

# 8 Non-Formal Education and Learning in Europe

## The Role of the Council of Europe

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### **Preface**

As Europe experiences its worst conflict, following the invasion by Russia of Ukraine in February 2022, since the Second World War, causing the collapse of so much of the work of the Council of Europe – which immediately suspended the Russian Federation from its membership, and from which Russia subsequently withdrew, in the middle of March 2022 – and deep questions concerning peace and security in Europe, the revision of this paper could not, arguably, be more timely. It was drafted towards the end of 2021 to illustrate how the “non-formal” educational work of the Council of Europe Youth Department had promoted deep learning within and around the themes of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, holding out a promise for the sustainability of young people’s civic and political engagement anchored on intercultural tolerance and understanding. On the very day that Russian troops crossed the border into Ukraine, a small group of “alumni” – researchers, trainers, advisers – from over the 50 years of the Youth Department’s existence gathered in Strasbourg to consider how to maintain a momentum for human rights and related learning in Europe that suddenly appeared to have stalled. Indeed, a year later, for only the fourth time since its foundation, Council of Europe heads of state and government met in Reykjavík, Iceland, to reassert its role and values (Reykjavík Summit of the Council of Europe 2023).

### **Introduction**

It is not easy to articulate the rhyme and reason for what is differentially known as “non-formal education” or “non-formal learning”. Beyond schooling and formal education, a plethora of activities are promoted in a multiplicity of contexts, all of which claim to be advancing knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and critical understanding of a range of issues through “experiential learning” and through “reflective practice”. I myself have argued in recent years that we should adopt the more cumbersome terminology of “non-formal education and learning” in order to capture the spectrum of activities, some of which embody more didactic elements of classical teaching and some of which lean firmly towards the active learning that characterizes “community education”.<sup>1</sup>

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This chapter focuses on just one such context, that of the Council of Europe Youth Department, and a relatively narrow cluster of issues framed around the trilogy of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Invariably, its range of practices draws from across the spectrum of non-formal education and learning. Those practices themselves, through its own institutional work program and through partnerships with others, span, *inter alia*, publications, “training the trainers” courses, long-term training courses for young people, campaigns, youth policy reviews and advisory missions, symposia, events, expert groups, quality recognition procedures, task and finish groups, and mobility projects. In order to illustrate some of the more concrete infrastructure that has derived from its philosophical origins, the chapter considers those practices with which the author has most familiarity. It should be said, however, that *all* practices developed by the Council of Europe Youth Department are informed by a mission to strengthen access to youth rights, deepen youth knowledge, and broaden youth participation. They are grounded in the principles of distinction, mutual respect and trust, inclusiveness, sustained commitment, participation, equity, transparency, and collaboration. These are now enshrined in the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 (Council of Europe 2020).

### **An Overview**

Throughout the 20th century and into the current century, there has been an inexorable and incremental interest and commitment to broadening and deepening learning environments for young people – through both the “pushes” of intellectual and pedagogical thinking and the “pulls” of youthful demands – in order to strengthen both personal development and participation and democratic engagement and renewal. The work of the Council of Europe generally, and specifically through its Youth Department, has been at the heart of cultivating such evolution.

In 1968, Danny Cohn-Bendit (Danny Le Rouge) was the firebrand poster boy of “les évènements”, the street disturbances in Paris (and elsewhere) that brought students and workers together to demand greater say in political and civic life, which seemed to them to be disproportionately and unjustly controlled by an older generation firmly set in its own ways. Forty-five years later, in May 2013, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, by then a respected and respectable German MEP representing the Greens, gave the keynote speech at the 25th anniversary of JUGEND für Europa, the German national agency for the European Union (EU) youth programs, delivering and supporting a range of projects and initiatives developed by, with, and for young people. As the funding for such programs has steadily increased in the 21st century, it is useful to consider what has taken place in between, since those brief, incendiary days in May 1968.

The Council of Europe, one of the oldest and largest of the European institutions, was established in 1949, in the aftermath of the Second World War. Its core mission is to promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law; each of its member states (now 46 countries) have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights. Indeed, its best known “instrument” is the European Court of Human

Rights. However, since its foundation, the work of the Council of Europe has extended in many directions: in support of minority groups, the fight against racism and discrimination, intercultural learning, freedom of expression, gender equality and – of relevance to this chapter – young people, youth voice, and participation, and what, today, should probably be called “non-formal education and learning”.

