stress and unhappiness but also to confer high status and so generate esteem.

Young people are often conscious of the fact that their agency is disregarded by both particular adults and by societal institutions in general. A convincing example in this context is that of young, unaccompanied refugees to the UK who are confronted with accusations of lying to immigration offcers in order to get into Britain by illegitimate means. The enormous efforts and hardships they have endured in order to migrate by themselves are disregarded. As a result, the only agency attributed to them is being duplicitous.

Recognition of agency requires the consideration of inequalities as well as the ways in which young people incorporate them into their identities. This highlights the necessity for policies for recognition and inclusion. Without these, the feeling of not being listened to affects both young people's well-being and self-esteem and so has deleterious effects on their identity construction. Acknowledgement of young people's agency thus needs to take into account both intersecting inequalities and the ways in which young people incorporate these into their identities.

In sum, young people's awareness of their social position has consequences for their current practices, for social cohesion, for the negotiations of their futures and the crafting of meaningful biographies. Individualisation and collective identities operate simultaneously in changing social structures and collective identities can also be sources of insecurity. Young people's everyday practices simultaneously demonstrate "constrained agency" and social creativity. The problem is, however, that often young people are not recognised as social actors because they do not always exercise agency in ways which are socially approved.

- the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- the transfer and use of qualifcations across different countries. http://europa.eu/rapid/press ReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/ 1760&format=HTML&aged=0&langua ge=EN&guiLanguage=fr

Young people's full participation in education, employment and society
The Commission has adopted a communication stressing a cross-cutting to youth issues to enhance young people's active participation in education, employment and in society. It proposes to reinforce the partnership between EU institutions and youth representatives and to prepare in future every three years an EU report on youth. Other concrete proposals include the launch of a consultation and an impact assessment on voluntary activities of young people, an initiative for job mobility and access of young people to culture. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0498en01.pdf

A transversal approach to youth policy
The Council of youth ministers on 16 November 2007 adopted conclusions on a transversal approach to youth policy, with a view to enabling young people to fulfl their potential and participate actively in society.
In the Conclusions the Council supports the Commission's view that investment in youth must start early and must follow a transversal approach. It also underlines that the structured dialogue with young people should be reinforced. The Council underlines the importance of different forms of education – from formal to non formal and entrepreneurship education - as well as the European Youth Pact in addressing young people's transitions into the labour market and integration in society in general. http://register. consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st14/st14426.en07.pdf

New European Commission's Social Agenda
In 2008, the European Commission will launch its new Social Agenda. There are currently three important and interlinked topics on the table:
· Europe's social reality
· Economic and Social Cohesion
· The EU budget
A consultation process has been started on the Internet. Until 15th of February contributions can be made here: http://ec.europa.eu/employ ment_social/emplweb/news/news_ en.cfm?id=352

Workshop 'young parenthood'

Our workshop discussion started from a collection of questions and emerging issues the thematic group had developed so far. Among them, there is a strong focus on learning processes in transitions to parenthood – an area which needs to be explored by further research.

- What are tensions between options and constraints in Individualised transitions into parenthood ?
- Cultures of transitions into parenthood: are there (new?) practices within (old?) cultural frames? Which engendering respectively degendering processes can be identified?
- Which learning contexts have to be considered and how is learning related with negotiating meaning, images and normalities in transitions to parenthood?
- Which policies are relevant between self-steered networks and public support systems; and what is the impact of local regimes of transitions into parenthood?

Key issues of the debate were *1st* dominant public discourses such as the demographic discourse or its counter-discourse, the moral panics on teenage pregnancy; *2nd*, insights into developments in Sweden, Norway, and Estonia; and *3rd*, rich material on young people's decision making and negotiating processes.

Eva Bernhardt, demographer from the University of Stockholm, presented findings from the Panel study of Swedish young adults, conducted during the last years. Two waves of questionnings of 22 to 34 year old young women and men have been analysed with regard to the mutual relationship between value orientations and family building. The results underline the complex interaction between diffrent factors of family building. Housing reveals to be a structural barrier, but above all subjective motives and cultural traditions have to be considered.

