

**“Making Europe”:
youth participation through international voluntary work
and non formal education programmes**

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by

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Summary of Objectives

The European Union offers a wide range of mobility programmes in the field of tertiary education. Initiatives as the Erasmus programme are well known among young European students and have so far involved thousands of participants. Besides this, the European Union has developed initiatives in the field of non formal education as well. The intention of this thesis is to present the development of the European Union Youth Policy and its non formal education programmes designed all over the last 20 years and to assess their impact on young people in Europe. Special attention will be focused on the Youth in Action programme and on the international dimension of voluntary work in Europe. Its effectiveness in promoting youth participation to civic society, in inspiring a sense of active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans and to involve them in shaping the Union's future will be further discussed, in order to demonstrate that the promotion of a cross-sector youth policy should become a political priority.

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Introduction

Nowadays the European Union is an easy mark for criticism: the failure of the Constitutional Treaty, the “Irish no”, the democratic deficit, the embarrassing European election turnout, the weakness of the Lisbon Strategy, are only a few of the arrows flung from the bow of ruthless Eurosceptics against the European institutions. To assess whether such critics are justified or not it would require a deep analysis; on the other hand it cannot be ignored that a substantial progress in several fields has been so far achieved thanks to the process of European integration. In order to realise the scope of the change occurred in more than half a century of integration, it would be useful to look back at the dusty past of our continent. The following words are an excerpt from an Adolf Hitler’s speech held in 1938:

the weak must be chiselled away. I want young men and women who can suffer pain. A young German must be as swift as a greyhound, as tough as leather, and as hard as Krupp's steel¹.

Exactly fifty years later, in 1988, the European Communities launched their first programme for youth mobility, the Youth for Europe programme. And two decades later, Margot Wallström (2007), the vice President of the European Commission responsible for Institutional relations and Communication strategy, was able to express her enthusiasm on youth and Europe:

[to make] lifelong friends in other countries. That, to me, is an absolutely fundamental part of being European.

Even the fiercest opponents of the process of European integration should acknowledge that all over the last sixty years Europe has undergone a radical change (proved by the huge gap existing between Hitler’s and Ms Wallström’s statements) which reached its utmost expression in the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons. And young people as well.

¹ Hitler, Adolph, Speech on Germany's Future, 1938, available from <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk>

Young people in Europe experience today the possibility to move around freely, work and learn more easily than ever before. They live in a continent much different from the place where their parents and their grandparents lived. With the achievement of peace, an economic and political framework has been created. The last generation of Europeans have now the chance to offer their contribution for a cultural integration, through closer contacts, international experiences, intercultural exchanges.

All over the last 20 years young people in Europe have had the possibility to take part in several programmes aimed at promoting active citizenship, identification with Europe, solidarity and social inclusion. A key feature of these initiatives is that they have been designed within the framework of non formal education. Unlike formal education, which tends to take place in special settings such as schools, non formal education takes place outside institutions and is mediated by resources and people in the community. International volunteering in non formal educational contexts is currently one of the main instruments of the European Union's youth policy: through this approach, young people in Europe can discover and intensively experience the cultural variety of our continent, offering at the same time a meaningful contribution to local communities.

Is this the right key to promote affiliation to Europe among young people? Is it possible to claim that this is the path that will lead us to develop solidarity and mutual respect between European cultures? Will these road lead us to the accomplishment of what Jeremy Rifkin calls the European dream? This thesis tries to provide some answers to these and other relevant questions.

The first part of this work focuses on the development of the European Union's youth policy and its instruments, with a special insight on the Youth in Action programme, the cutting-edge tool in the non formal education area. The second part will analyse the processes and trends affecting currently European societies and young people through the challenging perspective of the *world risk society* theory. This will be a suitable introduction to discuss about active citizenship and youth political participation, to present a relevant case study and to finally assess the EU's instruments in the youth policy area.

PART I: The European Union Youth Policy

A systemic approach

The European Union has been defined in several ways: an institution *sui generis*, a super state, Commission President Manuel Barroso used recently the term *empire*. Each of these definition can be debatable, but for sure no one can doubt that the EU is a system. According to one of the basic principles of the systemic theory, a system is more than the sum of its components. If applied to the youth policy of the European Union, this principle highlights a crucial aspect to understand the current status of the youth area and its future development.

Keeping in mind that this policy is regulated by the open method of coordination, it is clear that all the potential progress depends on the contributions of the actors and institutions involved: the Commission (with the DG Education, Culture and Youth and the EACEA Agency) as engine of any progress, the commitment of the European Parliament and its related committees, the Council of Youth and Education Ministers, the impetus from the European Council, the consultative function of the Social and Economic Committee, the implementation by the Member States and the input from numerous NGOs and actors belonging to the civil society. All this components working together, sometimes proceeding at different speeds, ensure a development of the youth area. Taking into account that their impact should be placed in a systemic framework in order to be fully appreciated and understood, the following section will highlight and describe the tasks of the EU institutions and actors involved in the youth policy making, in order to define their contributions to the youth policy.

Legal basis

Being reconstruction and establishment of peaceful relationships among the European countries the main reasons for the foundation of the Communities, it was obviously premature to include the topic of youth policy in the European political agenda in the late fifties. In the original version of the Treaty of Rome, youth as a concept of European policy is not mentioned. We have to wait until 1993 with the Treaty of Maastricht, which enlarged the field of EU policies included also youth in its article 149, paragraph 2: the EU should “encourage the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors”. Education and youth programmes were officially included as new areas of EU competence and the art.149 became the legal basis for cooperation in the youth field at European level².

Member States are responsible for youth affairs and actions by the Union are essentially initiated by the Council through recommendations and programmes designed to develop cooperation and mobility at Union level. Such action is regulated by the open method of coordination.

The Commission

As of 1 January 2007, Youth is now explicitly mentioned in the portfolio of the commissioner formally responsible for Education, Training and Culture, to show that young people are given increasingly important considerations at European level. In 2005, the Commission established the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA, located in Brussels) in order to better manage the Community programmes in the fields of culture and education, including Youth in Action and Europe for Citizens. Besides lighting up the workload of the related DG, the Agency, fully operational from the 1st of January 2006, is also responsible for the evaluation of the projects, for the dissemination of information and for the contribution to European knowledge and expertise.

One of the Commission’s main function is to work as motor of the Union. This means not only drafting legislation, but also including a wide range of actors in the legislative sketching process, promoting dialogue among various stakeholders. Two examples of such actions concerning youth policy can be identified in the structured dialogue and in the D-plan launched in 2005 by the Commission. The structured dialogue, a direct follow-up of the White Paper on youth and a logical consequence of the European Youth Pact, is an instrument to actively involve young people in policy shaping debates and dialogue in relation to the European agenda. It offers a valuable

² It can be surprising to notice that such guidelines had already been determined 45 years earlier, although in a different context: in the Hague Congress in 1948, which set the framework for the Council of Europe, it is possible to find already references to “youth mobility” programmes in Europe.

contribution to the implementation of the Commission's Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate. Through this strategy, Member States have committed to set up national debates on the future of Europe, promoting discussions on key European themes at national level. The Commission assists the states in this plan, besides monitoring the results and providing feedback.

The European Parliament

CULT is the abbreviation of the European Parliament committee responsible for culture and education. Besides promoting culture, knowledge and cultural diversity the committee works to enhance cultural exchanges, the Union's education policy, youth policy and the development of a sports and leisure policy, cooperation with third countries in the areas of culture and education and relations with the relevant international organisations and institutions.

The main function of the parliamentary committees consists in amending legislative proposals and reports to be presented to the plenary. With the extension of the co-decision procedure the leverage of the European Parliament vis-a-vis the European institutions has considerably increased, to the extent that now, and even more in case of the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the Parliament is de facto a powerful legislative body.

All over the last 20 years European parliamentarians have exerted political pressure in order to improve, promote and enforce the youth programmes. Their commitment to increase the Youth in Action programme budget is a significant example of such actions³. Furthermore, the Parliament has constantly kept attention high regarding volunteering. An example of that is the report on the 'Role of Volunteering in Contributing to Economic and Social Cohesion' (2008) which encouraged Member States and regional and local authorities to recognise the value of volunteering in promoting social and economic cohesion, and recommended the promotion of cross-border voluntary projects.

The Council and the Presidency

The Council configuration responsible for the youth programmes is the Education, Youth and Culture Council (EYC) that brings together the related ministers from the Member States.

It usually adopts its decisions by a qualified majority (apart from on cultural affairs, where it acts unanimously) and in co-decision with the European Parliament.

³ See page 21

The Member State which holds the presidency of the EU plays an active role in the organization of the Youth Event, a gathering that involves 150-200 young people from across Europe (sometimes also from outside Europe) to discuss political issues and agree on priorities and messages to policy makers. This event, co-organised and co-financed by the EU-Presidency and the Commission with the cooperation of the Youth Forum, provides opportunities for dialogue between young people and decision makers.

The European Council

Since its establishment, the European Council's main function has been giving political impetus to the European Union through periodic meetings with chief of states. Such contribution has been provided as well in the youth field, with some relevant summits. Among them, the most influential in the last ten years were the following:

- the Lisbon council of 23 and 24 March 2006 focused on active employment policy and setting the lifelong learning as a priority;
- the Spring European Council of 22 and 23 March 2005, adopting the European Youth Pact;
- the Thessaloniki Council of 19 and 20 June 2003, extending the Community programmes to the countries of the Stabilisation and Association process.

The Member States

Youth policy varies considerably from country to country, according to the model adopted by Member States. Although two main models can be identified (a centralising model, with a specific youth ministry, and a local based model where youth issues are spread over several ministries) some countries do not fall into any of these categories, having adopted a "mixed" position. Therefore it is possible to suggest the following classification:

- countries where the national youth policy is coordinated by a well-defined youth sector;
- countries where the youth policy is coordinated by a specialised youth sector and partly by a number of other sectors such as education or employment;
- countries which have no designated youth sector and no centralising body and the implementation of national youth policy is shared with a variety of traditional sectors.

Of course such differences mirror the wide variety in the target groups of governmental youth structures and policies as well as the different definition in the concept of youth in the Member States (some countries consider youth to range from 0 to 25 years of age, while others take 13 to 25/30 as their age range). Although many steps have been recently taken towards harmonisation in this area, any strict definition is extremely difficult.

An important Member States' responsibility is setting up the National Agencies for the Youth in Action programme which are responsible for the administration of the EU non formal education programmes at national level.

Cooperation with the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe, through its Directorate of Youth and Sport, has always provided a significant impetus to the development of a youth policy in Europe at local, national and European level; the two European Youth Centres (in Strasbourg, since 1972, and in Budapest, since 1995) and the European Youth Foundation, a fund established in 1972, foster cooperation among young people in Europe by providing financial and logistic support. In this context, the cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Union is pivotal. The collaboration between the two organisations is regulated by a partnership agreement in the field of youth, initiated in 1998 and streamlined in 2005, with the aim of promoting active European citizenship and civil society by giving impetus to the training of youth leaders and youth workers working within a European dimension. The main reason that prompted the establishment of such cooperation is that the Council of Europe and the European Union share the same commitment toward the promotion of a youth policy, and common actions in this area could help avoid double work. However, it should be noted that the two organisations have a different approach in implementing youth policy: the Council of Europe boasts a longer and more extensive experience and a more efficient networking potential in the field, while the Union has a more dynamic approach, supported by the binding nature of its actions. The synthesis of these different working methods is mutually beneficial as it brings an added value in joint activities, like training, conferences, workshops, seminars, as well as the management of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy, a research database for youth policy across Europe⁴.

The cooperation between the European Commission and the Council of Europe aims also at improving the research on youth topics, disseminating information, using the multiplier potential

⁴ The virtual European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYC) has been developed by the Council of Europe and the European Commission and aims to provide the youth field with knowledge and information on the realities of youth across Europe in order to promote evidence based policy making and to enhance the exchange of information and dialogue among the actors involved.

and involving partner institutions' networks, such as the European Youth Forum, National Agencies of the Youth in Action programme, Eurodesk⁵ and the SALTO⁶ Resource Centres. The latter plays an important role in South-Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and it is fully in line with the new policy of the European Union towards neighbouring countries.

