



## ***Moving towards a Positive and Independent Policy For All Children And Young People***

### ***Inspirational Paper***

#### **First of all**

This paper is meant to inspire and support participants in their search for positive and independent youth policies. It should act as a compass for discovering the main elements, ingredients or building stones (values and conditions) of this movement towards this new approach in youth policies. This paper should help to find directions; open minded and inspirational. It should be emphasised though that it is not the intention to adopt this paper politically or to work towards one 'position paper' at the end. It should be positioned as a compass for debate and discussions within a peer learning environment between countries and representatives at the seminar in October 2012 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The seminar is part of a larger and wider movement towards positive investments in children and young people.

#### ***The European Youth Strategy as guiding framework***

*Young people have the right to fully participate in society and to have their voices heard. They all should be given the best possible start in life, to feel a sense of belonging, to be included. It is the main ambition of the European Youth Strategy of the European Union. The EU calls for youth employment, social inclusion, health and the well-being of young people to be top priorities in Europe's youth policy. The EU and Member States must do more to support young people, who have borne the brunt of the economic crisis.*

*National governments – the EU Member States - are stimulated to develop inter-sectorial youth policies, not only by creating opportunities to work and in education, but also to foster solidarity and active citizenship for all. A structured dialogue with young people themselves should be at the heart of these integrated youth policies in order to fully base this from their needs and wishes in society<sup>1</sup>. EU Member States – responsible for implementing the youth policies – therefore strengthen collaboration between them and their stakeholders, including young people themselves, to arrive at these ambitions at national, regional and local levels.*

<sup>1</sup> An EU Strategy for Youth (2010 – 2018) – Investing and Empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities, European Commission, 2009



## **Two years of peer learning between national governments and stakeholders**

Current two-year peer learning process between seven EU-countries<sup>2</sup> is such a collaboration initiative. Stakeholders in the youth field – governments and institutions – are collaborating to further strengthen the profile of youth policies developing a more positive and independent youth policy for all at local, regional and national levels. The main aim of the 2-year process is to develop a strong positive profile for youth policies at European, national and decentralized levels. Participating countries are keen to arrive at more collaborative approaches between all policy areas, but also by youth activities, programmes and projects. By developing structured dialogues with young people within integrated youth policies active citizenship and participation of young people in society as a whole shall be further developed. In Berlin in June 2012 the first seminar between seven governments in youth policies started the debate for an independent youth policy. The second leg takes place in Rotterdam, the Netherlands in October 2013. The process will be continued in the Czech Republic and Germany in 2013.

### ***The main conclusions in Berlin showed that***

*the life phase ‘youth’ has to get stronger into the focus of youth policy – the reduction of young people on (future) work force or target groups of different administrative, educational and social work activities is not justifiable any more. A problem and deficit focused view on youth does not support to face the challenges of all young people of today. An independent youth policy is required: positive, based on cross sectorial partnership and cooperation.*

*In this development of a subject-oriented positive youth policy, regional and local governments play a vital role: in most of European states it is them who serve with the concrete implementation of youth policy, and who have the closest connection with the daily life of young people. Therefore they have to be well included in the new positioning of youth policy by the European and national level.<sup>3</sup>*

### **Moving towards a positive and independent youth policy.**

The meeting in the Netherlands in October 2012 is the second leg in this two year process. The focus in the Netherlands will be to move towards a shared meaning and vision for a more positive and independent approach in youth policies and practice. To move into a process of understanding, of deepening and widening the concept of positive youth policies and its core principles. To create and to inspire towards further developing these visions in each of our own settings within the youth policy environments. To bond and connect with common grounds to profile children and young people from a positive point of view. It should continue the ‘Berlin’ debate, deepen it and also broaden the search of each others roles and responsibilities of the various actors in national, regional

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<sup>2</sup> Germany, Czech Republic, France, Sweden, Belgium (Flanders), Lithuania, the Netherlands

<sup>3</sup> The full report will be soon available on [www.jugendpolitikineuropa.de](http://www.jugendpolitikineuropa.de).

and local policy together with children and young people.