A platform for education and learning within the Council of Europe, the Youth Department commenced in 1972 when it opened its European Youth Centre in Strasbourg and appointed a director, Ragnar Sem, and its first educational adviser (called a tutor at the time), Peter Lauritzen, who played a key role in a plethora of developments across the realms of policy, research, and practice in the youth sector right through until shortly before his untimely death in 2007 (see Ohana and Rothemund 2008). The expressed purpose of the first European Youth Centre (there is now another one, in Budapest), enshrined in its 1972 statute, was to “give young people a hand in the building of Europe” (Ohana and Rothemund 2008, 395). Lauritzen’s early role and responsibility was to prepare, run, and evaluate what were known as “study sessions” – week-long educational seminars on topics determined by international non-governmental youth organizations as relevant for their ongoing work. With others, he was also instrumental in shaping a “co-management” system that engaged non-governmental youth stakeholders in determining the program for youth at the European Youth Centre. This approach was recently endorsed in the Council of Europe Secretary General’s 2021 Annual Report, when she noted that while a variety of forms of youth participation in decision-making were generally quite similar in their effectiveness, “the highest ranked form remains that of ‘co-management and co-production’, suggesting that this ‘could be important for the design of the post-pandemic recovery measures’” (Secretary General of the Council of Europe 2021, 143).

From the start, through the 1970s and 1980s, the Youth Department pioneered new participative and experiential approaches to learning and “teaching” on a European scale. And as “Europe” enlarged following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, these models of training and youth engagement forged by the Council of Europe were not only extended and developed by the institution itself but also embraced by its new member states. Lithuania, for example, adopted the co-management system for a while at least (see Council of Europe 2003), one of very few nation states ever to have done so, though others have recently started to explore versions of this approach to securing the voice and perspectives of young people in decision-making on matters that affect their lives, a fundamental principle of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Over these years, this youth participation imperative has been broadened and deepened, extending across a diversity of policy domains (not just education but also health and housing, for example) and well beyond the formal definition of a “child” (up to the age of 18 years) into the multiple definitions of “youth” and “young adulthood”, which now sometimes reach into the thirties (see Crowley and Moxon 2017).

Throughout the 1990s, the Council of Europe youth directorate placed great store, among a diversity of innovations and initiatives, on its distinctive long-term training courses (LTTCs) that were designed to embed what might be called “deep

learning” in its participants, who often became lifetime ambassadors for the process, frequently amending them within the resources available for delivery in their own countries without explicit acknowledgement of their origins, but nonetheless ensuring the reach of elements of the principles and practice of the Council of Europe to all corners of Europe. Indeed, just three days after the “9/11” attacks in the United States, Lauritzen made perhaps the speech of his life at a gathering of European level youth work trainers, in Brugge, Belgium. It was not recorded, and so the following is written from the author’s own recollections. As participants pondered on the implications of 9/11 for their work, Lauritzen was insistent that “Europe” was not a concept concerned with borders, countries, faiths, or politics, but a place committed to particular values – not only the guiding and governing ideals of the Council of Europe but also a wider canvas of obligations regarding rights, tolerance and understanding, and participation. These are inalienable and enduring principles that shape non-formal education and learning within the Council of Europe, most recently harnessed within the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030: including mutual respect and trust, inclusiveness, sustained commitment, participation, equity, transparency, and collaboration (Council of Europe 2020). Each decade has, incrementally, added a cluster of buzzwords and phrases to the youth sector’s lexicon of activities: networking, quality standards, cooperation, synergies, and lobbying in the 1990s; youth policy development, youth participation and active citizenship, human rights education, intercultural dialogue, and social cohesion in the 2000s (Ohana and Rothemund 2008, 14–15). All remain pertinent to this day.

This chapter critically reflects on what might be called the “Europeanization” of youth work throughout the member states of the Council of Europe (which includes all member states of the EU), the significant steps forward, and some of the obstacles and opposition still at play.

### **The First 30 Years – 1972–2001**

Ohana and Rothemund refer to the 1970s as the “pioneering” years, reporting that they were dedicated to strengthening the European youth structures and their international equivalents, which were quite rare at the time and, back then, had little access to intergovernmental institutions. Emancipation, liberation, and anti-capitalism were the leading concepts of that period. These were reflected in the programs of the European Youth Foundation and the European Youth Centre, which served as the space for heated political discussions that resulted in numerous political declarations. The demands towards the European institutions were clear: young people required access and structures for participation (Ohana and Rothemund 2008, 13).