Additional agreements were initiated also with Mediterranean countries not belonging to the European Union. The Barcelona Declaration, adopted in 1995, laid down the foundations for the EuroMed Youth Programme, whose main purpose is to promote mobility of young people, non formal education and understanding between nations through youth exchanges in the Mediterranean area. The programme started with its first phase in 1999 and the last phase (2005-2008) featured a decentralised implementation that facilitated the involvement of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, The Palestinian Authority, Syria, Jordan, Israel and Turkey.

Finally, a partnership between the Commission and the United Nations Volunteers⁷ is also being strengthened in order to increase cooperation in the field of volunteering.

⁵ The Eurodesk European network is a permanent support structure of the Youth in Action Programme of the European Union. Its task is to provide high quality information and advice concerning Europe to young people and those who work with them. National co-ordinators, networks of local information providers and co-operation partners in 31 European countries act as contact points to the European Eurodesk network. The office in Brussels facilitates the management and co-ordination of the Eurodesk Network, its activities and services.

⁶ SALTO (Support and Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities) is a network of 8 Resource Centres working on European priority areas within the youth field. It provides youth work and training resources and organises training and contact-making activities to support organisations and National Agencies within the frame of the European Commission's Youth in Action programme. It supports co-operation between Programme and Neighbouring Partner Countries from Eastern Europe, South Eastern Europe and Caucasus within Youth in Action Programme.

⁷ The UNV, based in Bonn, is a UN organisation that promotes voluntarism for development.

The development of the youth policy

The following section presents the most important steps taken by the Union in order to develop its youth policy through a variety of actions: dialogue, involvement of civic society, improvement of the cooperation among Member States. Three instruments must be absolutely mentioned: the White Paper on Youth, the Youth Pact and the recent “Investing and Empowering” strategy.

The White Paper on Youth

At the turn of the century, the activities of the European institutions in the youth area mainly focused on the implementation of specific programmes, rather than on coordinated measures involving all the Member States. Therefore the White Paper “A new impetus on European youth” adopted by the Commission (2001a) has to be considered as a real turning point, as it contains specific proposals to increase cooperation in four youth priority areas: participation, information, voluntary activities and a greater understanding and knowledge of youth. The concrete result of the White Paper was the adoption of the open method of coordination in the field of youth and the political intention to include the youth dimension in other policy initiatives⁸.

In order to work effectively, the method involves fixing guidelines, specific timetables and goals to be achieved in short, medium and long terms; member states are invited to use indicators and benchmarks, to compare best practice, to monitor and evaluate the progress and to profit from peer review and mutual learning processes. A coordination among the Member States is an essential requirement, mostly regarding the international voluntary service: young volunteers need to be legally and socially protected; voluntary service needs to be recognised as an educational experience at European level; obstacles need to be removed in order to facilitate the mobility for young volunteers. The framework of the open method of coordination inspired youth-related legislation and strategies at national level, and more countries involve now youth organisations in their policy-making.

The Youth Pact

An additional instrument developed by the Union in order to enhance the potential of young people in Europe is the Youth Pact. The Lisbon Council (2000) established the ambitious goal to make the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” within

⁸ See Council Resolution 2202/C 168/02 of 27 June 2002

2010. The unsatisfactory evaluation of the fulfilment of the Lisbon strategy's objectives led to its revision in 2004. As part of the revised Lisbon Strategy, the European Youth Pact, started out from the initiative by the heads of state and government of Germany, Spain, France and Sweden, was adopted in March 2005 as one of the instruments for promoting growth and jobs. The necessity of this measure lies in the assumption that there will not be any active citizenship if young people do not have a job, therefore issues like employment and social inclusion had to be tackled. Three aspects are worth to be mentioned, with regard to non formal education and international volunteering: firstly, the Pact stresses the importance of youth mobility; secondly, it calls for a holistic and coherent policy towards young people (overall consistency of initiatives) ; thirdly, it emphasises the key role of the active participation of all those involved, particularly youth organisations, through a *structured dialogue* coordinated by the Commission. Basically, the last point means that any future legislation being drafted at a European, national, regional or local level that effects young people should require their previous consultation so that their concerns or suggestions are taken into consideration. Such condition is also in line with the suggestions proposed by the Commission with the White Paper on better regulation (2001b).

The Youth Pact was designed with the European Youth Forum, the National Youth Councils and the European Youth Week in mind. The former is a European international organisation which was established in 1996 by national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations. It works as the successor of the Council of European National Youth Committees (CENYC) and serves to channel the flow of information and opinions between young people and decision-makers. The European Youth Week is an event set up by the European Commission (the first edition was held in 2005) and aims at gathering young people from all over Europe to discuss youth policy and the future European agenda in the youth policy area.

A new strategy: Investing and Empowering

Problematic transition into the labour market, high unemployment rates, risk of poverty and social exclusion, ageing of European population called for a reinforcing cross-cutting approach, as the framework of the open method of coordination has not always proved its efficiency in tackling all the new challenges young people have to face at the beginning of the new millennium.

This is the reason why the Commission recently published a communication (2009a) to propose member states to better cooperate in the youth field in order to properly address the new issues and challenges affecting young people in Europe. A new strategy needs to be developed to achieve three main goals: creating more opportunities for youth in education and employment; improving access

and full participation of all young people in society; fostering mutual solidarity between society and young people. The communication contains innovative inputs which refer to issues already debated, but also to new aspects in the youth area. For example, important suggestions to address urgent topics as the climate change and the millennium goals have been included. With such new propositions, the European youth policy acquires an *ecological* and a *global* dimension: member states are invited to take action in order to “encourage *green* patterns of consumption and production with young people (e.g. recycling, energy conservation, hybrid vehicles etc.)” (2009a, p.11). Regarding the *global* dimension, the Commission shall promote volunteering opportunities with regions outside of Europe and shall support the development of youth work on other continents.

Furthermore, a reinforcement of skills recognition is stressed, through two instruments, Youthpass and Europass⁹, which highlight the importance of cross-border mobility.

Future steps: 2011, European Year of Volunteering

The United Nations General Assembly established International Volunteer Day in 1985. The 5th December is now celebrated worldwide with events to highlight the valuable work of volunteers. However, at European level many NGOs and youth organisations working in the voluntary sector had the idea to establish a more powerful reminder of voluntary work, an activity that involves more than 100 millions Europeans.

In 2007 a network of international organizations committed to the promotion of volunteering in Europe began to develop a strategy in order to declare 2011 the "European Year of Volunteering". The European Commission was sensitive to the request of the network and has decided to support the proposal. The Council is expected to endorse this decision, after the European Parliament has been consulted, by the beginning of 2010.

Dedicating 2011 to the topic of volunteering will help Member States, regional and local communities and civil society achieve objectives such as rewarding and recognizing volunteering activities, raise awareness on related issues, empowering volunteer organizations and consequently improving the quality of their projects.

The European Year of Volunteering should help volunteers and volunteering organisations from everywhere in Europe to meet and to learn what is done best in other countries. The public authorities will be able to learn more about volunteers and making volunteering easier.

⁹ Youthpass is part of the European Commission's strategy to foster the recognition of non-formal learning. Europass is an initiative which aims to help people make their skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe, through documents designed in such a way as to help people chronicle their skills and competences in a coherent manner, thus facilitating the application process for learners and workers.

The Commission proposes to allocate a budget of 6 million Euros for the European Year and an additional amount of 2 million Euros for the preparatory actions starting in 2010. The proposed activities should focus on communication and awareness-raising measures, such as conferences, seminars, exchange of experience and publications. Similar activities shall be run in the Member States through national coordination structures.

An European Year of Volunteering will have of course a considerable impact on the promotion of youth organizations' projects, on the initiatives of NGOs active in youth exchange and on the European Union's voluntary programmes for young people.

An overview on the EU non formal education programmes

This section will examine the development of the tools designed by the European Commission in the field of non formal education, starting from the pioneering *Youth for Europe* in 1988 until the last version of the *Youth in Action* programme, planned till 2013.

1988 - Youth for Europe

In spite of the fact that a coordinated policy on youth was not yet established, the first real programme of youth mobility in the field of non formal education was set up in 1988. The “Youth for Europe” programme aimed at strengthening reciprocal understanding and cooperative relationships between groups of young people in Europe. Two significative goals were set: developing an awareness of a European identity and strengthening young people awareness of belonging to Europe. What the ministers meant with the concepts of *European identity* and *sense of belonging to Europe*, it is unfortunately not revealed, but these words mirror the renewed enthusiasm brought about by Jacques Delors’ mandates at the Commission, regarded by some as the most successful in the European Union's history.

At the end of the 80’s the European Commission came up with the idea to develop a new type of involvement for young people, including, COMETT, ERASMUS, TEMPUS¹⁰ and, in the field of non formal education, Youth for Europe. The instruments designed for the programme were youth exchanges: bilateral and multilateral exchanges with an educational purpose between groups of young people, “between the ages of 15 and 25 years, of a minimum duration of one week in a Member State other than that in which they reside and which are specifically planned so as to enable them to develop skills for active and working life as young people and adults in the Community”.¹¹ For the first time the target group were young people that had already left school and, more importantly, those with fewer opportunities to learn new skills, due to social exclusion or geographical disadvantage.

The programme presented an interesting institutional feature, which can be found in the future generations of European initiatives in the field of youth, namely its decentralised implementation in member states, through National Agencies. These are a key factor for the success of any programme that want to reach out its main beneficiaries at a local level, the young people

¹⁰COMETT was the first European Union exchange programmes focused on Industry-University links and exchanges; ERASMUS or *European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*, is a European student exchange programme established in 1987 with the aim of improving the quality and to increase the volume of student and teaching staff mobility throughout Europe; TEMPUS, set up in 1990, fosters multilateral partnerships between higher education institutions in the EU and the partner countries

¹¹ See Council Decision 88/348/EEC of 16 June 1988

themselves. The first phase of the initiative (spanning from 1988 to 1991) received a budget of 15 millions ECU and around 80.000 young people benefited from its activities.

It is important to stress that such actions did not take place in a vacuum: young people participation to the so-called international workcamps¹², organised by several NGOs worldwide and in Europe, boomed in the late 80's, showing an increased interest of the new generation towards intercultural experiences and non formal education projects. Pioneering organisation like Service Civil International or Youth Action for Peace had already set up their programmes to allow young people to take part in long term voluntary experiences abroad. However, none of these programmes featured a specific European dimension, even though they considerably contributed to bridging the gap between cultures and promoted young people active participation to several fields, as peace, environmental protection, social inclusion and many more.

1998 - European Voluntary Service

Right after Youth for Europe was created, history went forward: the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 and an historical integration of East and West began. From then on young Europeans and youth programmes found themselves in a much larger Europe. It was about time to develop new instruments in the field of youth mobility and non formal education.

The Youth for Europe programme was structured in three different phases (1988-91, 1992-94, 1995-99). It undoubtedly raised awareness on voluntary service activities in the Member States, nevertheless the range of action was considered by the Commission (1996, p.3) “very limited and largely in the form of awareness campaigns, spin-off effects and incentives”. In order to respond to such limits, the European Parliament repeatedly called for a voluntary service at Community level. The result was the establishment of the European Voluntary Service to be adopted from 1998, a programme that “aims to encourage young people to become citizens of the European Union and to enhance their contribution to European society” (p.10).

The programme is a typical example on how it is possible to turn a potential crises into a profitable opportunity. In the last decades millions of young Europeans have experienced increasing difficulties in accessing a permanent employment, due to growing inequalities, limited resources, extended transition from adolescence to adulthood (as it will be discussed in the second part). Nevertheless, this extended “waiting period”, associated with an increased attitude for European mobility could be considered as a key to allow young people to open a door for Europe, to enjoy the

¹² Workcamps are international voluntary projects, generally short term (workcamps of 2 - 4 weeks), aimed at bringing volunteers together from many different countries, cultures and backgrounds to live and work on projects of benefit to local communities. The projects are designed to support and encourage local initiatives.

chance for a “transitional experience that brings Europe to life”(p.9). The underlying idea is simple: to give young people, most of all those who suffer from social exclusion and geographical disadvantage, the possibility to experience short and long term voluntary terms abroad, as a response to the apparent disaffection of young people with traditional forms of participation in public life and as encouragement to become more active citizens.

