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Introduction: learning mobility and non-formal learning

The Council of Europe (since the mid-1960s), the European Commission (since the late 1980s) and many European states and civil society organisations (in the aftermath of the Second World War) have long fostered programmes and strategies to enhance the mobility of young people.¹

The prevailing notion of such programmes is that the process of economic and political integration in Europe will indeed remain fragmentary and unstable without accompanying social and educational measures. Instead of a Europe with non-transparent bureaucratic institutions, a “Europe of Citizens” was meant to develop wherein people would get to know each other, appreciate their mutual cultural differences and, at the same time, form a European identity by saying “yes” to core European values. As such, mobility is considered important for the personal development of young people, contributing as it does to their employability and thus their social inclusion.

1. This introduction refers partly to a text by Elisa Briga: <http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/ekcyp/BGKNGE/Mobility>, accessed 30 January 2013.

These programmatic aims are increasingly confronted with the economic situations in some European countries where the unemployment rate among young people reaches nearly 50%.

But mobility is also important since it is considered to enhance intercultural competences and to contribute to the development of participation and active citizenship. In this respect, the learning dimension in mobility schemes is crucial: learning mobility in the youth field focuses on non-formal learning as a relevant part of youth work with links to informal learning as well as to formal education; it is understood as physical and organised learning mobility but does not neglect virtual mobility, which facilitates and supports physical mobility experiences.

From an institutional perspective, the Council of Europe was the first intergovernmental organisation to address the phenomenon of learning mobility at the European level; when the youth sector started opening up in the mid-1960s, youth mobility was included among its major themes. It is about an inclusive policy in the European context. It is about exercising rights to disadvantaged social groups to give equal rights to everyone independent of gender, generation, sexuality, disability, ethnic background and faith. Inclusive policy implies education, training, housing, equal resources for the disabled, immigrants and participation (democratisation). Inclusive policy is about equal rights for everyone and efforts to eliminate injustice. An inclusive policy is about social cohesion, which is a political term. It underlines the essentials for the attainment of the three core values of the Council of Europe: human rights, democracy and constitutional legality. It is a matter of how to develop and strengthen social relationships and provide access for all to educational and social programmes.

The first initiatives in this field were the European Agreement on Travel by Young Persons on Collective Passports (1961) and the European Agreement on "au pair" Placement (1969). In 1972, the European Youth Foundation (EYF) was established to provide financial support for European youth activities which serve the promotion of peace, understanding and co-operation among young people in Europe. From the mid-1980s, youth mobility became a permanent part of the agenda of the ministerial conferences and the number of texts covering specific aspects of mobility increased with the mobility of youth workers and local policies to promote mobility. In particular, in the 1990s the Council of Europe took important steps towards the promotion of youth mobility by founding the European Youth Card Association (EYCA) as well as the Solidarity Fund for Youth Mobility (now Mobility Fund by Rail for the Young and the Disadvantaged) and by adopting two recommendations, one on youth mobility, and another on the promotion of a voluntary service. Today, the most relevant political document for youth, The Future of the Council of Europe Youth Policy: AGENDA 2020, includes support for the development of youth mobility, which is also encouraged in the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on the participation of young people in local and regional life, wherein an entire article is dedicated to the role of local and regional authorities in the policy for mobility and exchanges.

Following mobility schemes for young workers in the framework of the European Social Fund in the 1960s, the European Union started at the end of the 1980s to promote youth exchanges through specific funding programmes such as Erasmus (1987) and Youth for Europe (1989). The Treaty on the European Union, signed in Maastricht in 1992, states that Community action should also be aimed at "encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors". Youth mobility became an asset of the EU youth policy

due to the further development of funding programmes promoting mobility, such as the European Voluntary Service. The White Paper “A new impetus for European Youth” (2001) underlined the importance of the recognition of specific skills gained through mobility experiences, and youth mobility emerged as a transversal policy which has to be taken into consideration in other policy fields.

One of the main focuses of the youth mobility programmes was the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities. Several important policy documents have been produced on the topic of youth mobility, including the European Quality Charter for Mobility (2006), the Council of the European Union’s Recommendation on the Mobility of Young Volunteers Across the European Union (2008), the Council’s conclusions on youth mobility (2008) and the European Commission’s Green Paper on “Promoting the learning mobility of young people” (2009). The promotion of youth mobility is also included in the Council of the European Union’s Resolution on a renewed framework of cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018). These developments paved the way to the Youth on the Move initiative as one of the seven flagship initiatives in the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union.² The strategy is the answer of the EU to the high youth unemployment rate and aims at preparing young people to face future economic challenges. The main idea behind Youth on the Move is that learning mobility is an important way for young people to enhance their development as active citizens, and strengthen their future employability both by acquiring new professional competences and developing a positive attitude towards mobility. Therefore, mobility is seen as a key instrument to prepare young people to live in the society of the future, and to be open to new ideas and opportunities.

