

TOPIC

During the last years, the *Instituto de la Juventud* (INJUVE; the Youth Institute) has been interested in and has published the results of social investigations on young people from a comparative European perspective. Through its publications (for example, the Youth Report 2005 and the *Revista de estudios de Juventud* nr. 56 / 2002 and nr. 65 / 2004) the Youth Institute provided information on the changes in conceptualization of young people's transitions to adult life, as well as on differences observed among different European countries. In former times, people got a job after education/ training and then formed a family, but young people's transitions in Europe are no longer linear, as highlighted by the concept of "yo-yo trajectories". In current times, the different stages are reversible: Today they are in training; tomorrow they will find a temporary job and stay "employed" for a while, after that they may enter unemployment, and then again re-enter training or find another (temporary) job. "Yo-yo transitions" are fragmented, reversible and young people's future is uncertain.

In modernity, deviations from the project plan, the norms or the traditions were disapproved of. But at the same time, people perceived these factors as impositions, as threats to their freedom and personal development. However, nowadays its absence is seen as a source of uncertainty and insecurity by many people. Whereas in post-modernity, social institutions created to support the individual have lost plausibility. Norms and values are called into question and institutions, while competing to ensure people's safety, fail to do so, therefore being called into question as well.

The new situation has forced people to drastically change strategies, resulting in what Bauman calls liquid modernity.

"Liquid is something that can easily change its shape. Applied to the concept of society, this means a revolution, as the only thing remaining constant is constant change. For the first time in human history we are confronted with change as a permanent condition of human life. This leads to the necessity of developing appropriate behaviours and to dispose of contacts in a state of constant change. There are no reference models to follow" (Bauman, Z. 2004,"Flüchtige Moderne, supervision, Sonderheft ANSE-Konferenz 2004:3)

This means that knowledge, as well as information, is provisional. There are no routines, no transferable models nor valid recipes. There is not a unique authority, there are many and they are in constant competition. And they frequently contradict each other. The individual has to choose the one he prefers. In liquid modernity, to learn and to forget is a simultaneous process, because what you learn about the world today will be useless tomorrow. Bauman (2004) explains this new situation as a consequence of the continual change we are going through, underlining that "learning" is precisely that: what we consider to be true, useful and effective one day, will no longer be so tomorrow.

The sociologist Ulrich Beck, in his book entitled "Risk society (1986)", analyzed the current state of society basing his analysis on the paradigm of "individualization". Applying this concept to situations, personal relations, problems or events we face every day in present society (which Beck calls second modernity, or Bauman characterizes as liquid society) we can interpret and understand them.

The trend towards individualization in society is the main characteristic, the distinctive sign of the second modernity society. Individualization shows itself in the **dissolution** of previous socio-historical forms and links, meaning subsistence dependences and traditional dominance (dimension of freedom); **loss of traditional securities** regarding know-how; background norms and believes (dimension of disenchantment), and a **new form of social cohesion** (dimension of control/integration), this is, a new way of relating to each other, a new kind of social unity. (Beck, 1986:206)

Therefore, the concept of individualization expresses that people are "forced" to choose, to take decisions; traditional links are no longer valid, links to lean on are not available anymore and, as a consequence, we have to build up new ways of relating to each other, new social networks.

Freedom, singularity and different ways of living are opportunities offered to us by second modernity society. But at the same time, hence its ambivalence, the individual can no longer turn to the family or the social environment to receive help, life orientation or examples for individual situations.

Faced with this new situation of constant change, trying to be oneself, having to take decisions, constantly choosing, people need knowledge and individual skills to cope with the decisions they

have to take. Individualization does not mean that social structure has lost importance, in terms of origin and opportunities. Social inequality linked to resources and opportunities also persists in individual trajectories, leading to broader or narrower biographical choices. Individual ability to manage the own transition to adulthood fundamentally depends on social capital, cultural knowledge, support received by the family and opportunities and restrictions related to education, gender, social origin and ethnic group. In view of this new situation, the need of being able to access individualized counseling to cope transitions from school to work, and to other stages in life, becomes evident.

Inequality in young people's social capital makes *constellations of disadvantage* more and more visible during decision-making, although it is the need to decide by oneself what makes these constellations visible.

This monographic issue focuses on two situations, which are part of what we call *constellations of disadvantage* of young people in Europe: a) early school leavers with qualifications below compulsory education and b) unemployed young people and/ or young people working in temporary or precarious jobs.

The European Council meeting in Lisbon (23-24 March 2000) carried the label "Towards a Europe of Innovation and Knowledge". Clear objectives were stated and defined. They were to be met by 2010. Objectives such as to lower early school leaving, youth unemployment and job precariousness was among the objectives.

Half way through, in 2004, the Commission commissioned a report to assess the progress in the "Lisbon Strategy". The workgroup was under the direction of former prime minister of the Netherlands, Wim Kok. Results were not optimistic and forced EU-governments to redefine ongoing strategies and programmes. The European Council of March 2005 redefined the Lisbon Strategy as suggested by the Kok report.