2000 - Youth

“Youth exchanges in particular contribute to mutual trust, the strengthening of democracy, tolerance, a willingness to cooperate and solidarity between young people, and they are therefore crucial for the cohesion and further development of the Union”: these are the words from the preamble of the decision of the Parliament and the Council (2000) establishing the Youth programme for the period 2000 – 2006, with a financial framework for the implementation set at 520 million Euro. The programme was based on five pillars, some of them pre-existing in the previous initiatives in the field of non formal education: Youth for Europe, European Voluntary Service, Youth Initiatives, Joint Actions, Support Measures.

The main aims of these actions were to develop understanding of the cultural diversity of Europe and, at the same time, to grasp its fundamental common values, by promoting the respect of human rights and combating racism and xenophobia. As the Youth programme was improved and expanded by the following Youth in Action programme, its main features will be discussed in the next paragraph.

2007 – Youth in Action

Since 2007 Youth in Action has been the newest programme of the EU in the field of non formal education. It has taken all the experiences of the past 20 years of European youth work and brought them under the same umbrella. Established by a Council decision (2006), the programme streamlined the previous instruments and added new actions, like job-shadowing, reinforcing as well the possibility to experience activities in third countries.

It could be rhetorical to claim that Youth in Action involves young people in *shaping Europe’s future* or in creating a *common European identity*; it is a more down to earth assessment and a honest judgement to admit that the programme enhances the potential of non formal education processes so far designed by the Union. And we can agree with the Commissioner Jan Figel, when he states that “the EU now is more *youth friendly* and more *youth oriented*”.

The promotion of active citizenship, solidarity, tolerance and mutual understanding between young people in different countries are the general objectives of the programme. They should contribute to develop EU policies, in particular regarding the recognition of diversity in Europe, the efforts towards social cohesion and the engagement against any form of discrimination¹³.

Coming to the specific objectives, some of them appear to be quite generic and hard to be measured (developing young people's sense of belonging to the EU; encouraging the participation of young people in the democratic life of Europe); on the other hand, other tasks express clearly the purpose of the programme: fostering the mobility of young people in Europe; facilitating participation of young people with fewer opportunities, including young people with disabilities; and last but not least, two essential aims: “providing non-formal and informal learning opportunities with a European dimension and opening up innovative opportunities in connection with active citizenship”¹⁴ and “developing exchanges and intercultural dialogue between young Europeans and young people in the neighbouring countries”¹⁵.

The programme, which covers a period from 2007 to 2013 with a total budget of € 885 million, is structured in five different actions: Youth for Europe, European Voluntary Service, Youth in the World, Youth support system, Support for European cooperation in the youth field.

The best known and probably most stimulating action is the second, the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which already existed outside the framework of the programme and has been empowered with additional features. This action offers young people aged between 18 and 30 years the possibility to take part in a long term voluntary project abroad. The volunteer is provided with assistance (a training before and during the experience and an evaluation meeting at the end), is supported by a sending and a hosting organisation, receives full reimbursement for the travel costs, free accommodation, a monthly allowance to cover the costs of food, a language course during the project and free insurance cover. The voluntary work is unpaid, part-time and spans a wide range of areas, such as culture, youth, sports, social care, cultural heritage, the arts, civil protection, the environment, development co-operation, and many more. The no-profit activities carried on by the volunteers should enhance their skills and benefit the local community.

A key role in the coordination of the EVS projects is played by several European NGOs that provide participants with the ideal setting and dynamism for such non formal education processes. An EVS volunteer can work in a refugee centre in Austria, for an environmental organisation in Sweden, can be involved in the preparation of an African Cinema festival in Italy or can work in a community for homeless people in France, just to give some examples. An online database with the

¹³ See art 2 § 1-3 of the Council Decision 1719/2006/EC of 15 November 2006

¹⁴ See art 3 § 1(j), *ibidem*

¹⁵ See art 3 § 2(a), *ibidem*

descriptions of hundreds of EVS projects can be consulted by the eligible candidates, while the application procedure is supported by the so-called sending organisations (usually NGOs, but also local institutions, like schools, and youth centres). Volunteers can apply also for projects outside the European continent, although their amount is limited compared to those based in Europe.

The first and third action, respectively Youth for Europe and Youth in the World, are similar in regards to the initiative (short term intercultural exchanges involving small groups of young people from up to 4 countries) but differ in the scope of the countries involved: while Youth for Europe is open to the 27 EU Member States, Youth in the World focuses on developing ties with partner countries that are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, along with the Russian Federation and countries from South-East Europe; moreover, a second sub-action is open to all Partner Countries around the world that have signed a youth-related agreement with the EU.

Besides the already mentioned short term activities, the first action includes two interesting further sub-actions: Youth Initiatives (involving young people at a local, regional and national level) and Youth Democracy Projects (aimed at improving young people's understanding of democratic procedures and of their right to participate in the decision-making structures of a democratic society). Action 4 is targeted at building capacities among youth workers through initiatives such as job shadowing, training, seminars and meetings, in order to develop co-operation and partnerships and to exchange good practice in the field of youth work, while action 5 supports the dialogue between young people and policy-makers fostering a better knowledge and understanding of youth through national and transnational seminars, youth events and cooperation with international organisations.

Europe for Citizens

Although it does not directly fall into the category of youth initiatives, the Europe for Citizens programme is a relevant tool in the field of non formal education and has had an impact in encouraging young European citizens to respect their diversity and to overcome differences. The programme, started in 2007 and operative until 2013, has a budget of 215 million Euro and consists in four different actions with the aims of promoting town-twinning initiatives, commemorations of historical events, projects to preserve active European remembrance associated with the mass deportations and former concentration camps. The ambition of the programme is to bring together people from local communities across Europe to share and exchange experiences, opinions and values, to learn from history and to debate and reflect upon the European citizenship and democracy. Key concepts are therefore the encouragement of the dialogue between European citizens and the institutions of the EU, and the Promotion of European Values (tolerance, mutual

understanding, solidarity) through volunteering and active citizenship. It is evident that such initiatives (based on the concept of a so-called “discovery mobility”) might have a strong impact on the new generations, specially when the non formal learning setting ensures that the local dimension is well combined with a transnational and multicultural approach.

Beyond rhetoric: a provisional evaluation of the European Union's youth policy

Table 1: Youth in Action programme 2000-2006, Participants and Resources

2000**	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 5	Total
Number of participants	45,393	2,798	21,869	33,724	103,784
Number of projects funded	2,692	5,423	836	1,078	10,029
Amount Mio €	23.1	20.7	5.6	8.7	58.1
Average funding per project €	8,581	3,817	6,699	8,070	5,793
2001	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 5	Total
Number of participants	61,169	3,430	18,570	24,370	107,539
Number of projects funded	2,951	5,754	1,136	1,616	11,457
Amount Mio €	27.4	23.9	6.7	10.7	68.7
Average funding per project €	9,247	4,158	5,857	6,626	5,992
2002	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 5	Total
Number of participants	60,736	3,432	18,515	33,516	116,199*
Number of projects funded	2,824	6,526	1,342	1,337	12,029
Amount Mio €	28.9	21.9	7.1	12.9	70.8
Average funding per project €	10,230	3,353	5,320	9,625	5,884
2003	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 5	Total
Number of participants	68,603	3,566	18,557	30,845	121,571
Number of projects funded	3,089	6,255	1,395	680	11,419
Amount Mio €	31.6	23.5	7.4	13.3	75.8
Average funding per project €	10,220	3,760	5,336	19,580	
2004	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 5	Total
Number of participants	77,722	4,067	36,648	35,320	153,757
Number of projects funded	3,268	7,037	1,756	959	13,020
Amount Mio €	36.1	26.4	9.3	11.8	83.7
Average funding per project €	11,047	3,752	5,296	12,304	
2005	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 5	Total
Number of participants	68,349	3,919	17,493	17,163	106,924
Number of projects funded	2,937	7,522	1,667	871	12,997
Amount Mio €	36.9	27.9	9	12.5	86.3
Average funding per project €	12,550	3,705	5,428	14,330	
Total	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 5	Total
Number of participants	381,972	21,212	131,652	174,938	709,774
Number of projects funded	17,761	38,517	8,132	6541	70,951
Amount Mio €	184.1	144.7	45.6	69.7	444.1

Source: Ecorys (2007, p. 64)

Are the EU non formal education programmes really effective in accomplishing the tasks set by the White Paper on Youth, the Youth Pact and the new strategies? This question will be answered in the next parts, by examining the current sociological, cultural and economical context in which young European people live. However, this section will examine whether a gap exists between

words (what the EU institutions and Member States have proposed to realise) and *deeds* (what has been done so far in order to promote such programmes, their implementation and their visibility at a national and European level). It will be possible to jump to some conclusions, based on interesting contradictions.

An analysis of the 7 years (2000-2006) of the Youth programme (the first edition of the current Youth in Action programme) reveals that more than 700.000 participants took part in the programme, through more than 70.000 projects (see table 1 in the previous page). A considerable figure, that has increased since 2007 with the implementation of the new Youth in Action. When the discussion comes to culture and education at European level it is a logical consequence of that to wonder why only the Erasmus programme is part of the “collective imaginary” related to young people mobility and not yet the non formal education programmes. Is this due to a lack of advertisement, visibility, popularity? Can this low profile be related to the fact that non formal education is mainly an instrument of non-institutional agencies, like NGOs or youth organisations?

Desmond Dinan is the author of a number of textbooks on European integration and its history. In its book “Ever closer Europe”, considered by many as a masterful examination of the institutions and politics of the EU, the Irish professor analyses the impact of the Maastricht Treaty on education and youth programmes. No references on the non formal education programmes (Youth for Europe, EVS, Youth) is to be found. On the other hand the author acknowledges that the Erasmus programme might have broken down barriers and helped students feel more European, besides reinforcing in some cases national prejudices and stereotypes, and spawning “innumerable transnational love affairs”(Dinan 2005, p. 441). This is food for thoughts (or even concerns): in a 650 page book about the state of the art of the EU a phenomenon that has involved 1,5 millions European people all over the last 20 years is not even mentioned. However, prof. Dinan’s comment is quite representative of what mainstream media and EU experts think about education and culture at a European level: this field is uniquely associated with the Erasmus programme and non formal education is not even worth to be mentioned.

The Commission strives to provide the Youth in Action programme with more visibility in order to raise awareness on its non formal education initiatives. However, one might perceive a lack of coherence when noticing that the current commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, the Slovak Jan Figel, studied Engineering and during his political career before his appointment was never in charge of youth related issues.

It is true that all these remarks might seem quite petty, if we take into consideration that the EU institutions and the Member States did commit themselves to achieve a real development in the area of youth. Unfortunately the field of youth, culture and education (at any level, be it local, national

or European) has the power to catalyze bad habits of declaratory politics, empty (and cheap) statements enshrined in endless pages of resolutions, measures, plans. The result of this unfortunate attitude is the already mentioned glaring gap between rhetoric and reality. Is this the case? According to the European Youth Forum, a NGO lobbying for the promotion of youth issues, the answer is yes:

While at the Spring European Council, Member States reconfirmed their commitment to the European Youth Pact — which calls for encouraging the mobility of young people and expanding the scope for students to undertake a period of study in another Member State — and underlined the importance of the educational programmes, the Council fails to put its money where its mouth is. (EYF 2006)

The statement refers to the decision to allocate the budget for the Youth in Action programme for the period 2007-2013. The European Parliament considered the sum proposed by the Commission and the Council inadequate: it was actually nothing more than the previous programme and it was deemed insufficient considering that such resources should have been shared with ten new member states (the co-decision procedure to adopt the related legislation started before the 2004 enlargement). The main complaint was based on the assumption that with such a budget the same activities can be kept but no new ones can be created and it would have been impossible to fulfil the EU's objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and the European Youth Pact. Furthermore, it was stressed that NGO's are the main implementing actors and do not have enough financial resources.