The staple provisions by the Youth Directorate were “study sessions” and “long-term training courses” (known as LTTCs). The former focused on a specific theme drawn from a broad menu designed to empower young people, sometimes provided for specific segments of (usually “organized”) youth, such as young farmers or young politicians, and sometimes catering for more mixed groups in

order to exchange a range of experiences and perspectives. The LTTCs – bringing young people from diverse non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and from all over Europe – were anchored within a process of deep learning through an initial residential experience, then perhaps projects, but certainly some application of that initial learning “back home”, and then a second residential experience to reflect on perspectives and achievements. In their different ways, both delivered what would now be called “immersive” and “blended” learning – combining some classical didactic lectures with projects, challenges, debates, and group work. Both were intensive and demanding, proclaimed to be “transformative” in their intention and design, and usually experienced as such. Whatever other diversities were present and represented among participating young people in these study sessions and training courses, there were always the diversities of geography, culture, and language. Those involved discovered shared agendas and aspirations, as young Europeans, from within their previous worlds of difference (see also Stenger, this volume).

Many years later, around the turn of the millennium, Peter Lauritzen – together with his co-author, Irena Guidikova, whom he had appointed as a research officer in the youth directorate in the 1990s – crystallized the thinking he had first formulated as long ago as 1965 (his “eggs in a pan” thesis),<sup>2</sup> arguing that as the nation states of Europe merged together, they could no longer individually make and shape their young people; on the contrary, they argued, it was young people who needed to be enabled and empowered to make and shape Europe (Lauritzen and Guidikova 2003). Lauritzen’s own definition of youth work has stood the test of time: “The main objective of youth work is to provide opportunities for young people to shape their own futures” (Ohana and Rothemund 2008, 369). To that end, the “youth work” of the Council of Europe had its part to play and, for Lauritzen and his colleagues in the Youth Department, a critical contribution to make. This was, of course, especially true as the 1980s unfolded, during which time some of the guiding imperatives of global solidarity and intercultural learning played out within the youth sector (see Williamson and Basarab 2019) as a result of stronger connections both between “North” and “South” and between “East” and “West”, culminating at the end of the decade with the momentous fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent expansion of the “European” project (see also Gray, this volume). Youth work and youth research (see Williamson, forthcoming), with various links already established with NGOs and research institutes behind the “Iron Curtain”, was well placed to take a wider European project forward, though it would be another six years before a second European Youth Centre was opened, in Budapest in December 1995 (see Ohana 2006).

Towards the turn of the millennium, although “study sessions” and “LTTCs” remained at the heart of the Youth Department’s activities, its work with young people encapsulated an increasingly diverse range of capacity building and campaigning initiatives. These included starting to set standards for youth policy development; building cooperation both within the youth sector and between governments on questions of youth policy; the *All Different All Equal* campaign of 1995; and specific pedagogical approaches to human rights.

Such practices diversified further, as the Council of Europe youth directorate joined forces with the European Commission to establish, in 1998, the “Youth Partnership” (formally, the Partnership Between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth), with an initial responsibility for training European level “youth workers”, and setting stronger links with European youth research networks, in order both to strengthen knowledge about young people in Europe and to attempt some “succession planning” by supporting young(er) youth researchers in motivating them to play their part in the European project – in a context where academic careers were rarely enhanced through commitments in that direction. Three “young researchers” seminars were held in Budapest between 1999 and 2001, in collaboration with the International Sociological Association (youth) Research Committee 34.

### **Consolidation and Development; the New Millennium**

After nearly 30 years of evolution, the youth work of the Council of Europe had both established itself and was seeking to both consolidate its sphere of influence and to diversify and develop further. The turn of the millennium heralded something of a step change in the place of what was still variably called non-formal education or non-formal learning within both policy and practice at a European, and sometimes at a national, level. Moreover, its membership had expanded dramatically throughout the 1990s, almost doubling in size; by 2001, of its 46 members, only 4 (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Monaco, and Montenegro) were yet to join. The Youth Department now faced greater challenges promoting its particular activities and methodologies within this “new” Europe (though see Cuvelier, this volume).