An-Magritt Jensen from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology of Trondheim, looked at the complexity of choices under different and partly provocative angles: by referring to data from European Surveys and the COST action A19, she highlighted the ambivalence of extramarital births from a children's perspective. She also brought into mind that the silent revolution in partnerships also may provoque tendencies of re-traditionalisation – e.g. when lone mothers take over the whole responsibility for a child, or when men seek for a traditional workshare in marriages with (often much younger) women (often from a non-Norwegian background).

Intercultural aspects also have been highlighted by **Leeni Hansson** from Tallinn University. She pictured a highly segregated situation of the Estonian society, in which ethnic ascriptions and belongings (Russian – Estonian) represents the most important demarcation line with regard to marriage markets, but also with regard to beliefs on work share among the partners.

Julia Hirst from Sheffield Hallam University started from UK survey data and from her own studies on three generations of teenage pregnancy. She emphasized that against all moral panics on teenage pregnancy young people experience more difficulties from poverty and social ascriptions – e.g. reactions from family, school, neighborhood, employers – than from the age at which they became parents. She also highlighted some mostly hidden en-acting aspects of teenage parenthood, such as responsibility, meaning of life, and social bonds. In a gender perspective, this includes also new concepts of masculinity.

Rachel Thomson from the Open University, Milton Keynes (UK) presented findings from longitudinal studies carried out together with various colleagues. She showed that transitions to parenthood and the concepts of motherhood and fatherhood they rely on are interlinked with (local) youth cultures, (local) normalities, (local) opportunity structures (education, work, housing) for young people. Self-concepts are deeply embedded in these contexts. They depend on the extent to which young women and men are achknowledged as responsible persons and are given the chance to experience themselves as such.

Disa Bergnéhr from Linköping University analysed negotiation processes on parenthood in young couples. Through focus group interviews she found that couples negotiate especially 'the ideal life course', the tension between 'love relationship and family'; 'the right time for parenthood' between the risks of damaging ones career and infertility, and last not least body matters.

In sum, the working group process has benefited from these contributions in several respects:

- As regards theoretical perspectives, a multi-perspective approach seems to be most appropriate for the complexity of factors playing together in transitions to parenthood.
- As regards theoretical concepts, a deeper understanding especially of culture and learning has been achieved.
- As regards methodology, a lot could be learnt from the variety of approaches and methods applied in the studies presented by our guests. Also in this regard, multi-methodological proceedings appear to be a highly promising way to achieve a better understanding of young women and men in their transitions to parenthood.

Workshop 'youth participation'

The starting point of the workshop on young people's participation was formulated in terms of emerging issues which had resulted from the interim phase of the UP2YOUTH project:

- What actions of young people can and/or should be defined as participation?
- Does school prepare for or inhibit participation?
- To what extent are youth cultures recognised as participation?
- What are positive and negative policy factors with regard to youth participation?

Adrienne Sörbom from the University of Stockholm questioned current understandings of political participation as necessarily being connected to either institutions or social movements. Intergenerational comparison shows how boundaries between life style and political participation, between private and public are being increasingly blurred. In late modernity life politics stand for the simultaneity of an ideology of makeability and the uncertainty of agency.

David Buckingham from the Institute of Education London pointed into a similar direction in his presentation of the EU-project CIVICWEB. There is few evidence that the Internet attracts more and other young people to engage online rather than offine. As with regard to offine participation the question arises who actually listens???? and where participation starts and where it ends considering the relevance of sites like 'Myspace' but also right wing sites.

The contextualisation of structure and agency in local communities was also central in the contribution of *Alan France* and *Liz Sutton* from Loughborough University. Young people evaluate existing offers according to their access to resources and opportunities for coping with everyday life. A 'fair' balance between rights and responsibilities may enhance participation. The experience of unfair treatment in contrast may lead into criminal careers.

Alessandro Martelli and *Nicola de Luigi* from the University of Bologna referred to participation in the context of intergenerational relationships which structure arenas of agency within institutions but also informal strategies and relationships within the local society. Different meanings of citizenship materialise in different policy orientations: policies of affliation, services, money and a social pedagogical model balancing freedom and tutorship.