Therefore, the European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by the German Member of Parliament Lissy Gröner¹⁶ (PES) and made some amendments to the proposal: the Parliament proposed EUR 1.128 billion as opposed to the Commission's proposal of EUR 915 million budget.

However, the amendments which requested the increase of 23% in the overall budget for the programme were rejected in the light of the Interinstitutional Agreement on the 2007- 2013 Financial Framework¹⁷. To sum up: the EU allocated 885 million Euros for the period 2007-2013 of the Youth in Action programme.

The Italian sociologist and writer Claudio Magris once said that those who believe in the European integration project shall be happy when sometimes a step forward, and at the same time a half step backward will be taken. In this case, the half step backward consists in having to accept a bitter compromise: on one hand, a brand new tool has been developed (the Youth in Action programme), on the other hand, not enough resources have been allocated in order to express its entire potential. This has a direct repercussion on the National Agencies of the programme, which are responsible for the administration of the voluntary projects coping with limited means, and on

¹⁶ by 542 votes in favour, 76 against, 12 abstentions.

¹⁷ See Common Position C6-0273/2006

the NGOs and youth organisations, which are the main actors involved in designing, proposing and implementing the activities¹⁸. The lack of statistics and available data on the current and past Youth in Action programme is a proof of this resource deficiency.

If the European Parliament cannot be blamed for such disappointing outcome, and if the Commission can claim to have played its usual role of “honest broker” between the institutions, the main responsibility for such contradictory proceeding lies on the Council. The suspect is that some national governments have the interest to keep, and not to shorten, the gap between words and deeds.

¹⁸ An example: the Commission has currently set the implementation of “group EVS” as a priority. Unlike “individual EVS”, focused on individuals volunteers serving for a long term period, these are short and medium-term activities that involve large groups of participants. The intention is to include more volunteers in the programme, in order to increase participation, optimizing at the same time the limited resources available. However, many NGOs, mostly those with limited financial and human capital capacity, are not able to carry out such demanding projects. Consequently, Group EVS projects have not got a foothold yet.

PART II: Youth in the global risk society

Living in the world risk society

A picture from a commercial from the 1950's displays a generic family sitting down to eat lunch. The smiling wife, in her twenties, serves a generous roasted chicken while her husband, in his thirties and their three children enjoy the scene. The last fifty years have radically changed this scenario, specially in Europe. Youth unemployment, the crises of the welfare systems, the current economic crises (and a looming environmental one) are obstacles for the achievement of the generic family. Let alone the ageing of the population:

stop thinking for a moment about deep recession, trillion-dollar rescue packages and mounting job losses. Instead, contemplate the prospect of slow growth and low productivity, rising public spending and labour shortages. These are the problems of ageing populations, and if they sound comparatively mild, think again" (Economist, 2009, p.3)

If showed now, that commercial would lose its whole appeal, besides sounding ridiculous. Linear predictability is no more a feature of our society. The stability of the first modernity (featuring simple, linear, industrial modernisation) is currently threatened by simultaneous and interlinked processes such as globalisation, gender revolution, underemployment, ecological crises and the crash of global financial markets. But how did we come to this?

With the introduction of new technologies since the 19th century most people in the developed world have become free from the dependence of their basic needs. These technologies, however, have created new risks in the name of progress. It is now these risks, rather than the unfulfilled basic needs, that represent the biggest problem facing society today. In the past, risks used to be something people could see, hear, taste or smell. What we have to tackle now are dangers (such as *swine flu*, environmental disasters, terror attacks) whose consequences, although in most cases product of human actions, are not necessarily foreseeable or containable.

Welcome to the world risk society: a challenging environment, featured by risk and hazard as results of the scientific and industrial development. Such dangers do not possess specific limits, rather transcend national borders and affect the whole global society, spatially and temporally, since they can involve even generations. Moreover, it is impossible to determine the accountability of such risks, due to their transnational and unpredictable nature. The very ideas of controllability, certainty or security, foundations of the first modernity, collapses:

a new kind of capitalism, a new kind of economy, a new kind of global order, a new kind of society and a new kind of personal life are coming into being, all of which differ from earlier phases of social development (Beck, 1999, p.2).

Ulrich Beck does not claim that we are witnessing the end of modernity. On the contrary, we have the privilege to experience the beginning of a new era, a “modernity *beyond* its classical industrial design” (Beck 1992, p.10)

Phenomena like the global financial crises, international terrorism and ecological disasters show clearly that unpredictability is a feature of our time. This opens new choices to individuals (taking decisions, thus risks) and the society is adapting to this trends. This is the reason why we talk about *reflexive modernity* (Beck, Giddens, Lash 1994), which is not a rejection of the foundation of modernity itself, but is an attempt to reflect upon our lifestyles, our trends, our development strategies in a critical (and possibly constructive) way. It is simply modernity turning the mirror on itself. The most evident aspect of reflexive modernity is the fact that we are constantly forced to ask ourselves urgent questions about the direction of our progress and our experimenting, both at individual and collective level. We have to deal with the risks of human actions, as the global warming problem clearly shows us.

Whether the current processes we are experiencing now will lead humanity to better or worse living conditions it is difficult to predict. Sociologists differ in assessing the effects of the potential consequences of the change. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that “there are no expert solutions in risk discourse” (Beck, 1999, p. 42). If in the past the decisions that were supposed to counter problems, dangers and crisis were previously based on fixed norms of predictability and calculability, patterns of causes and effects, the current risks cannot be measured, foreseen and faced linearly as they are a product of an infinite number of systemically interlinked factors whose behaviours are impossible to predict, as the *chaos theory* principles¹⁹ well demonstrate.

¹⁹ According to the findings of meteorologist Edward Lorenz in 1960, the main principle of chaos theory is the sensitive dependence on initial conditions: just a small change in the initial conditions can drastically modify the long-term behaviour of a system.

In spite of this frightening perspectives, one might follow the Barack Obama's motto "never waste a good crises", in order to turn the present difficulties into an unprecedented opportunity to design alternative decision making processes, more democratic and bottom-up based: considering the structural lack of real expertise on risk, capable to offer a definitive solution to the current and future threats, it could be more reasonable to enlarge the scope of actors involved in the policy making.

Is this a possible way to head? We do not have to overlook the increasing fears for security (economic, political and social), the contradictions of reforming the traditional welfare state with employment policies, the rapid change in science and technology and pressing global issues: all these changes should be tackled in common, as part of the need for fundamental democratic renewal.

Discussing the European social model, Anthony Giddens suggests a remedy adaptable to the risk society, in order to emphasize to the utmost its potentials rather than to highlight the negative effects. The "cure" he proposes (Giddens, Diamond, Liddle, 2006) consists in a new orientation (and a new attitude towards risk) which primarily concerns three aspects of the welfare state.

Firstly, if the post-war welfare state was based upon attack the five evils (a sort of corrective welfare state to tackle ignorance, squalor, want, idleness and disease), today we should rather promote education, learning, prosperity, life choice, active and social participation and healthy lifestyles: a move from passive to active welfare. To support his thesis, Giddens argues that the superiority of the Nordic European countries in terms of their low levels of inequality does not come from redistribution through taxes and transfers: the main explanation is their superior investment in human capital. Investment in education, the expansion of universities, the diffusion of ICT are crucial parts of the modernisation of the social model. Finland is an interesting example of a society in the vanguard of ICT and also with a strong welfare system. Only three generations ago, Finland was a very poor, heavily rural society.

Secondly, Giddens calls for a new view of risk, or rather a refashioning, not an abandonment, of the contributory principle. In the traditional welfare system all the major efforts were focussed on transferring risk from the individual to the state or community and security was defined as the absence of risk. If such attempt aimed at reducing dangers, on the other hand it cannot be hidden that risk has many positive aspects. People often need to take risks to improve their lives. Moreover, in a fast-moving environment it is important for individuals to be able to adjust to change, and if possible actively prosper from it. Giddens thus does not discharge this factor as completely counterproductive. It can trigger positive change, if properly managed.

Thirdly (but not less important) an ecological perspective needs to be integrated into the debate of *positive welfare* which includes environmental sustainability, together with the reform of the state and the decentralisation, de-bureaucratisation and diversification of public services.

Other analysis do not instil confidence and optimism. Growing up in postmodern conditions is like to “navigate – with decreasing guidance of collective norms – on the ocean of increased risks and potentialities” (Siurala 2002, p.24). Taking into account that in the time of globalisation we assist to the global effects of risk, Zygmunt Bauman defines globalisation as

something that happens to us for reasons about which we may surmise, even get to know, but can hardly control. Present-day insecurity is akin to the feeling the passengers of a plane may experience when they discover that the pilot’s cabin is empty – that the friendly captain’s voice was merely a replay of an old recorded message (Bauman, 2000, p.59)

According to the author of *Liquid Modernity* individuals are confronted now with a series of challenges never met before. There is no use in taking cover under the traditional and institutional frameworks (that meanwhile has turned from *solid* to *liquid*, meaning undergoing to a continuous change in shape, just like fluids). Therefore, individuals have to find other ways to organise their lives: they must be constantly ready and willing to change tactics at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability. When planning careers, strategies, personal development is a necessity to be flexible and, most of all, extremely quick, due to the surrounding conditions of endemic uncertainty:

patterns, codes and rules to which one could conform, which one could select as stable orientation points and by which one could subsequently let oneself be guided [...] are nowadays in increasingly short supply (Bauman 2000, p.7)

Some authors remark that it would be a mistake to overestimate the dimension of constant change, disorientation and uncertainty that seems to dominate the so-called *late*, *second* or *reflexive* modernity. Unlike Giddens and Beck, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) point out that there has been a tendency to exaggerate changes and to understate many significant sources of continuity, such as social class and gender as determinant for marginalization and social inequality. The authors acknowledge that life in late modernity involves subjective discomfort and uncertainty. In spite of the fact that young people can struggle to establish adult identities and maintain coherent biographies, their life chances remain highly structured with social class and gender, being these aspects still crucial to an understanding of experiences in a range of life contexts. Although we

might focus on the rapid social change young people have been experiencing, the authors remind us that

there is little evidence to suggest that the effect of social class on life chances is diminishing. At the same time, we are willing to accept that social divisions have become more obscure due to a greater individualization of experiences (Furlong, Cartmel, 1997)

Such remark assumes a pivotal importance and its consequences will be further discussed. Firstly, it would be naïve to presume that young people float in the ocean of constant change or that traditional institutions and the effects of social class have totally faded away due to the perpetual flow of chances young people are exposed to. For example, it would be hard to resist the temptation to claim that mediated experience, a central aspect of late modernity, have guarantee a larger participation through an apparently freer access to digital information and may make us feel a part of a broader, equal community. On the contrary, the authors warn us, our opportunities and our life chances continue to be structured by our lived rather than our mediated experiences.

Does this mean that the influential contributions from Beck, Giddens and Bauman should be rejected because are based on the “epistemological fallacy of late modernity” (Furlong, Cartmel, 1997)? Not at all. If the scope of the effects of risk, change and extended opportunities produces controversial assessments, what is more important (and here Furlong and Cartmel do not disagree with the followers of the world risk society theory) is that the late modernity, with its reflexive trends, has led to the development of a specific process, that the current sociological research agrees on calling as *individualization*. Far from being easily identifiable with a cynical, egoistical approach towards life (a misunderstanding caused by the similarity with the word *individualism*), individualization is

a structural concept, related to the welfare state: it means ‘institutionalised individualism’. Most of the rights and entitlements of the welfare state, for example, are designed for individuals rather than for families. In many cases they presuppose employment. Employment in turn implies education, and both of these presuppose mobility. By all these requirements people are invited to constitute themselves as individuals: to plan, understand, design themselves as individuals and, should they fail, to blame themselves.(Beck 1999, P.9)

If, as also Bauman reminds us, the responsibility for failure falls now primarily on the individual’s shoulder, it is just because the ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement has rapidly become the most powerful current in modern Western society. And yet it would be misleading to jump to the conclusion that individualisation is based on the free decision of individuals. To quote

Sartre's famous words, people are *condemned* to individualisation (Sartre, 1993). It is a *compulsion*, not a real free choice, for the manufacture, self-designed and self-staging biography.