Some foundation stones for new trajectories had already been put in place. The Council of Europe had commenced its international reviews of national youth policies, starting with Finland in 1997. There was initially no specific blueprint for these reviews, though that evolved over time. The methodology was innovative in a variety of ways, with an international team casting a “stranger’s eye” over national youth policy, providing constructive criticism and innovative ideas to the host country and, in turn, drawing lessons from the host country to share with the international community. Over 20 years, 21 countries, spread geographically throughout Europe, requested such a review. The reviews captured both the political rhetoric that surrounds youth policy and the ways in which young people experienced it, contributing to strengthening the hand of youth organizations in playing their part in informing youth policy development and implementation in the future. Three “synthesis reports” of the reviews were produced, demonstrating the issues that require robust attention and debate (see Williamson 2002, 2008, 2017).

One year later, the Youth Partnership (see earlier) embarked on its inaugural program, the preparation of the “ATTE” (Advanced Training the Trainers in Europe) long-term training course. Its aspiration was to produce a multiplier effect – to cascade a particular way of learning and training to young people at national and local levels.

Additionally, in 2001, the European Commission embarked on its first foray into *policy* in the youth sector, when it launched its White Paper on Youth (European Commission 2001b), with a focus on youth participation, youth information, voluntary activities, and a greater understanding of youth. In the previous year, as part of its preparations for the white paper, it had convened the first gathering of scholars involved in youth *research* in Europe, drawn significantly from researchers who had been part of a somewhat ad hoc network organized through the Council of Europe.

These markers are significant because they signaled the beginning of what is sometimes referred to as the “magic triangle” (Zentner 2016), gradually bringing together research, policy, and practice in the youth sector, thereby strengthening the dialogues and networks in which young people engaged for their own personal development and for their peers throughout Europe (see Milmeister and Williamson 2006).

All of this broadened and deepened the learning context for young people, *outside of formal education* (see also Remes and Burton, this volume). By the 2000s, this range of policy and practice was designed to support quite explicitly the strengthening of a European identity and young people’s identification with Europe (a point made, too, by Varsori, this volume). Indeed, the Council of Europe started to run training courses on “European citizenship”, a term that had not even been permitted just a few years before, when the European Commission conducted a research project, in 1997, on “citizenship with a European dimension” (European Commission 1998).

The learning context was indeed a *pot pourri* of ideas and methodologies, yet it was also a platform for advancing the cause and case of experiential learning. This had long been advocated in the non-formal education sector, particularly through Kolb’s writing on learning styles and experiential learning theory (see Kolb 1984), yet it had hitherto secured limited traction outside of maverick initiatives and “progressive” education. Now it was coming to be embedded within the institutional mission of certainly the Council of Europe youth directorate and probably the European Commission’s youth unit. This was the launch pad for both execution and experimentation.

The Youth Directorate (later Department) of the Council of Europe continued to run its LTTCs and various campaigns (such as another *All Different All Equal* campaign in 2005/6, and a lengthy *No Hate Speech* campaign from 2013), and sustained its “youth policy reviews” until 2016, but a great deal more activity proliferated, including publications, advisory missions, and a host more initiatives. The Youth Partnership was soon charged with adding youth research and European–Mediterranean cooperation to its portfolio, and has subsequently become the hub for youth knowledge development and research on youth policy and youth work. The European Commission has moved well beyond the youth mobility programs it established as long ago as 1987/1988 to conduct its own research into youth work and to construct a youth policy framework of its own, first in 2009 and subsequently in 2017. Almost in parallel, the Council of Europe launched its youth policy agendas in 2008 and 2020.

Over this period, there has been a plethora of active learning initiatives orchestrated by the thinking of the Council of Europe Youth Department and, increasingly, also promoted and supported through the resources of the European Commission – these include training kits (T-kits), publications, a living library, campaigns, study sessions, training courses, expert group meetings, and the ubiquitous, ongoing, and almost legendary human rights education program. This chapter cannot address all of these and will focus on four initiatives connected to them that, arguably, exemplify the contribution that has been made to education and learning at a European level and in the interests of a diverse, peaceful, and united Europe. They have been selected because they are initiatives that are most familiar to the author.

### **Youth Policy Development at a European Level**

The Council of Europe international reviews of youth policy, as it was noted earlier, spanned almost 20 years and covered 21 countries. They embraced a range of issues, both those considered important to the Council of Europe and those considered to be priorities by the host countries. There were always debates as to whether policy domains such as family policy, social protection, or criminal justice were legitimate areas for comment by the Council of Europe, which sought to focus primarily on issues related to its core mission of human rights and democracy; only through rigorous testing of these boundaries was it eventually concluded that the paramount focus of any future reviews should be on the following six themes: participation, information, access to rights, social inclusion, youth work, and mobility. The methodology of the reviews evolved over time, but the overarching purpose remained the same: to share international perspectives with the host country, to share host nation practice with the international community and, steadily, to construct some guidelines – *not* a blueprint – for effective opportunity-focused youth policy that might be applied throughout Europe.