### **What is positive and independent?**

It is crucial that children are provided with a good start in life. A good start provides better opportunities to grow and to develop themselves. Within the Netherlands, and in other European countries, there is a growing emphasis to work towards strengthening the ‘well-being’ rather than the ‘well-becoming’ of all children and young people between 0 and 25 years. To work from a merely ‘risk-oriented’ towards a more ‘development-oriented’ approach. The focus is therefore to create a more inclusive policy for children and young people within the context of their families, on the streets, in school, in their leisure time in sports and cultural activities or within their youth (work) networks and associations. Programmes and projects do not only implement the values but it is crucial to realize that the *view on wellbeing, on development and on participation* is the basis. If children and young people are not feeling well, if they do not have a strong base in life, it is not possible to develop their own citizenship, their skills and competences or to participate actively in society in other ways. Independent and positive children and youth policies integrate the support and guidance of children as well as their ‘*educative civil society*’ (families, friends, schools and voluntary and public youth services) to provide this strong basis for growing up and to feel a part of this society as a whole. We are all co-educators and growing up together. An enriching social environment stimulates the positive development of children and young people.<sup>4</sup>

#### ***Child Friendly Cities Network – a positive example***

*“If you design places that work well for children, they seem to work well for everyone else”. As we all once have been children ourselves, this seems a logical way of working in urban planning. The city of Rotterdam has adopted ‘child-friendliness’ as a valuable tool to design a liveable, sustainable city. In three years time Rotterdam developed a measuring instrument, an urban planning method and a pedagogical approach to becoming a truly Child Friendly City.*

*The Child Friendly Cities Network in the Netherlands is coordinated by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). It functions as a platform of aldermen of the city councils, civil servants and policy advisors and others interested in the field of innovative youth policy. Participation in this network provides local municipalities with the opportunity to share views, experiences and practices to further develop child and youth friendly environments within their cities. The development of positive youth policy is an important focus for this platform. The Dutch platform is part of the European Network of Child Friendly Cities.*

<http://www.childfriendlycities.nl/>

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<sup>4</sup> Winter, M. de (2011). *Verbeter de wereld, begin bij de opvoeding. Vanachter de voordeur naar democratie en verbinding.* Amsterdam: SWP.

Programmes and projects at local level therefore show stronger alliances for and with children and young people. A diversity of stakeholders work together with them and with the local municipalities, who – in the Netherlands - are directly responsible for youth policies within a more decentralized system.

### **Why youth policy with positive values and conditions?**

A positive and integrated approach has a stronger impact.<sup>5</sup> It focusses primarily on young people's merits, their potentials and talents. This stimulates the further cognitive, social and cultural development of children and young people. A positive learning feedback works within the principles of positive psychology and creates chances for lifelong learning. An enriching social climate in the neighborhood stimulates the positive development of children and young people. Positive – and independent – youth policies make upbringing a shared responsibility of children and young people themselves together with their direct environment (parents, family, friends, teachers, youth workers, public health workers, volunteers, neighbors). Involved citizenship and a reciprocal participation stimulate all citizens to relate to each other and to build relationships.

*Children and young people have the right to participate (article 12 in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child). They however do not participate if there is no sense of belonging. If there is no feeling of (wanting) to be involved or of direct involvement, than there is no reason or ground to participate. By involving people they will want to participate. And by participation there is ground for learning. These notions are the basis for further developing views on learning, on welfare, on education, talent development or on children and young people in general.*

Positive and independent youth policies primarily focus at the 'normal' growing up and upbringing of children and young people. Participation is closely related to well-being (causality). Only when well-being and a sense of belonging have been realized, a willingness to learn and develop can exist. The more you know and are able to do (success experiences) the more and the better you can participate. This also stimulates local initiatives within which children, young people and their families receive support in an informal way. It answers to the necessity in today's society to act with self-responsibility, to be the agency of one's own life and in solidarity with each other.

### **How to move towards positive and independent youth policy?**

By starting with the rights of the child. By acknowledging that children and young people have a right to fully participate in society, have a say and have a right to be heard. By sharing the pedagogical principles and values and by giving the key elements a meaning – a shared

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<sup>5</sup> Seligman, M.E.P. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). *Positive Psychology. An Introduction*. In: *American Psychologist*. 55 (1) pp. 5-14.

understanding. This does not only mean that these values and principles are being mentioned and indicated, but are recognized in the implementation of the policies and practice and in the approaches and attitudes of those working with and for children and young people. Practice what you preach.

### **What are the initial positive values, its elements or ingredients?**

These are the layers that create the firmness of the trunk of the tree in attached figure.