Beck stresses that processes like choosing, deciding, shaping are essential for individuals who aspire to be the authors of their lives, the creators of their identities. And even if Furlong and Cartmel refuse to share this emphasis, they converge on the assumption that

blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure. (Furlong, Cartmel, 1997, P.114)

In his brilliant analysis on the cultural differences between USA and Europe, Jeremy Rifkin claims that the European concept of freedom, unlike the American one, is not based on autonomy, but on embeddedness: for Europeans "to be free is to have access to a myriad interdependent relationships with others" (Rifkin, 2004, p. 13). As it will be discussed further on, an extreme emphasis on the individual sphere can produce overwhelming consequences, mostly in an environment more used to collective dimension and responsibility like Europe.

The process of individualisation

What are the main features that characterize the uncertainties of late modernity among young people? What are the trends that undermine any security, steady plans, long-term perspectives? Which underground waves shake the surface they walk on, so that it is becoming more and more problematic to rely on pre-defined ways, paths and traditional directions in their lives?

As mentioned at the beginning of this part, the trend of the ageing of European population is an issue that will affect any future decision and policy in the continent in the next decades. Europe will experience a rapid increases in the median age, according to the 50-50-50 rule: by 2050 roughly 50% of the European population will be above 50 years old. (Brakman et al. 2008)

We will be living in a society in which one out of three people would be aged 65 and more, so we will have to find new ways to balance interactions across generations. Social coherence across younger and older generation will be at the heart of solutions to population ageing challenges, and it is not just the public policies but also the civil society and the media that will be required to play a role in finding social cohesion across generations. We have to find a way in which we will continue to provide support to older people but at the same time not to consider them as a burden on the new generations.

Population ageing could be considered a hazard or it could offer new opportunities for the society depending upon how well we prepare for it. It is a challenge that societies will have to prepare for and if prepared (well) and much in advance, this would actually become an opportunity to develop even faster and with a greater extent of social cohesion across generations. But it could also become a hazard if we fail to take into account all the challenges that this population ageing phenomenon is posing to us. Simply ignoring the problem could lead into a “intergenerational conflict”, most of all if we consider that further risks will add up to such process. The overall consequences could be explosive if not tackled properly and on time. The perspectives regarding a decrease of the youth unemployment rate are not rosy: according to the European Youth Report (2009) the amount of young unemployed people raised (although slightly) in the last year (15,4% in 2008). In the last seven years temporary contracts have increased by 5%, an index that shows how unstable the job market has become. The current financial crises does not allow to be optimistic for the next years. Those who will suffer most will be the so-called NEET (young people *neither* in employment *nor* in *education* or *training*) whose proportion has recently raised to an alarming 33% among young people aged between 15 and 24 years.

Young people have to face the challenge of the second modernity, which is defined by global ecological and economic crises, widening transnational inequalities, precarious forms of paid work and other challenges of globalization. As discussed in the previous section, the new and common element strictly related to those challenges is risk, not only in technology and ecology, but in life and employment too. Since all these processes features a transnational origin and a systemic development, it is clear that they cannot be efficiently managed by nation states like it happened in the first modernity. The management of such new risks require a cosmopolitan outlook and a creation of a dense network of transnational interdependencies: as Beck recently stated, “it’s a matter of survival in this explosive, risky, global society.” (Jeffries 2006). In contrast, an evident contradiction arises when debating about the trends which are emerging in the second modernity: the future challenges call for collective actions, co-operative attitudes, democratic decision-making policy and fair access to information and resources; on the other hand, the individualization process, as it will be discussed further, leads to over-emphasize the personal responsibility and the ethic of achievement. Individuals have the perception to be alone and in danger, and like Hamlet needs to “take arms against a sea of trouble”. Again, Beck warns about the danger of fears “which may very well provide fertile soil for radical groups committed to violence” or extremism (Jeffries 2006). The effects of global warming and climate change, their related future migration patterns, the ageing of population, the undergoing consequences of globalization can be either seen as a time bomb or as an assist to achieve new goals, depending on how these processes will be handled.

All over the last 30 years Western societies have witnessed an unprecedented change that affected lifestyles, trends and orientations. Such deep modifications have brought about obvious repercussions on the construction of identity, most of all on young people, being youth a transitional period of semi-dependency which forms a bridge between the total dependence of childhood and the independence of adulthood.

The most evident expression of such patterns can be found in the new trends concerning domestic and housing transition. The changing patterns of schooling and the protraction of the school to work transition have led to an extension in the period during which young people remain dependant on the family and the state. In turn, the protraction of schooling is dependent on the sharp decline in demand for unqualified, minimum aged young people, forced to prolong their permanence at school due to the lack of working opportunities. Such trend has been augmented by the gradual but constant fragmentation of the job settings, with a decrease of employment perspectives in manufacturing industry and a significant increase in the service sector. As a direct consequence of these conditions, the demand for flexible specialization and technical skills in smaller work units has considerably increased, as much as the risk of exclusion from the job market: individuals are forced to assume greater responsibility for their experiences in the labour market and to constantly assess the implications of their actions and experiences, running the risk of marginalization if they are not able to develop the skills required to achieve success. The globalised marketplace seeks young workers who can flexibly adapt to changing conditions, who will be willing to transfer from one job to another without complaint, who will work long hours and accept any expectation to a permanent condition.

Considering the above mentioned aspects, would it be still correct to adopt the traditional model of transition based on predictable linear progression that sees adulthood as point of arrival? Probably it would be useful to accurately reconsider the patterns of youth transition, which are not sequential and normative anymore like they used to be 50 years ago, but they are characterized by a maze of cyclical, reversible and uncertain pathways. Undoubtedly a source of stress and frustration, such trends can be seen as well as a constructive pressure that pushes young people to shape up actively their identities:

young people are increasingly seen as proactively defining, negotiating and making sense of their own transition[...] it is young people's own narratives that have recently made academics question the linear approach to transition which had hitherto been the norm (Barry 2005, p.101)

In other words, the extension and de-sequencing of transition brings about opportunities to tailor and design new forms of living, to create space in which young people can experiment in a context

free from restraints that featured the experience of the previous generations. On one hand, this can be considered a rewarding and challenging experience, on the other hand it entails a wide range of difficulties in constructing stable social identities in a period characterized by economic and social marginality, where more and more vulnerable young people are the main target of manipulation and commercialization of identity through stereotyped gender images and scripts.

The exposure to such dangers is intensified by the extension of a factor that Turner (1982), taking inspiration from Van Gennep, calls *liminality*. In traditional societies the liminal phase (where people own nothing, have no status and share a temporary degree of equality) is a planned and brief stage that leads to the adult phase of life. The process of transition (and the consequent integration of individuals in the adult society) is regulated by steps and events that take the form of rites of passage. Now, as James and Prout (1997) correctly notice, youth transition extend over considerable periods of time rather than being concentrated into ritual moments. This pending position is well expressed by the metaphor of *yo-yo-transitions* which refers to young men and women who feel themselves somewhere between youth and adulthood and implicates that many disadvantaged young people hold no status and cannot find supportive structures to guide their transition to adulthood. Status passages have lost their standard features and have gradually become reversible, fragmented, individualised. The gap between biographical transitions and institutionalised trajectories (which refer to the structural pathways institutionalised by education and public policies) has increased.

The reversibility of transition patterns can be furthermore associated with the mobility process, which will be analyzed in the next section. Recent major changes (such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the implementation and expansion of the Schengen area, the introduction of the Euro in many European countries, the improvement in transport costs and conditions) have largely facilitated the European mobility experiences and have enlarged the spectrum of perspectives available.

Statistics published in the 2009 European Youth Report seems to validate these observations. People in Europe are less likely to enter into a first marriage, and, in 2003, did so more than two years later than in 1990: the average age at first marriage rose from 24.8 years to 27.4 years for women and from 27.5 to 29.8 years for men (the average age to enter into a first marriage is now 27,3 years). Furthermore, the number of marriages between partners of different nationalities has become significant. Divorce rates have increased since the 1970s, more than doubling in some countries, unmarried cohabitation has become commonplace, and a large proportion of children are born outside marriage: in most Member States between 25 % and 50 % of all children.

The contemporary social research has focused on the consequence that the new patterns of transition have produced on young people in different areas, as health, leisure and lifestyles and, most importantly, political participation.

Regarding health risks, it can be briefly said that the social conditions of high modernity might be the factors leading towards a deterioration in mental health which are manifest in different ways among young males and females: depression, eating disorders, suicide and attempt suicide have all become more common and can be related to the ongoing sense of doubt which is a central feature of high modernity and which can be particularly threatening for young people in the process of establishing adult identity (Furlong, Cartmel, 1997).

Also leisure, an area that involves considerably young people, has been gradually affected by the effects of late modernity. Rojek identifies specific trends that show how increasingly privatized and commercialized this aspect has become, so that it is legitimate to use the expression *individualization of leisure*, a shift from a public to a private form of activity, linked to the commercial development of leisure as a commodity which contributes to define individual lifestyles (Rojek, 1985).

It is however the field of politics and participation the one which assumes a paramount value in the assessment of the effects of late modernity on young people. Giddens (1991) claims that a shift from *emancipatory politics* to *life politics* has occurred. Collective values and traditions have weakened, leaving the floor to processes of self-actualisation. The priority is now set on the personal sphere, on the construction of self-identity and styles. These trends reflect upon young people's political participation that has taken new forms, like single issue political campaigns, fundamental moral issues, growing affiliation to youth NGOs, commitment for animals rights, interest on environmental issues, recycling, consumer activism, protest against nuclear power, only to provide some examples. It is affiliation to "new social movements" what attracts young people nowadays, rather than conventional politics.

Further analysis suggests that we need to take into account the several degrees of political activism and we must look at *lifestyle politics* as an important field of political action rather than only traditional political engagement such as voting or joining political parties (Haerpfer, Wallace, Spanning, 2002). Statistics support this thesis: the Eurobarometer survey on young Europeans (2007) indicates that despite the fact that a majority of young European citizens consider themselves interested in politics and current affairs in their own country and in the EU, only a minority is engaged in political parties or trade unions. They seem to favour other forms of political action to make their voice heard by policymakers, such as demonstrations, strikes, Internet forums and petitions.

Youth participation and active citizenship

Some conclusions can be summoned from the analysis proposed in the previous sections:

- we are experiencing a second phase of modernity;
- this phase is featured by a high degree of uncertainty and risk and a de-standardisation of the traditional institutional pathways;
- the process of individualisation is a way agents try to adapt to the structure changes in society.

In view of such environment, this section will focus on young people's political participation and civic engagement, in order to pave the way for a final assessment on the impact of the EU youth policy. Being the promotion of active citizenship, social inclusion and a common European identity the main objectives of youth policy developed by the Union in the last 20 years, a special attention will be paid on the instruments designed by the Union in the field of non formal education in order to achieve such results: are they able to "reach out" young people, considering the current socio-economic context? Do they stimulate their participation and their active citizenship? What can be improved in the EU youth policy? Is this really a political priority in Europe? And, last but not least, does international volunteering contribute to the creation of an European dimension among young people?

Before assessing such aspects, it is essential to spend some more words on two key factors: active citizenship and political participation among young people in Europe.

The blind faith in the cultural spill-over

Slovakia holds the saddest record in the history of the European Parliament elections: turnout in this EU member state for the 2004 elections was the lowest in the EU at just 17%, with less than two in ten Slovaks casting their ballot. In order to address this problem and to avoid to be rewarded once again with the wooden spoon, Slovakia launched a European Parliament-funded project which aimed to use innovative means (initiatives such as quiz competitions on EU issues for high-school graduates or simulated meetings of European Parliament committees) to inspire young people to take a stand in the 2009 June election. Yet expectations were not so optimistic. "If the sixth of June is very sunny in Slovakia, then the turnout could be very bad," feared the director of the EP Information Office in Slovakia Robert Hajšel a few weeks before the election day.