Of most significance for this chapter is the fact that the reviews explored both formal and non-formal education and learning provision in each country, often noting that traditional curricula in schooling appeared to be trapping young people in classical academic frameworks of learning that paid little attention to a changing Europe, one in which young people were needing to build more autonomous directions in their lives, what eminent sociologists have sometimes referred to as “choice biographies” (Giddens 1991). The escape route that did support those new directions was often through the work of youth organizations, youth projects, and youth work, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Appreciation of the value-based and methodological ideas of the Council of Europe and the youth programs of the European Commission was often palpable. The youth policy reviews revealed deep curiosity in what, to many countries in both Eastern and Western Europe, were innovative and challenging ideas, especially with regard to reforming learning pathways in education, training, and employment, though also in areas such as health care and criminal justice (where the idea of youth voice and participation was often non-existent). The recommendations of the reviews often met,

however, with cultural and political barriers, over and above the routine resources and infrastructure limitations. Nevertheless, at minimum, they provided encouragement and renewed motivation to those already practicing more progressive and inclusive methods for engaging young people in labor markets, public policy, civil society, and transnational exchanges.

### **Training the Trainers in the Youth Sector**

As noted previously, the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth was forged and formalized in 1998. The initial focus was on youth worker training and curriculum development. This led to the development and implementation of the ATTE course: *Advanced Training the Trainers in Europe*. Drawing on over 20 years of “non-formal” education and training within the Council of Europe and over a decade of youth programs supported by the European Commission, the ATTE consolidated, over two years, both the content and the methods that characterized these approaches to learning outside of formal settings.

The ATTE course was both ahead of and in tune with the times. Both the Council of Europe and the European Commission were now preoccupied with ideas around lifelong learning and active citizenship. For the Council of Europe, this had been a slow burner; for the Commission, a sequence of Eurobarometer survey data suggested that citizens in general, as well as young people, had limited knowledge and understanding of the EU, nor did they appear to have the skills required for living in an integrated Europe (European Commission 1998). There was particular concern about intergenerational solidarity and youth political participation (see Forbrig 2005): “rekindling young people’s sense of belonging and engagement in the societies in which they live is an urgent task” (European Commission 1998, 8). Shortly after the conclusion of the ATTE course in 2003, the two institutions issued a joint working paper presenting a common position on education, learning, and training in the youth sector as an integral part of voluntary and civil society activities (European Commission/Council of Europe 2004). The working paper also advocated, within the concept of lifelong learning, closer connections with formal education, vocational education and training, and adult and community education (see Chisholm and Hoskins 2005). The ATTE course was but one initiative that had drawn both inspiration and resources from almost parallel developments in both thinking about lifelong learning and ideas within the youth sector (see European Commission 2000, 2001a, 2001b) at the turn of the millennium.

The ATTE course was followed with a similar initiative, this time labelled TALE (*Training for Advanced Learning in Europe*), the evaluation of which (“A TALE Unfolded”, by the late David Jenkins), somewhat paradoxically given that the main judge, Bob Stake, had once co-authored a book entitled *Telling Tales* (see Abna 1999), was awarded the 2011 Outstanding Evaluation Award by the American Evaluation Association. This certainly put non-formal approaches to learning and training on the radar of those involved, globally, in educational administration,

curriculum development, and assessment. Further, it paved the way for a significant contribution, not least through the imaginative thinking of David Jenkins himself, to the development of the hybrid and pioneering pilot Master's program in European Youth Studies (MA-EYS) – see later.

### **A Case Study of Learning Beyond the Classroom**

The “youth sector” across Europe was largely unrecognized and uncharted territory that had not only to be created but also mapped. The pioneers on this terrain were not only progressive bureaucrats ensconced in the European institutions and academics sacrificing conventional career paths to professorial status (though many eventually achieved this) but also those who abandoned classical youth work or other occupational trajectories to adopt adventurous and innovative approaches to training. Some benefited from the ATTE and TALE courses (see earlier) and others learned from those who had been participants. A group of the early training pioneers developed what was reported as the “Madzinga” program of intercultural tolerance and understanding through experiential learning and outdoor education (Williamson and Taylor 2005). The detailed account of this training course (Williamson and Taylor 2005) leaves few stones unturned as it reports the meticulous planning entailed and the way the long-term training course was experienced by participants, trainers, and the researcher himself.