During the years 2004-2005 a group of researchers from 13 different countries (Austria (AT), Bulgaria (BG), Denmark (DK), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Finland (FI), Greece (GR), Italy (IT), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), United Kingdom (UK), Rumania (RO)) worked on a thematic study of policy measures related to disadvantaged youth, commissioned by the DG for Employment and Social Affairs, EC. The article by Andreas Walther and Axel Pohl presents a detailed explanation of the project.

One of the objectives of national reports was to compare social responses and measures implemented in different countries in order to solve specific situations of disadvantage, as well as to gather information about policies and identify factors that make some measures more effective than others.

This number of the journal includes a summary of the situation in six European countries, chosen for their very particular characteristics or for the "Good Practices" that have been developed in the respective countries. Bulgaria was selected because it can be important to gather information about its situation and about specific measures related to the Roma ethnic minority before joining the EU; it is worth to compare the situations in Britain and Finland, two countries that obtained excellent results in the PISA study (OECD), although Finland suffers from high unemployment and Britain shows high youth employment rates. In Denmark and Austria there is low youth unemployment (5.6%) and low early school leaving; the early school leaving rate in Slovenia is 4.2%, but at the same time the youth unemployment rate is 16.9%, with a high rate of temporary jobs - 37.9% of all temporary jobs are being carried out by young people under 25. And finally, Spain was selected due to its high early school leaving rates, the high rate of temporary employment and also the Good Practices, mainly on a local level.

The article "Reactions of the European Union to the situation of young people: Employment Plans, Lisbon Strategy, Comprehensive Reform Policies", by **Andreu López Blasco**, presents the most relevant policies of the European Commission, from 1997/98 to 2005; policies tending to favour

convergence, promote employment creation – mainly for young people, women and long-term unemployed people – and approve measures to encourage young people to stay in educational institutions. There is a clear relation between policies promoted by the European Commission and EU member states and the known information about the situation of young people and, therefore, a brief tour through the most recent investigations carried out in the EU, Canada, Australia and the United States is made. Also the results of an evaluation of Employment Plans (1998-2001) are presented: from the perspective of second modernity society (Ulrich Beck) or using the metaphor of liquid modernity introduced by Zygmunt Bauman. As a consequence of the new situations that young people have to or may face, different action lines are proposed in the field of youth policies, considering that young people are “forced” to take decisions by themselves. The objective must be to carry out comprehensive youth policies that include (financial and personal) structures and resources in order to create a different form of social support, where young people can feel completely accepted as “negotiators of their own matters”.

Mario Steiner (AT), in the article “Disadvantaged youth in Austria”, describes the most important indicators related to disadvantaged youth and, after that, in the second part of the article explains why Austria has a comparatively privileged situation. However, there are also specific challenges for Austria, challenges that are analyzed in the third part. In the fourth part, the intervention strategies and the “Good Practices” are presented, with an effort to do an interesting methodological presentation, summarizing the relevant indicators of the presented experiences in a table. The outcomes are based on the analysis of diverse reports about policies, different assessment studies and there have been calculations done, using the Labour Force Survey and other statistics related to labour market and educational system.

The article by **Slyka Kovacheva (BG)** “Constellations of disadvantage and policy dilemmas in youth transitions from school to work in Bulgaria” presents, taking into account the background of radical social change that happened during the nineties, the effort to overcome the observed deteriorations in transitions of young people from education to employment and in social participation in general, as a consequence of the change from centralized planification and state economy to a market economy. With the disappearing of the State of the active interference in the regulation of relations between social groups, young people were affected by the disappearing of the security of the designs of transitions, leaving them today in the sea of risks and uncertainties of societies regulated by the market. In the last part 2 examples of good practices are presented.

Torben Bechman Jensen, in collaboration with Louise Joergensen and Camilla Wertz (DK), in the article “Answers to the constellations of disadvantage of young people in Denmark from the perspective of the individual”, present in the first part a general vision about who is considered disadvantaged youth in relation to un-employment and education in Denmark. In this first section, contextual elements, the educational system and the problems faced by Danish society are introduced.

The second part of the article presents three different types of good practice. These include a new initiative of support and advising (counselling), the production schools and the activation policy. These three “good practices” are chosen for their broadness and their substantive importance in the field of policy initiatives, which potentially are offered to a great number of young people in danger of marginalization. All three policy experiences are a good example of the reaction to the new situation of young people in the society of second modernity – there has to be an offer of counselling and support to allow people to take decisions individually.