Serdar Degirmencioglu from Beykent University in Istanbul reminded of the crucial importance of young people's subjective motivation. Are participation programmes connected to young people's subjective interests, do outcomes provide experiences of real infuence? As a consequence, 'guided participation' means policy and practice which address the links between subjective motivation and power relations.

Barry Percy-Smith from the SOLAR research group, University of the West of England, Bristol, extended this perspective to consequences for participatory practice which starts from children's and young people's actions rather than following preset normative assumptions. Consequently, participation means a general shift from services to spaces in which young people express their needs while professionals have the role of interpreters.

The perspectives of participatory policy and practice depend on local, national and European policy structures. *Romain Pasquier* from the University of Rennes questioned the comparative scope of UP2-YOUTH: to what extent are infuences on different levels refected, how have different political histories formed different models of citizenship and is there conver-gence or divergence in the process of European integration?

As a result, the thematic working group concluded to have received valuable comments.

- With regard to the defnition of participation it seems crucial - yet almost impossible - to separate normative from descriptive and analytical aspects which includes the diff culty to distinguish political from civic participation: what is (not) political?
- As regards the learning perspective it showed that - apart from institutional settings - theories on participatory practice need to be related with structural and policy factors.
- With regard to youth cultures individual and collective activities need to be distinguished while de-standardised life courses imply that a restriction to 'youth' is debatable.
- With regard to factors of policy and practice a broader perspective 'from services to spaces' and from possibilities for having a say towards having a right to be listened was suggested. More comparative analysis is needed to identify favourable constellations.

'Growing Up in a Liquid World: Youth Questions and Public Debates.' 5-8th September 2008 in Barcelona. http://www.isa-sociology.org/barcelona 2008/

New Publications

Ødegård, Guro (2007): *Political socialization and influence at the mercy of politicians*: A study of a local participation project amongst young people in Norway. Young, Vol. 15, pp. 273-297

Migration Integration Policy Index The Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) measures policies to integrate migrants in 25 EU Member States and 3 non-EU countries. It uses over 100 policy indicators to create a rich, multi-dimensional picture of migrants´opportunities to participate in European societies. More info and download of full report at: http://www.integrationindex.eu

Barnes, Marian; Newman, Janet & Sullivan, Helen (2007): *Power, participation and political renewal.* Case studies in public participation. Bristol: Policy Press. http://www.policypress.org.uk

Studies in the Education of Adults (2007): Special issue on 'Identity', 'Agency' and 'Structure'. Studies in the Education of Adults, Vol. 39, No. 2 Autumn 2007. http://www.niace.org.uk/publications

Siurala, Lasse (2007): *A European framework fore youth policy*: What is necessary and what has already been done? Diskurs Kindheits- und Jugendforschung, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 377-391. http://www.diskurs-kindheits-und-jugendforschung.de

Spalek, Basia (2007): *Communities, identities and crime.* Bristol: Policy Press http://www.policypress.org.uk

Stellinger, Anna (2008): *Young People Facing the Future.* Paris. http//www.fondapol.org/v2/index.php

Pohl, Axel & Walther, Andreas (2007) *Activating the disadvantaged.* Variations in addressing youth transitions across Europe, in: International Journal for Lifelong Education, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 533-553.

Stauber, Barbara (2007): *Motivation in transition.* Young, Vol. 15, pp. 31-47

Workshop 'transitions of ethnic minority youth'

The discussions in the workshop about young people from ethnic minorities' transitions to work were guided by a couple of guiding questions. These had emerged during the first year of the project:

- How do different constellations of immigration/minority/majority ('figurations') support particular forms of agency/agentic orientations?
- How do young people as actors construct their orientations and alter their relationships to contexts?
- How can we grasp these processes without either 'reifying'/'othering' the young people's social positionings nor neglecting ethnicity as a powerful structuring principle of transitions?