Arguably of greatest importance for this chapter is to communicate the sophistication of the learning objectives at stake and at play. It is perhaps often assumed that tasks are set, groups engage, and experiences are reflected upon. Yet Madzinga reveals the intensity and diversity of the education and learning taking place, which was not just “non-formal”. The threads of the course incorporated five strands: theories and concepts, personal development, professional skills (methods and activities), project development, and intercultural learning (see Williamson and Taylor 2005, 18). Though conducted almost entirely outdoors, there were significant elements that comprised traditional didactic education as well as, as one might have anticipated, large chunks of the day that required active learning.

Though the skeleton program had been shaped in advance, revisions were made to content, balance, and process each day, as the six trainers themselves reflected each evening on how each participant and the 30 participants in general had responded to expectations during the day. This fine tuning often went on well into the night, as thought was given to how to engage particular individuals more creatively and constructively. It was rarely possible to predict how much time would be required to “exhaust” particular elements of the program, whether “lectures” from a trainer followed by questions and discussions, group tasks followed by individual and collective reflections, or individual exercises that were then shared with the rest of the group. The layers and levels of learning were complex; their depth of penetration in the minds of each participant was revealed to some extent when they themselves had to apply that learning on a training day for youth workers from the local community.

### **A Case Study of Higher Education and Learning Beyond the Lecture Theatre**

As the first decade of the millennium drew to a close, the infrastructure planning for a master's degree in European Youth Studies had also almost been completed, though a detailed curriculum still had to be written. The MA-EYS had initially been mooted at the close of the ATTE course in 2003, with the aspiration of both bringing together the "magic triangle" (Zentner 2016) and melding classical higher education study with best practice in non-formal education and learning, as well as training. Planning for, presentation of, and securing resources for a pilot program was many years in the making: the eventual framework included 11 universities dotted across Europe, more "satellite" universities as partial partners, and the Youth Partnership, with significant funding from the European Commission and both material and pedagogical support from the Council of Europe (planning meetings were held at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, and the mid-course residential was held at the European Youth Centre in Budapest).

The vision was strikingly ambitious, with "architecture" that included theoretical, practical, and policy modules, a curriculum that combined students and resources in myriad ways and required multiple forms of engagement as both individuals and in groups, and modes of assessment that ranged from self-evaluation and reflection through different media to an extended project essay that was part fieldwork study and part academic thesis. The final portfolio of participants' work was "examined" by members of the core course team. There was the idea of a transnational semester where participants would follow two relevant modules at another university and immerse themselves in a side of the triangle that was not their previous experience; policy-makers would do youth work or research; researchers would shadow the civil service or support the implementation of a youth project; practitioners would get a taste of policy-making or turn their hand at research. The participants were carefully selected from across Europe for their diversity of knowledge and experience (and prior qualifications), although critically there were equal numbers from each corner of the triangle. In all, 30 people took part – a critical number that allowed for multiple combinations:  $3 \times 10$ ,  $10 \times 3$ ,  $5 \times 6$ ,  $6 \times 5$ ,  $15 \times 2$ ,  $2 \times 15$ . One of three areas of inquiry was explored by groups from each corner of the triangle: education and employment; housing and welfare; leisure and culture. However, although this was the primary thread of their learning journey, many other activities in the course were grouped in different ways, ensuring that each participant engaged in a variety of ways with all other participants on the course.

It was an immensely complex exercise that demanded intricate curriculum planning, with careful instructions for each time phase – attention to task, collaboration, and assessment. "Students" (co-learners) worked together, virtually, in different combinations for six weeks, before converging physically for a week of site visits, lectures, and discussion. They then had to work alone to draw together their learning into a composite portfolio.

It was a pilot course, and only the most innovative dimensions of the course were tested. Yet it was immensely pioneering, pushing at the boundaries of both

established practice (and expectations) in universities, local and national government, and training and practice programs used in work with young people. Regrettably, it failed to take root, despite its stellar rating by external assessors for the Erasmus Mundus funding program. Bureaucratic intransigence by some of Europe's higher education institutions, coupled with the financial crash and a greater risk aversity to investment experimentation, saw to that.