Mirjana Ule (SI), in her article “Disadvantaged youth in Slovenia”, describes the efforts undertaken in order to prevent the growth of poverty risk, especially among unemployed people, and the increase of social inequalities during the transition to a capitalist system. Therefore, the net of public education institutions which offered programmes going from primary education to university was expanded, as well as various support forms for children and young people belonging to more vulnerable social strata. During the last ten years, the problematic of early school leaving has led to the creation of a

relatively dense institutional network, which offers alternative educational options and promotes participation in various educational programmes. We think that knowing about the efforts done by Slovenia can serve to debate about new forms to take on the decrease of early school leaving rates. Among “Good Practices” we get to know through this article it will strike the reader how important counselling and training of the new professionals, the counsellors, is for Slovenia.

Germán Gil Rodríguez (ES), in his contribution “Constellations of disadvantage are becoming visible in Spain”, describes two of the phenomena that are affecting, with more intensity, the life of young people in Spain: early school leaving and temporary and precarious employment. They consider leaving educational institutions as a result of the evolution of society, of the changes that have been taking place in the education system, of the lack of investment in the education system, as well as the low valuation of qualifications and certificates by employers. In spite of the measures applied by educational authorities to answer to the needs stated by young people, these measures have not managed to lower the rates with respect to the EU average. Early school leaving puts young people in a situation of disadvantage for their insertion into the labour market. Insistence on the real causes of disadvantage demands the development of integral policies addressed to families, school and the social environment and, above all, to subjects that suffer this disadvantage.

Ilse Julkunen (FI), in the article “Early school leaving in Finland – a problem solved?” asks herself if Finland has already solved all problems related to transitions. The answer is twofold: On one hand, Finland belongs, from a European point of view, to the group of countries with low early school leaving levels. In Finland, 90% of the young people obtain certificates above compulsory education. On the other hand, Finland belongs to the group of countries with a high youth unemployment rate. The unemployment rate reaches 20% and is 4% higher than in some European countries and 10% higher than the average among the OCDE countries. Although Finland has lowered the already low early school leaving by modernising vocational training, improving the access to training and intensifying counselling and cooperation between and within schools, however, the low percentage of existing early school leaving is still a problem for the more vulnerable groups, particularly in urban areas. “Good Practices” presented focus on individual plans and on intensifying collaboration within and between different sectors in the community.

Andy Biggart (UK), in the article “Dealing with Disadvantage: an overview of the United Kingdom’s policy response to early school leaving, low attainment and the labour market” presents a general view of the dominating policies addressed to disadvantaged youth in the UK, focusing on those aspects of the policies that have as objective to decrease early school leaving, improve achievements and deal with youth unemployment. After presenting a summary of the British context and the policies applied in this field, the article examines in detail two of the most important policy initiatives the New Labour government has introduced, the “Connexions service” and the “New Deal for young people”. In the middle of the Good Practice “Connexions” is the central figure of a new professional occupation, the “Connexions Personal Counsellor”, whose objective is to provide a single contact point to offer support to young people in a wide range of topics.

Andreas Walther and Axel Pohl (DE), present in the summary-article “Disadvantaged youth in Europe: Constellations and policy responses”, the principal findings of a study commissioned by the European Commission about policies addressed to disadvantaged youth in 13 European countries and it focuses on three fields: the constellations of disadvantage in transitions of young people from education to employment, a general view of the applied policies in different countries and the conclusions that can be obtained from the comparative analysis between the different countries. The concept of disadvantage developed in the study is based on the supposition that former social inequality lines such as gender, ethnic group, and social class are today mixed with new lines of segmentation. As a consequence, it is argued that policies for social inclusion of young people have to be designed in an integrated way, taking into account biographical aspects and the vital cycle as an underlying principle.

In the first eight articles of the journal we can see that the thread of structural-preventive policies focuses, among others, around the creation of integrated youth policies addressed to young people or

to a young person as an individual, or the creation of counselling services and the continual assessment of monitoring – implementation of assessment (especially, and as good practices, in Denmark, Slovenia, United Kingdom, Finland, Spain).

For that reason, we thought it would be appropriate to put at the end, after the summary-article by Andreas Walther and Axel Pohl, the article “Counselling as a structure and action in labour and social insertion processes of young people: A reflection from the praxis”, by **Jesús Hernández Aristu (ES)**, a theoretical reflection about the function of counselling in the liquid society, based on praxis carried out by himself. The author starts with a reflection about the social changes and transformations and their impact on transitions of young people. In these transformations not all young people start from the same point, the living conditions are not equal, and therefore he suggests the substitution of some institutions for others, of one educational action to another counselling action. What he calls “new support structures” in school, in companies, in the leisure-time, etc. These new structures demand new actions, and that is why the author suggests individual counselling as a form of action and support in these new structures. The objective has to be a reinforcement of the person, of the intrinsic motivation, the reinforcement of one’s own social networks, the auto-determination of their own objectives, that is, help young people to be a person by him- herself. The author’s experience in training counsellors and his activities in social and labour integration projects for disadvantaged young people guarantee his proposal.

Andreu López Blasco