The workshop started from the methodological angle of dealing with second generation youngsters and questions of 'ethnicity' in general: **Roberto Alzetta** from the University of Genoa argued that the way social sciences are posing their questions is always a political statement. Therefore he proposed the perspective of the 6th framework project TRESEGY as a caution against the fallacies of 'international' research. He focused on the 'intelligibility' of social phenomena rather than on their explanation.

Barbara Stalder of the Federal Ministry of Education in Berne presented data from a longitudinal study among school leavers in Switzerland. She showed that differences in post-compulsory educational choices and pathways could not be explained with the duration of stay in the country alone and contrary to the importance of opportunistic factors the country of origin did not play a crucial role.

Valérie Sala Pala from the University of Saint-Etienne centred her contribution around some conceptual points she felt that the UP2YOUTH still had to clarify: the notion of ethnicity. In her opinion this was still oscillating between a constructivist and a naïve-positivist definition which tends to overlook the power relations involved. One potential issue with the research question of UP2YOUTH was the focus on individuals which makes it difficult to analyse collective actions and processes like political movements of young immigrants.

Vesa Puuronen from the University of Joensuu started his observations from Kymlycka's distinction between voluntary and forced minorities resulting in a differentiated multi-culturalism with very different outcomes for the different groups. This differentiation, as Puuronen showed for Russian speaking young people in Finland, has large impacts on young people's identity formations and their transitions to work. He concluded that without positive action approaches the difficulties of these young people could not be overcome.

Anna Kende from the Hungarian Academy of Science in Budapest provided the workshop with insights into the situation of young people from Roma minority communities in Hungary. She stressed the interplay between exclusion processes as reasons for difficult transitions and pointed to some unintended side effects of integration policies in the vocational training area. One important sideeffect is that by creating special needs schools exclusion in some areas even increased.

Momodou Sallah from the DeMontfort University of Leicester analysed the development of multi-cultural, anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies in the UK. His main thesis was that since several years assimilation and integration have become major concepts in policies and public debate again.

Karin Schittenhelm from Siegen University in Germany presented findings from a transnational study on the role of cultural capital. In her view, the role of collective identities and the subjective sense of belonging is often under-estimated. Her own research also showed the need for comparative models that include a multi-level analysis.

In conclusion, all participants of the workshop valued the broad overview of perspectives that the choice of experts had brought to the front. While discussion on certain aspects of the contributions were very lively and certainly will go on during the whole project, there are a couple of common questions that the workshop has posed to the upcoming working phase of the UP2YOUTH working group.

- What role do collective identities play in the development of agency in youth transitions?
- The subjective perspective of young people on the majority society is a major factor in their social positioning. It would be worthwhile to look into its impact on their agency in school-to-work transitions.
- Every research dealing with these questions has to be self-reflexive on the way it is conceptualising its topics, its research questions and its methods of analysis.

Waechter, Natalia; Blum, Johanna & Scheibelhofer, Paul (2008): *Social capital as key for successful school-work transitions?* Analyzing migrant youths´ trajectories and social networks. In: Brooks, Rachel (ed.): Transitions from Education to Work: New Perspectives from Europe and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave (in press)

GHK (2007) Study on active citizenship education. Final report for the European Commission. http://ec.europa.eu/education/doc/reports/doc/citizensedu.pdf

Spannring, Reingard; Ogris, Günther & Gaiser, Wolfgang (eds.) (2008): *Youth and Politics in Europe.* Opladen: Barbara Budrich (in press)

Kovacheva, Siyka; Kabaivanov & Manolova, P. (2007): *Satisfaction with work-family balance.* Paper presented at the yearly session of the Union of Bulgarian Scientists (UBS), Plovdiv, 16 November 2007.

Bendit, René & Hahn-Bleibtreu (eds.) (2008): *Youth and the future.* Youth Transitions. Processes of social inclusion and patterns of vulnerability in a globalised world. Barbara Budrich. Opladen (Publication date: June 2008)

ISS (Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik) (2007): *The Socioeconomic scope of Youth Work in Europe.* Study commissioned by the Youth Partnership of European Commission and Council of Europe. Download: http://www.youth-partnership.net/youth-partnership/research/socioeconomicscopeofwork.html

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