It seems that weather conditions at the beginning of June in central Europe were not so unfavorable for picnics or excursions, since Slovakia recorded the lowest score for the second time in a row (19,64%). However, this meager result should be linked with the whole EU member states turnout (43%), the lowest ever since direct elections for the Parliament started thirty years ago.

The Slovak case assumes a particular symbolic meaning for two specific reasons.

Firstly, Slovakia recently adopted the new European currency. The changeover, that proceeded smoothly due to meticulous preparations in all sectors, was saluted as beneficial and was considered as a contribution to Europe's collective effort to recover from the current economic crisis with the potential advantages to create growth and jobs and keep inflation under control. "The Euro is more than just money" commented a joyful Manuel Barroso to celebrate the Slovak adoption of the single currency on January 2009 "on this historic day Slovakia is a powerful symbol of economic and political progress and of European integration." (IP/09/1, 1 January 2009). According to the Eurobarometer surveys (2009), the vast majority of Slovak respondents considered that the changeover had been a success: 9 in 10 respondents said they felt well informed about the new currency, a large majority of respondents were satisfied with the information provided by the national authorities and by television which was seen to be the most efficient source of information during the changeover, mostly by youngest respondents.

Secondly, in spite of the low electoral turnout, Slovak citizens and most of all young Slovaks declare to be euro-enthusiastic. Being part of the EU does not undermine their national identity and young Slovak citizens set high expectations on EU membership (Macháček, 2005). This is in line with the survey results (Eurobarometer, 2008) which show that a majority of Europeans, and an even more important majority of young Europeans, consider that the European Parliament 'should have the greatest decision-making power within the European Union' (47%), that it is 'democratic' (69%) and that it has a positive or a neutral image (80% and even 85% for 15–24 year olds).

If taken into due consideration, these two aspects raise a number of questions: how is it possible that a successful changeover to the Euro, the most symbolic and pragmatic step towards the economical integration in the EU, and the popular enthusiasm and support to the European Union in Slovakia were followed by the lowest turnout in the last European Parliament election?

It is impressive to notice how experts and MEPs themselves are at their wits' end regarding this issue: "I don't know why the turnout is so low and we need to study why people don't go out and vote," EP Liberal leader Graham Watson said.

It would be a mistake to underestimate and oversimplify the factors which led to the abstention (such as political disillusionment due to the financial crises, national political situation, insufficient media exposure of the candidates), nevertheless it is essential to bring up a crucial issue: can the

accession to the internal market and the adoption of the single currency *consequently* create consensus for the political project of European integration? In other words, is political participation a variable dependent on financial and economic factors?

These questions are particularly related to young European people. The current generation, more than the previous ones, is invited to share the values of democracy, tolerance, respect of human rights and to develop skills like intercultural understanding in order to upgrade the European Union into an advanced stage of political and cultural integration, or, to say it in a more non formal but straightforward way, to *make Europe*. To simply believe that such processes will automatically occur as a functional consequence of the development of the internal market (like a “spill-over effect”) is not only naive and superficial, but also dangerous, as this assumption entails a passive approach towards the promotion and development of the above mentioned values and skills. Specific studies have demonstrated that economic developments leads to stable democracy as it brings changes in political culture and social structure (Inglehart, 1997). However, the most threatening risk of focusing efforts and priorities *only* and *essentially* on the development of the internal market is to turn young people into a generation of passive consumers, instead of active citizens. The elections for the European Parliament acquire therefore a paramount meaning, as they become an opportunity to discuss about key European issues, to raise citizens’ interest on the European Union and to provide them with tools and information to understand the decision-making process and the functioning of European institutions.

National governments, political parties and associations in Europe often fail in attracting voters, as the two last turnouts demonstrate. According to Sara Pini (2009) abstention at European elections is not irrational behavior but is a consequence of specific factors, like poorly identifiable political issues, the absence of a real campaign, a weak perception of what is at stake in these elections, the complexity of the European political and institutional system and the difficulty of understanding it.

Furthermore, and this relates mostly to young people, there are no truly European media, and the European public space is still under construction. Pini argues that it is necessary to adapt to new forms of communication: if it is true that young people read fewer newspapers and are less engaged in political parties and trade unions, it is also undeniable that they meet, exchange and form their political beliefs on the Internet, on blogs and on social networks, establishing international links and overcoming the rigid national boundaries. The understanding of this phenomenon could be a chance for the EU to shape up challenging political debates in the future.

Considering these aspects, the increase of the share of votes for the right-wing parties²⁰ in the last EP elections must not be perceived as surprising, nor must it be astonishing the fact that a considerable amount of these preferences came from young people: extremist parties' candidates talk plainly, use populist language and reach the masses with their message, exploiting the fear of social upheaval to turn it into anger, hostility and the desperate demand for a moral and ethnic *order*.

Young people's increasing abstention and growing consensus for extremist parties in the European Parliament elections bring up a paradox that needs further explanation: on one hand, young Europeans show a high confidence and affection for the European Union, on the other hand they manifest widespread indifference, or even hostility, towards European politics (only one-third of 18–24 year olds voted in 2004). An analysis of the "life politics" approach can account this trend. Abstention and disaffection in the political debate do not necessarily mean a total withdrawal in the personal sphere, but they might simply reflect a desire for more direct forms of participation and engagement. Moreover, it is useful to discriminate between *indifference abstention* (linked to a lack of information and to a less-developed sense of belonging to the EU) and *protest abstention*, which is becoming the main form of political behaviour among young people and reflects hostility not towards Europe as such, but towards the kind of Europe which is being built (Pini 2009)

European identity or identification with Europe?

These observations lead the discussion to the controversial issue of a European identity, which implies opening up a real Pandora's box. Developing an awareness of a European identity and strengthening young people awareness of belonging to Europe have been two of the main declared European Union's objectives in the field of youth policy.

Although the social research has so far struggled to operationalise and measure a viable concept of European identity, it must be admitted that such process, like any other issue related to identities, is extremely disputable. In order to overcome the impasse some authors propose to replace it with the concept of *identification*, a choice that offers an advantage in the empirical research (Datler, Wallace, Spannring, 2005). The point is not answering questions about the existence or not existence of a certain identity, but to be investigate around to the different degrees of subjective affiliation with a certain *object* (for instance: the project of European integration, the idea of a European constitution, the development of common European values, the consensus towards

²⁰ The most resounding results were obtained by Geert Wilder's party for freedom (PVV) that won four mandates in the Netherlands; the True Finns party led by Timo Soini which increased its share of the vote by 13% in comparison with the 2004; the Austrian FPÖ; the extremist party Jobbik in Hungary.

European policies and so on). Furthermore, this perspective includes the possibility of a multiple identification (for example, affiliation for the European dimension and, at the same time, strong bond for the local community). This is a crucial specification, that allows to briefly introduce two key factors in order to assess the impact of the EU youth policy: *cognitive mobilization* and *active citizenship*.

In their comprehensive overview of the literature on the popular perceptions of the EU as a system of governance, Loveless and Rohrschneider (2008) come to the conclusion that higher levels of cognitive skills are necessary to understand the highly abstract nature of the EU. This is the reason why the concept of cognitive mobilization has been operationalised as high levels of political awareness, skills in political communication and the ability to receive and manage incoming and increasingly accessible information. Inglehart (1970) confirms that identification with Europe requires cultural capital, education and cognitive mobilization, and Datler, Wallace and Spannring, (2005) demonstrate that mobility experience, knowledge of the European languages and the everyday discussion of political and social issues in European politics are among those conditions that allow individuals to construct their identification with Europe.

If cognitive mobilization can explain the requirements for affiliation to the EU, further indicators are needed in order to understand more active degree of mobilizations (other than a *theoretical* understanding of the EU functioning, a consensus for its policy and participation to European Parliament elections).

Inglehardt argues that casting the vote is not necessarily an indication of mobilization, since it can be deemed as a way to delegate power and responsibility to a limited elite. A new and alternative modality of participation is emerging, a style that presents considerable differences with the political participation based on affiliation to traditional parties: it is issue oriented, based on specific groups rather than on established bureaucratic organizations, it seeks specific policy changes rather than simply giving a blank check to the elites of a given party. This mode of participation requires relatively high skill levels (Inglehart, 1997).

It is thus misleading to believe that mass publics and young people have become apathetic, citing evidence that voter turnout has stagnated or declined. Again, Inglehart notices that these accounts are accurate about voting, but miss the point that people display a rising potential for elite-challenging action. This implies that we should take a broad view of politics before dismissing young people as apathetic. (Haerpfer, Wallace, Spannring, 2002)

An objective of the EU youth policy is to promote voluntary activities with a view to reinforcing young people's solidarity and engagement as citizens. Active citizenship is a broad concept which encapsulates many different aspects, such as social solidarity, social affiliation and social capital,

which help young people live together in the global diverse environment in Europe (Mutz, 2004). Among the several dimension of this factor, the cultural dimension of citizenship deserves to be particularly highlighted: respect for diversity, fundamental democratic values and contributing to peaceful intercultural relations have become key objectives to be included in the formal and non formal education programmes, in view of the radical changes which currently affect European societies. Contributing through active citizenship does not mean only obtaining information on how the European institutions work or to increase the turnout for the European Parliament election; it means to constructively react to new forthcoming challenges: to communicate in a multicultural environment, to increase sensitiveness towards the current complexity of social issues like migration, to share and to use resources in a more democratic way, to harmonise the objective of internal market competitiveness with the concept of sustainability, to adopt a critical approach towards the process of cultural homogenisation in order to promote the cultural diversity and to encourage exchanges.

Part III: A case study

“La Città dell’Utopia” EVS project, Rome, Italy

This part will present one among the thousands of Youth in Action projects in Europe. The “Città dell’Utopia” project, set up in Rome by the Italian branch of the NGO Service Civil International, is a valid example of how it is possible to implement the European Union’s guidelines in the field of youth policy and non formal education highlighting the dimension of international voluntarism and active citizenship. The next sections will present the organization’s aims, the development of the project, the role of the international volunteers and their contribution to the local community.

Service Civil International

Service Civil International (SCI) is a peace organization that co-ordinates international voluntary projects and counts 43 official branches all over the world. Although the access to the project is open for people of all ages, the vast majority of participants are aged between 18 and 25 years old, and around 66% of them are women.

SCI work is based in the belief that all people are capable of living together and co-operating with mutual respect and without recourse to violence to solve conflict. These principles have old roots: the organization was created in the 20’s by a Swiss pacifist, Pierre Ceresole (1879-1945). Inspired by the Quakers’ philosophy and ignited by his motto “deeds, not words”, Ceresole initiated his civil service work in the devastated area of Esnes, near Verdun, which had been a WWI battle-field a few years earlier. With him were some German and Austrian pacifists who were eager to work in France as a form of compensation. English, Dutch and Swiss volunteers joined them and worked together in a spirit of brotherhood. The core idea was simple and provocative at the same time: by working together and establishing friendship, it would be impossible to become enemies. It was 1920 and the first SCI international *workcamp* was born.

SCI strives to keep such values alive today: through international voluntary work the main objective is to give people the chance to experience cooperative way of living while contributing in a useful manner to the community. Furthermore, the international dimension of the projects allows participants to bridge cultural gaps, to foster mutual understanding and to prevent racism and xenophobia.

From October 2006 to August 2007 I worked as European voluntary Service (Action 2 of the Youth in Action programme) responsible person for the Italian branch of SCI in Rome, which has gained an extensive experience in carrying out European Union's funded projects in the last two decades. My responsibilities included writing and submitting the applications to obtain the financial support from the DG Education, Youth and Culture (EACEA Agency), providing information for the EVS Italian outgoing volunteers and tutoring 7 EVS incoming international volunteers in Rome. Not only had I the chance to work with and for them, I shared even the same accommodation, a small flat in the former country house "Casale Garibaldi" which hosts the project "La Città dell'Utopia" (Utopia City). Such unique and rewarding experience allowed me to get an insider look at the features of the Youth in Action programme.