## **Reflection**

Given that reflection is an essential and integral element in the cycle of non-formal education and learning (see Kolb 1984), it seems appropriate to bring this chapter to a close with some reflections on how this approach to learning and thinking has increasingly made its mark on young, and now older, Europeans.

First, it should be acknowledged and accepted that perhaps the time was right. Though development was extremely patchy, and some regimes (public authorities and educational institutions) were stubbornly sticking to their old pedagogies, there were at least pockets of interest in more self-directed and collaborative learning, both within formal education and in the community.

Whether or not the ground is ripe for sowing new seeds still requires those seeds to be sown (see also Palayret, this volume). Within the Council of Europe itself, and within its orbit, there was – second – a small group of individuals, both '68-ers whose world view was shaped by “les évènements” of 1968, and '89-ers whose world view was shaped by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the apparent collapse of Communism (see Fukuyama 1992), who were willing to put conventional career paths on hold in order to pursue a “dream of Europe”, even if that dream may now be under threat (see Mak 2021). They came from all corners of the so-called magic triangle of research, policy, and practice in the youth sector, as well as from all parts of Europe<sup>3</sup> and, slowly over five decades, built a body of knowledge and understanding, methodology, and credibility that, hitherto, had not existed.

Third, at least some of those (quite a few) who participated in what might be called the “first generation” of European-level provision in the youth sector – the research networks, the training courses, the expert groups, the symposia – went on to occupy more senior and influential positions across a range of spheres, both within and beyond the youth sector. They took with them a set of ideas and values about what counted as learning and how it might be done. They advanced more hybrid forms of education and learning through research collaboration, policy dialogue, and strategic partnerships. In short, they have promoted interdisciplinarity and comparative engagement throughout the youth sector, on some of the burning (and learning) overarching issues facing democracy and belonging in Europe: participation, information, volunteering, digitalization, social inclusion, access to rights, youth work, and mobility (see Basarab and Williamson 2021).

Some of this work is now firmly established, such as the human rights education program developed by the Council of Europe and anchored with the much-lauded resource *Compass*, which has now been translated into over 30 languages and “has

played an essential role in shaping rights-based approaches to youth policy and youth work” (see Brander *et al.* 2002, 2023).

Other work has been more of a slow burner, such as the gradual advocacy and recognition of “youth work”, culminating in a formal resolution by the Council of the EU, in 2020, to support a European Youth Work Agenda,<sup>4</sup> an idea first mooted in the Council of Europe’s 2017 *Recommendation on Youth Work*<sup>5</sup> but systematically promoted over the previous decade through both a long-term study of the history of youth work in Europe (Coussée *et al.* 2009) and (at the time) two European Youth Work Conventions. The first, under the auspices of the EU, celebrated the diversity of youth work in Europe.<sup>6</sup> The second, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, confirmed the common ground of youth work, that, in all its forms, it was concerned both with securing and supporting *space* for young people’s voice and autonomy, and with supporting young people’s positive and purposeful transitions to the next steps and stages in their lives.<sup>7</sup> The third European Youth Work Convention, held virtually in 2020, put some flesh on the bones of the Bonn Process, as the European Youth Work Agenda has been named, for development and implementation by member states. The final declaration was called *Signposts for the Future*.<sup>8</sup>

There are many more examples of such European-level transnational initiatives that have created far greater flexibility and fluidity in approaches to education and learning, across spheres way beyond traditional schooling curricula and classroom methodologies. Learning mobility (Kristensen 2019) and intercultural dialogue have been the watchwords behind much of this work, with participants from all corners of Europe exchanging views, experience, and knowledge from their cultural contexts in order to build best, or better, practice through learning from others. This has never been about constructing a European blueprint or prescription for action at national or local levels, but rather a recognition that everyone has a unique story to tell, and that “Europe” will be developed positively through hearing them. In that respect, the philosophy is little more than an amplification of a small training course, in which all voices matter and everyone has an equal contribution to make. Those courses are, in effect, symbolic representations of a particular democratic and rights-based vision and version of Europe, with the hope that the participants will be its ambassadors in the future.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was first drafted not long after the expression of a shared commitment between the European Commission and the Council of Europe, in December 2020, to advance a “European youth work agenda”. *Signposts for the Future*, the Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, highlighted eight trajectories that might strengthen a common vision for youth work throughout Europe, despite some very different histories (see Verschelden *et al.* 2009).