In some chapters in this book (e.g. Cairns, Chapter II) it is underlined that attitudes towards mobility are changing due to the living conditions in some European countries. It is rather the habitus of a family than the attractiveness of European programmes which has a decisive impact on the mobility of young people. Overlapping reasons are seen in the consequences of financial crises.

What remains to be explored in this analysis are the influences upon mobility decision making, including migration to other countries. The most obvious answer is the neoclassical economic explanation: young people move to pursue better career opportunities and/or to escape what may be difficult financial circumstances at home.

On the other hand, findings from other research on the mobility of students and young apprentices consistently show the following outcomes:

- increase of self-confidence and enhancement of social competences;
- gaining intercultural competences;
- improvement of foreign-language skills;
- sustainable significance of the mobility experience for personal development.

The debate on youth mobility goes on and encompasses related policy fields, particularly employment and education. There are obvious links among these different sectors, but the youth sector also claims its own specificity and identity. Obviously, there is no clear common understanding as to what is considered youth work in the European countries. Nevertheless, we need a common basis, especially in the field of youth mobility. Therefore, we stress the importance of linking the rationale

2. See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/flagship-initiatives/index_en.htm.

and the spirit of the Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention³ with youth mobility activities.

Youth work is defined in the Council of the European Union's Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) as:

a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people. Increasingly, such activities also include sports and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the area of "out-of-school" education as well as specific leisure time activities, managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and is based on non-formal learning processes and on voluntary participation.

The following questions are embedded in this discussion: how to validate and recognise the skills and competences acquired through non-formal learning, and how to assess the impact that mobility schemes have on young people's personal development, as well as the added value of fostering civil society structures and democracy. It is not an easy exercise to provide answers to these questions, which is why co-operation with researchers and experts from practice and politics is crucial.

To gain a better understanding and knowledge on the topic several events have been held in the past, among them the conference Framework, Quality, and Impact of Young Europeans' Learning Mobility in May 2011 at the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe in Budapest. It aimed at taking stock of current debates and research findings on the learning mobility of young people, exchanging insights into quality factors and programme formats that contribute to the desirable impact of learning mobility schemes for young people, and identifying common interests, resources and interfaces as a basis for collaboration projects, studies and further exchanges within a European network of experts.⁴ The conference proved that despite the existence of a certain amount of research there is still a lack of knowledge and understanding. More efforts are needed to close this gap.

Another important result of the conference was the suggestion to implement a European Platform on Learning Mobility (EPLM) in the youth field, as an actor independent of existing institutional actors. The aim of such a platform is to facilitate a sustainable exchange between policy makers, researchers, practitioners, institutions and organisations involved in the youth sector. The continuous co-operation of these parties is seen as providing added value to the further development, visibility and recognition of learning mobility in the youth field. The platform is seen as an independent interdisciplinary network co-ordinated by a steering group in which researchers, policy makers and practitioners are working together in order to improve the quality of mobility and its effects on young people's lives. The 1st European Platform conference in March 2013 in Berlin may be considered a milestone and a concrete result of this initiative.

In this context, this book, titled *Learning mobility and non-formal learning in European contexts – Policies, approaches and examples* and published as part of

3. See: http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youthpartnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Youth_Work/Policy/declaration_1st_european_youthwork_convention.pdf, accessed 30 January 2013.

4. The papers of the conference are available at: www.forscher-praktiker-dialog.de/index/learning-mobility2011/index.html, accessed 5 February 2013.

a series of youth knowledge books under the EU/Council of Europe youth partnership, aims at contributing to better knowledge and understanding of the subject. The structure of the book corresponds to different dimensions in the youth field which are of fundamental importance.

In Section I, the authors will provide readers with an insight into historical developments, the political framework of youth mobility and achievements. Section II will draw on concepts and approaches concerning mobility and learning and shows, together with a European literature review on learning mobility, remarkable evidence concerning the high productivity of related research in this field.

To learn from others, to transfer knowledge, and to offer access to experiences, these are crucial elements in this context. Therefore, Section III refers to and offers good practice examples and project reports.

All chapters are written by experts in the field of youth mobility. The particular value of this book is that academics, researchers, political stakeholders, policy makers and practitioners have put together their knowledge and experience. The book intends to contribute to dialogue and co-operation among relevant players and to the discussion on the further development and purpose of youth mobility schemes in terms of outcomes for young people.

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