La Città dell'Utopia

La Città dell'Utopia is a project hosted by the Casale Garibaldi, an historical building surrounded by secular pine trees and located in a modern, densely populated area not far from St. Paul Basilica in Rome. It is a popular suburban area inhabited by a large number of elderly people, where the number of families coming from Latin America, northeast Europe, Asia and Africa is raising. The Casale dates back to the end of the 18th century and is the result of the transformations made to an ancient country house according to typical 19th/20th century models. The legend goes that Giuseppe Garibaldi (hero of the Italian unification) rested at the Casale for one night. No matter whether it really happened or not, the legend has endowed the building with an alleged historical value, thus preventing the house from being demolished. In 2001 a group of activists of the Italian branch of SCI started renovating spontaneously the place, which was abandoned and inhabitable for many years. In 2004 the local municipality authorized SCI Italy to coordinate international projects and activity in the house, under the name of "La Città dell'Utopia" project.

Since 2004 the Casale has hosted a number of activities in different areas with the support of hundreds of local, national and international volunteers (through short term international workcamps), who offered their valuable contribution to carry out the initiatives and to renovate the old house. A real turning point was achieved with the completion of a flat in the ground floor to host the long term international volunteers within the framework of the Youth in Action programme (Action 2 – European Volunteer Service). The ground floor features also a hall and spaces that can be used by SCI and local associations for social and cultural initiatives like meetings, conferences, training courses, activities with schools. The first floor hosts an audiovisual library focused on north-south issues and international solidarity, and an hostel that can accommodate up to 30 people,

usually international volunteers or seminar participants. The lowest floor, still under construction, will feature a bio-inn project, to promote initiatives and courses about biological agriculture, fair trade and sustainable consumption, involving at the same time disadvantaged categories of workers in all the activities. The whole house is surrounded by a biological garden which is tended by the members of a local environmental association. Furthermore, once a month SCI Italy organizes a small biological market on the yard, aimed at bridging the gap between local farmers and consumers.

La Città dell'Utopia is meant to be a social and cultural laboratory focused on new models of local and global development based on a balanced, sustainable and fair approach. The main aim of the project is to empower local associations, groups, schools, cooperatives by offering citizens opportunities to take part in the environmental and social development of the district, and at the same time creating a network for socialisation and solidarity initiatives. The project promotes the concept of active citizenship: local citizens are invited not only to attend the numerous events organized, but also to take actively part in the development of the initiatives, with ideas, personal contribution and long or short term commitment.

The EVS volunteers

The Città dell'Utopia project offers young people aged between 18 and 30 years the opportunity to volunteer for a 6 month period in the framework of the EVS programme²¹. Volunteers are provided with travel costs reimbursement, accommodation (in one of the room of the volunteers flat in the Casale), a pocket money, insurance, tutoring, a pre-departure training and Italian language classes.

Sending organizations are responsible to assist the volunteers throughout the application process. SCI Italy, as receiving and coordinating organization, selects and hosts the volunteers, while the National Agencies of the Youth in Action programme take care of the administrative aspects (financing and assessing the projects, providing information, setting up the pre-departure training).

Between October 2006 and August 2007, the period I worked as a EVS coordinator at SCI Italy in Rome, I tutored two "rounds" of EVS volunteers (4 in the autumn/winter season and 3 in the spring/summer season), coming from Spain (2), France (2), the Netherlands (1), Portugal (1) and Poland (1). Sharing the same accommodation turned into a real multicultural challenge

²¹ Volunteers from the following countries and regions are eligible to apply for a n EVS project: Member States of the European Union, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Kosovo, under UNSC Resolution 1244/1999, Montenegro, Serbia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Syria, Tunisia.

(furthermore, the two French volunteers had a not-European family background) which required the development of communication and interrelationship skills combined with mutual understanding and reciprocal support. Although they were hosted by SCI Italy, 5 volunteers worked for two different projects (1 in a daycare centre for children, 4 in an NGO office). Two volunteers worked for the project La Città dell'Utopia, assisting the project coordinator. However, even the 5 volunteers not directly involved in the project supported the daily activities in the house (such as giving classes in their mother languages) and offered their contribution to the organization of events, seminars, workcamps and to the overall maintenance of the place²². The activities which included the EVS volunteers can be divided in four main areas:

- Cultural and social activities: participation and organization of conferences, meetings, festival, exhibitions, thematic dinners; courses of music, group dancing, tai chi, African percussion, languages, gardening, informatics, theatre; workshops on sustainable lifestyle, such as recycling, composting, reduction in consumptions and renewable sources of energy.
- Support to SCI activities: coordination of national and international meetings, workcamps, seminars and Youth in Action programme exchanges.
- Volunteering promotion: setting up an info-point on international exchanges, mobility and volunteering; promoting and advertising the project activities in Rome; networking with like-minded voluntary organizations.
- Working with media: supporting the audiovisual library by managing and researching new material and organising events, such as film projections, festival and cine-club.

Skills and contributions

In terms of learning opportunities the volunteers engaged in these activities have the chances to gain skills in several fields, such as project coordination and networking; moreover, they learn about active citizenship, local sustainable development and participated democracy; and of course they can strengthen their knowledge of the Youth in Action programme and increase the ability to deliver information to other youngsters, acting as multipliers; finally, thanks to the collective dimension of the experience, the language courses and the daily contact with citizens, local

²² Every EVS project must be designed as a part time activity, but of course the working hours can be extended by voluntary commitment.

volunteers and SCI Italy staff members, the EVS volunteers can improve considerably their Italian and can obtain a deep understanding of the local, regional and national culture.

It is often stressed that the European Voluntary Service is a “learning” service: throughout non-formal learning experiences young volunteers improve and acquire competences for their personal, educational and professional development as well as for their social integration. To provide young people with valuable skills for their future integration in the job market is without any doubt *one* of the aims of the programme. However, it would be a mistake to highlight only this aspect, which plays anyway a pivotal role, considering the high competitiveness in the European professional environment and the requirements necessary to obtain a high-skilled position.

The Città dell’Utopia project casts the spotlight upon an additional dimension: the contribution that international volunteers offer to the local community in term of “social capital”, a process which demonstrates that the wealth of an area should not be valued only through economic indicators, but according to the chances the area offers to increase social cohesion, inclusion and solidarity. It is a contribution that falls into the category of active participation in line with the “lifestyle politics” analysed in part II. Such form of activism is not necessarily bound to an affiliation to political parties or to guidelines provided by institutions, it rather finds its expression in actions, commitments and values related to specific areas, like environmental protection or promotion of human rights. Nevertheless, such commitment does have a clear political dimension: avoiding the use of plastic, promoting self construction courses of solar energy device, planning actions to raise awareness on water consumption, designing activities against intolerance and xenophobia, like events focused on Roma culture or the organization of free Italian courses for immigrants; all these initiatives demonstrate the increasing impact of active citizenship in the *reflexive society*, where it is essential that citizens reflect upon their lifestyle and behaviors, the effect of their actions on the environment, their role in the current multicultural society.

The EVS volunteers hosted by the Città dell’Utopia project have the chance to experience these processes, promoting the value of active citizenship in the local community and gaining or reinforcing skills and abilities in a context featured by three key factors:

- the international and multicultural quality of the project: as I could experience working as a tutor, living together and sharing the same spaces for a six month term prompts the EVS volunteers to establish friendly relationships and to solve conflicts with mutual understanding and dialogue, reaching reasonable compromises;

- its collective dimension: although volunteers are sometimes asked to perform tasks individually, most of the work requires constant contact with groups, local volunteers and citizens, an environment that helps develop social and language skills;
- its framework of non formal education: SCI Italy, as many NGOs active in international voluntarism, is characterized by the absence of a rigid hierarchical structure; responsibilities are carried out professionally, and staff members and volunteers are invited to share the ideals and values of the organization, offering their contribution according to their skills and interests. For young EVS volunteers, this is the ideal setting to develop their creativity and to interact with a new culture abroad.

Strengths and weaknesses

All over the last 5 years the constant and increasing presence of EVS long term volunteers and short term participants to international workcamps and other actions of the Youth in Action programme has provided a considerable visibility to the project, which has hosted so far hundreds of events and thousands among citizens and volunteers. Its positive impact on the neighborhood is no more questionable. However, more questions arise when it comes to the financial sustainability of the initiative. Like many NGOs working with young volunteers, SCI Italy depends on the support of the Youth in Action programme (through the Italian National Agency) in order to host the EVS volunteers, which underpin the Città dell'Utopia project and provide an international dimension to the activities. Therefore any problem related to the administration of the programme can have negative repercussions on the whole project. Such difficulties might consist in a delay in the transfer of the funds from the agency to the hosting organization; a rejection of the application due to lack of financial resources; generic bureaucracy problems. In this case, it is responsibility of the hosting organization to raise the fund necessary to cover the overall cost of the project. Keeping in mind that many organizations which host EVS volunteers are small NGOs or associations (often voluntary based) with limited financial resources, it is clear that a reliable approach in the administration (from the European Commission and the National Agencies) is the essential requirement for the efficiency of the programme.

PART IV: an assessment of the Youth in Action programme

The previous sections have focused on a number of sensitive issues: cognitive mobilization, active citizenship, political participation. Now it is time to proceed with a critical assessment of the instruments designed by the EU youth policy, taking into consideration the major difficulties that the “world risk society” poses to young people. It is important to remember here the main general objective of the Youth in Action programme 2007-2013, which are to be considered as the EU youth policy cornerstone as well:

- to promote young people's active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular;
- to develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to reinforce social cohesion in the EU;
- to foster mutual understanding between young people in different countries;
- to contribute to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field;
- to promote European cooperation in the youth field.

The following assessment will focus on four different aspects of the EU youth policy instruments: non formal education; mobility; international volunteering; social inclusion.

Non formal education. A suitable framework?

The Youth in Action programme is the core of the EU youth policy. It allows young people in Europe to take part in voluntary projects in the framework of non formal education. Most of this activities are set up by NGOs and youth organisations, therefore it is correct to define such educational approach as *non formal*, in the sense that its setting is not regulated by rigid institutional guidelines. Is this modality suitable to provide young people with those *high skills* previously examined with respect to the concept of cognitive mobilisation? Is non formal education the right context to promote active citizenship?

Tom Bentley (1998) argues that young people are not able to transfer or apply the knowledge they acquire from school to the pressing problems of their everyday life. According to his studies formal education has a too narrow conception of the cognitive capacities of the individual and the standardised educational settings are limited to provide young people with the possibilities to reflect

on the highly diverse, often individual and quickly changing issues of their identity development. In other words, formal education is not the most appropriate tool to meet the demand of the individualisation process in the reflexive society, to use Beck's terminology. On the other hand, young people concerns tend to find responses outside the formal structures, particularly outside the classroom: NGO activities, less established social movements and action groups, youth cultures and subcultures, municipal youth work, sports, social, employment and cultural projects, the cyber world, peer groups and other everyday contexts. As the previous sections demonstrated, this engagement matches with the concept of *life politics*.

Considering such assumptions, it is possible to claim that non-formal learning, constructivism and an educational policy based on life long learning and non formal education are the most suitable methods to empower civic engagement among young people and the best approaches to design educational strategies adaptable to the features of youth (Siurala, 2002). The European Commission hit the nail on the head in designing a non formal framework for the Youth in Action programme. However, just because the tool has such a valuable potential and impact, its implementation should be improved and more resources should be allocated.

Promoting youth mobility. A key for identification to Europe?

Promoting European citizenship among young people is one of the general objective of the Youth in Action programme. Clear and measurable criteria for the learning process of citizenship are unfortunately not yet available in the sociological research, as the phenomenon is not well documented, let alone the recurrent inconvenience related to the operationalisation of this concept. An additional challenge to promote European citizenship consists in the gap between voluntary engagement at local level and its significance in the wider European context. Youth organizations and NGOs work very often within the field of their small local realities in order to recruit their volunteers, therefore it becomes sometimes hard to convey such European large-scale dimension at regional level.

The topic of European citizenship and identification with Europe can be found in studies related to young people mobility in the framework of voluntary projects. Travelling, collecting meaningful experience abroad (short term and long term), experiencing intercultural exchanges can be included under the rubric of youth mobility, the overarching dimension of the Youth in Action programme. Specific studies have confirmed the importance of programmes promoting travel and mobility in Europe. One of the added values of such experience consists in the acquisition of languages skills, a central requirement for any kind of European integration.