The youth sector of the Council of Europe, and its broad educational mission, has been guided by a Youth Department that celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022. Over half a century, it has both cemented some sustaining structures and

advocated evolution and flexibility, as the wider world has changed and new issues and challenges have arisen. It has necessarily adapted its working methods and focal concerns, and adopted new partnerships and programs, as it has taken note of the social, cultural, economic, and political developments affecting young people throughout Europe.

The formal education systems of Europe have often been stubbornly defended by national authorities behind principles of subsidiarity, and of course for many other reasons, despite EU aspirations to establish a common European Education Area by 2025 within which “learning, studying, and doing research would not be hampered by borders” (see European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice 2018). There has been a great deal of rhetoric about the multi-dimensional and transnational characteristics of modern Europe in support of such a vision, yet it is apparent that reverse trends are often also at play.

In contrast, the non-formal education and learning policy and practice developed and implemented by the Council of Europe Youth Directorate (latterly Department) has moved quietly forward. This chapter has drawn brief and different examples of the nature of that progress: The Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policies, the early training courses for European-level youth work trainers, the *Madzinga* intercultural learning course through outdoor education, and the pilot course for the Master’s in European Youth Studies. In different ways, all invoked innovative methodologies and hybrid “curricula” to pursue their multiple objectives. These were invariably framed within making the familiar strange and applying a “stranger’s eye” to routine practice, both bringing personal experiences to the European table and taking from that European table ideas and practices considered worth experimenting with “back home”. And, through that process, and its recording in reports, books, and training manuals for wider dissemination and use, a European compendium of excellence in the field of non-formal education and learning has been compiled, drawing theoretical and empirical material from Portugal to Finland, and from Iceland to Azerbaijan (Basarab and Williamson 2021). Though not without its challenges, there has therefore been a remarkable and indeed sometimes transformational evolution of non-formal education and learning that has traversed and transcended the borders and boundaries of Europe’s member states.

## Notes

- 1 See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUT2KqIMAGA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUT2KqIMAGA). I was asked to produce this short video – Non-Formal Education and Learning – at the request of World Scouting, for the 1st World Non-Formal Education Conference, held in Brazil in December 2019.
- 2 Lauritzen argued that the task the younger generation has set itself is to turn the citizens of the Common Market (the European Economic Community) into committed Europeans. He illustrated his perspective on European integration through the image and idea that six eggs forming an omelet in a pan can no longer be separated.
- 3 I have in mind, here, for example, the late Peter Lauritzen in a pivotal and coordinating role, the late Ola Stafseng (Professor of Education at the University of Oslo), the late Lynne Chisholm (who, inter alia, worked at the European Commission and became Professor of Educational Sciences at the University of Innsbruck), Henrick Otten (Germany), Hans-Joachim Schild

- (first Head of the Youth Partnership), Jan Vanhee (Flemish Government), Miriam Teuma (Maltese Youth Agency), Yael Ohana (educational adviser), Mark Taylor (trainer), Siyka Kovacheva (University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria), Helena Helve (University of Helsinki), Andreas Karsten (youthpolicy.org), Antje Rothmund (now Head of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe), Marta Medlinska (ATTE participant, and Youth Partnership), Paul Kloosterman (trainer). I could name more, and these names are simply illustrative.
- 4 “Resolutions of the Council of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Meeting Within the Council on the Framework for Establishing a European Youth Work Agenda”. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 415/1, 01.12.2022. Accessed online 19.09.2023: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2020.415.01.0001.01.ENG](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2020.415.01.0001.01.ENG).
  - 5 Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on youth work, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 May 2017 at the 1287th meeting of Ministers’ Deputies, 31.05.2017. <https://rm.coe.int/1680717e78>.
  - 6 Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention. Ghent, Belgium, 07–10.07.2010. Accessed online 19.09.2023: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262202/Declaration/2f264232-7324-41e4-8bb6-404c75ee5b62>
  - 7 Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, Making a World of Difference. Brussels, 27–30.04.2015. Accessed online 19.09.2023: [https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262187/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration\\_FINAL.pdf/cc602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262187/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration_FINAL.pdf/cc602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85).
  - 8 Accessed online 19.09.2023: [https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/recognition-resources/-/asset\\_publisher/llpkrN7127by/content/-2020-3rd-european-youth-work-convention-final-declaration](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/recognition-resources/-/asset_publisher/llpkrN7127by/content/-2020-3rd-european-youth-work-convention-final-declaration)

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