Researches confirm the value of language education and programmes promoting travel and mobility. In the conclusion of the European Commission funded study on the orientation of young man and women to citizenship (Jamieson, 2005) is recommended that youth policies actively seek to incorporate young people across all levels of education and career paths. It identifies reasons for targeting disadvantaged groups and regions with low levels of language skill, travel and mobility and encouraging more engaging and systematic citizenship education across the EU.

Throughout the last fifteen years the Commission has acknowledged the link existing between transnational mobility and the understanding of other European societies and cultures²³. Although some steps towards the promotion of mobility has been taken, much more should be done in order to effectively overcome the obstacles that young people have to face when volunteering abroad, for example in the context of visa policies. The European Youth Forum, which has always been committed to this issues, lobbies European institutions in order to achieve a barrier-free Europe for young volunteers. There are examples where young people cannot participate in activities due to the fact that the embassy cannot issue either a short-term or long-term visa, since none of them satisfy the real purpose of the visa needed. The Youth Forum points a finger at national governments and highlights an evident contradiction: governments have stated their support to civil society development and the promotion of active citizenship, thereby encouraging young people to volunteer and build a strong European identity, whereas visa policies are completely in opposition to those ideals. Therefore more efforts are expected from the Commission and the Parliament as driving forces in order to promote young people's mobility in Europe and to avoid foot-dragging at national level. A possible strategy (Bertoncini, 2008) requires setting young people's mobility as a political priority through two main steps:

- carrying out and disseminate in-depth and supported studies (cohort follow-up, quantitative and qualitative analyses, employers' surveys etc.) to establish the actual impact of mobility on young Europeans on a personal, educational and professional level;
- establishing a directorate specifically dedicated to mobility within the Education and culture General Directorate; it also requires that "young people's mobility" be part of the portfolio of one of the European commissioners.

²³ In the 1996 the European Commission presented a Green Paper on obstacle hindering transnational mobility. The document stresses that mobility "enhances the social skills of individuals, who learn how to communicate and live within those societies and to respect diversity; furthermore, it encourages the acquisition of linguistic skills and contributes to the development of "European citizenship" complementing existing citizenship, of the country of origin". See COM(96)462

These two orientations would not only facilitate and encourage young people's transnational mobility in Europe, but they will incite the EU to invest additional political and administrative energy on youth policy.

International volunteering. An effective tool to foster civic engagement?

There is an urgent need for a deeper awareness of the role and contribution of young people's voluntary activity in Europe. Not only are quantitative data not sufficient to have a clear picture of the current situation, but also qualitative analysis are required in order to assess the impact of these factors. Luckily example of good practices are available, as the AmeriCorps²⁴ in the US, which demonstrates that national youth voluntary programme can have a positive repercussion on lasting civic engagement. Three aspects will be taken now into consideration, in order to assess the issue of international voluntarism related to the EU youth policy: the international dimension, the collective dimension and the contribution of voluntarism to social capital.

One of the limits of national voluntary programmes is the focus on national agendas within national borders, a constraint for a wider European dimension. International programmes such as the EVS are therefore very much needed. The added value in performing voluntary activities abroad consists in living in another culture at a considerable geographical distance from home. This factor offers the possibility for intercultural learning through transformative learning processes where everyday practices are performed differently, and subsequently challenges currently held cultural beliefs. The distance from home provides the open space to explore the differences and new identities. The simple travel experiences such as *gap years* before university cannot provide such learning opportunity because of the lack for reflection and pedagogical support which can reinforce stereotypes of other cultures rather than challenge them (Stanley, 2005).

An additional valuable quality of the non formal setting of international volunteering within the framework of the Youth in Action programme is the collective experience. The learning processes are not of an individual kind, as the voluntary activities are implemented together and collective experiences take place, resulting in respective learning processes in an intercultural environment. This means that young people do not ascribe these experiences to personal efforts or their individual learning capacities but rather to common activities.

Voluntary activities can generate learning processes to build on social solidarity and to strengthen social capital. As Putnam (1993) argues, extensive participation to voluntary activities

²⁴ The AmeriCorps programme provides school-leavers in the US accommodation, a weekly allowance and an educational award in exchange for a year or full-time service in activities such as youth mentoring, running after school programmes and cleaning up parks. Its goal include renewing the ethic of civic responsibility.

fosters cooperation and trust which are essential to the successful functioning of democratic institutions. An international and intercultural dimension of voluntarism can be a central factor for the development of a European dimension and a stronger affiliation for the European integration process among young people.

However, the fact that voluntary work has radically changed in the last 10 years is a reality that cannot be overlooked. A considerably high amount of young people turn to voluntary activity in order to increase their employment potential in a job market that has become more competitive. This trend has produced a remarkable impact: “last-minute” or short term commitment, rather than lasting ideological affiliations. Furthermore, the typical young volunteer across Europe, as Hoskins (2005) points out, is female, relatively wealthy, educated. It is harder to find young people who have dropped out the education system, as international volunteering still requires demanding resources (language skills, access to information) easily available to educated and wealthy young people.

Does the Youth in Action programme EU provide effective answers to social exclusion?

Although it is not included in the general aims of the Programme (it can be found listed among the specific objectives: “facilitating participation in the Programme by young people with fewer opportunities”) social inclusion is a crucial aspect that Youth in Action does not overlook.

As the previous section demonstrated, economic and social changes over the past two decades have disproportionately affected disadvantaged young people and helped to make the school-to-work transition more protracted, more fractured and more risky. Governments in Europe see long term youth unemployment as an important cause of social exclusion and has introduced measures to tackle the problem, in line with the Lisbon Strategy guidelines.

However, the emphasis has been focussed more on the *supply* of youth labour (advice, training and other help that young people need to make them more “employable”) rather than on *demand*, that is, the number, the type, quality and location of jobs available to young people in order to provide them with a wider social and economic structures and related opportunities and choices (Barry 2005). Of course this does not mean that such approach is not effective in enabling many young people to move successfully from welfare to work (even though it has contributed to generate a negative collateral effects, like the “Generation Praktikum”); on the other hand, it is proving less successful at helping more socially disadvantaged young people who have to cope with limited resources at their disposal. Furthermore, Furlong and Guidikova (2001) reminds us that it is

not young people who refuse responsibility but adult society which denies them opportunities for responsible participation.

The Youth in Action programme can be an effective instrument to tackle social exclusion for a number of reasons. A valuable change in the new 2007-2013 programme consists in the extension of the age limits to take part in EVS project: whereas the old version required a maximum age of 25 years old, from 2007 participation is allowed to volunteers not older than 30 as well. This is an important extension that takes into consideration the current social trends affecting young people in Europe and consequently facilitates and enlarges their participation in the programme.

Furthermore, long term voluntary services abroad can be seen by many young unemployed people as a meaningful alternative. It is here important to keep in mind that in post-industrial European countries also well-educated young people are facing problems to adapt in the job market, as they tend to reject work that does not live up to their expectations and are unwilling to accept lowly qualified jobs (Weil, Wildemeersch, Jansen, 2005). It is not thus surprising that a majority of EVS participants are high-educated young people which expect to gain additional skills that can be later apply in the job market.

However, the biggest challenge is the inclusion of disadvantaged young people. The external final report on Youth in Action 2000-2006 requested by the Commission came to the conclusion that the Programme seems modestly effective in targeting young people with fewer opportunities but it did have some promising effects on young people with less access to opportunities (Ecorys, 2007).

The modest results achieved so far could be ascribed to two main reasons: firstly, the concept of young people with fewer opportunities is not supported by further details in documents related to the Youth programme. Consequently, how the different factors are defined and should be measured or put into operation is unclear. Moreover, it is not indicated what percentage of young people with fewer opportunities the programme is aiming at.

Secondly, it is really difficult to reach some groups of young people with fewer opportunities. These include young people who are not organised, homeless young people, substance abusers and other young people on the margins. Young people with fewer opportunities who can be reached relatively easily tend to already be active via youth organizations.

It is important to notice that the participation in non formal programme provides young volunteers, most of all those affected by social and geographical disadvantage, with social skills to be later on applied in the professional environment. More efforts must be focused therefore on the acknowledgment of voluntary experiences, often underestimated and not considered valuable because of their lack of formality.

Conclusion

Many significant steps forward have been taken in the last 20 years in the field of youth policy in the European Union. Thousands of young European citizens are choosing to spend long term periods abroad not only within the academic framework of programmes as Erasmus, but also joining initiatives like the European Voluntary Service. Young people have increasingly become more familiar with the EU non formal education programmes and with international volunteering.

European institutions and Member States have acknowledged this process and have put more emphasis on cooperation on youth issues, on the promotion of the Youth in Action programme and on initiative aimed at empowering youth mobility. The intention to declare 2011 the "European Year of Volunteering" goes clearly in this direction.

It is maybe too early to analyse the effects of the current youth policy on young European people. Not only is the work still *on progress* (every research on this field must cope with a regrettable lack of data), but processes like a promotion of a European identity through international volunteering, mobility programmes and intercultural exchange require a considerable amount of time to be assessed. Thus any European identity, if ever existing, is still for sure under construction.

However, the current state of the play cannot be used as a reason to downgrade youth policy. The current debate is centered on creating the background for the social changes that the adults of tomorrow (today's youth) will have to manage, handle, solve, in a constructive and creative way. It is much more than the acknowledgement, shared by the majority of young people today, that they will have to work for longer and that their pensions will be less generous. Very probably the most pressing challenge in the future years will consist in dealing with a limited and reducing resources, a fact that could produce risks of political discontent, if such threats will not be managed by including democratically as many actors as possible in the decision making process.

It is necessary to go beyond the superficial rhetoric and place youth policy as an urgent priority in the context of the potential risks that we can run in the future if such trends are further ignored. The current generation of young people can be the key generation (of adults) called to solve the challenges in the next decades. The question is not "shall they cope with these problems?", rather "are they offered the right tools *now* in order to be able to meet these challenges *tomorrow*?"

The instruments designed by the European Union in the field of youth policy can provide a convincing answer. The Youth in Action programme can indeed promote solidarity and active participation among young people: its non formal setting, characterized by the dynamism and flexibility of youth organizations and NGOs, is an ideal context to empower youth civic engagement and reduce the risks of intolerance and xenophobia.

As demonstrated in the previous assessment, the programme has the potential to provide young people with effective tools and abilities to manage the future crises, problems, difficulties in a constructive perspective. If the traditional institutional framework meets difficulties in providing young people with the skills necessary to cope with the challenges of the *reflexive modernity*, non formal education through international voluntary work is the most pragmatic and ideal instrument to support them in the development of these abilities.

“Youth Pact”, “Investing and Empowering”, “Promoting Youth” are intriguing slogans which show a high institutional commitment on young people. It must be still ascertained whether deeds will follow suit, particularly from the Member States’ side. The decision from the Council not to increase the budget for the Youth in Action programme as suggested by the European Parliament is not a good omen for the future. It would be advisable to increase the funds at least twofold in the next decade, in order to really empower youth policy as agreed by the Member States. High competitiveness in the job market combined with the negative effects of the global financial crises might equal a higher rate of social exclusion among young people in the future years. Moreover, the risks of intergenerational conflicts due to the ageing of Europe, the structural changes combined with the individualisation process in the Western societies, the political instability that climate change, increasing migration, rising unemployment might cause in Europe cannot be further overlooked.

Western societies have considerably changed recently. The shift to *lifestyle politics* is an important sign that shows that young people have not become apathetic or that they completely disregard political engagement: they have simply changed their way of participation. For this reason, international voluntary activities, mobility programmes and intercultural initiatives must not be considered as *alternative experiments* anymore. It is about time to upgrade the youth policy and spread, disseminate, convincingly promote and empower the EU non formal education programmes in the future. If the European Communities have been built upon economic foundation, it is now up to young people to *make Europe* selecting carefully solid bricks and cohesive mortar: the result could be a cosmopolitan, colourful, hospitable and stable construction.

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