- ❖ Inclusive: all children and young people can and should be able to participate.
- ❖ To be present and to relate. To be nearby, to support and to show compassion for care.
- ❖ Development oriented. To facilitate young people to take part in society, with the focus on age differences, differences in backgrounds and opportunities, time, circumstances, living conditions and perceptions,
- ❖ Dialogue oriented; supporting children and young people to have a voice and see to it that this voice is heard, by providing options for influence
- ❖ Positive and talent oriented. Positive (playful); making use of the potentials and to value them which enables children and young people to develop a positive self-image and self esteem and which creates the natural need to learn
- ❖ Child centred. Demand-driven: in dialogue with regards to age and circumstance.
- ❖ Group oriented. A collective and social approach in a community-development setting
- ❖ Holistic. Integral with an eye for the whole living environment of children and young people.

*The Branches and Leaves are the practice within which the positive and independent youth policies flourish and grow.*



*The Trunk has a variety of layers that provide a strong firmness (values, key elements, principles, conditions)*

*The Roots give food for the trunk to take part, to develop and to grow – to have views on children, learning, health and society*

### **Dutch practices**

Concrete practices and examples in policy programmes, projects and activities with and for children and young people show how these core principles (the roots of the tree) are visualized in practice. They are the leaves and branches of the tree in attached figure.

The field visits in Rotterdam and Capelle aan den IJssel in the Netherlands serve as a real life laboratory for the seminar participants. The field visits are structured by the approaches in

- improving the social climate & supporting the development of talents of children and young people
- teaching young people to work through vocational training and enterprises

- facilitating children to learn by experience and through creativity at schools and in non-formal education
- active participatory youth policies in which children have a say in local policy and practice
- combining creativity, care, education and work through community schools and entrepreneurship

The field visits will act as reflective mirrors for developing closer in depth meaning and understanding in our search to move towards positive and independent policies during the round tables at the seminar.

### **Learning for Well Being together**

During the workshops at the second day at the Rotterdam Seminar, the ‘Learning for Well Being’ will take place through a number of focal points<sup>6</sup>. They are the roots of the tree in attached figure. These focal points further elaborate on the principles behind the positive and independent youth policies to get better understanding about them;

#### *-View on children*

Consider children, adolescents and youngsters as full partners in their own development instead of as objects of care and education. Point of departure should be what every unique young person needs in order to develop, and involve them (and their parents) in their own development and getting acquainted (growing into) several social contexts.

#### *-View on learning*

Each individual has talents. Focus on strong points (success experiences) and stimulate children, adolescents and youngsters to develop these further. Do not consider learning as a purely cognitive process but as an integrated one with many dimensions. Learning is a process of giving a personal meaning to things. This process takes place through observation and emotions. Provide children, adolescents and youngsters with opportunities to observe in several ways: by doing, feeling, seeing, smelling, hearing and accompanying media to express their emotions.

#### *-View on health*

Stimulate a healthy lifestyle and behaviour in all parenting contexts. Think of a healthy lifestyle and healthy behaviour not as a separate point of interest, but as a theme connected to all matters (social-ecological approach). Demonstrate this by setting a good example. From early on, reflect with children on the necessity and advantages of a healthy lifestyle / healthy behaviour.

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<sup>6</sup> Bron: Consortium of Foundations in Europe learning for well-being

*-View on education and work*

Make a shift from standardized education towards student-oriented (departing from the personal environment and perception), active, meaningful and reality-based education and work. Make sure there is a safe environment, containing mutual relationships (connecting), autonomy and competence. Provide opportunities for interaction and reflection. Provide tailored support: instruction, supervision for research, coaching for learning, personal development etcetera.

*-View on society*

Arrive at a shift from sectorial to systemic solutions in politics and society. Reality presents in a coherent way and in its entirety (ecology). In collaboration –horizontally and vertically- look for solutions in society in which this coherence is guaranteed and recognizable for (young) citizens by involving them, also in this respect.

**Finally**

This seminar is part of a wider movement to invest in new youth policies at local, regional, national and European level. It should help to search new ways towards positive and independent youth policies. The seminar does not direct one way or a ‘one size fits all’ mode, but puts the child and young people’s needs in the centre. It helps to search for common working elements to create better effects in working with children and young people in a variety of ways and concepts. We should interact and learn from each other. The first step in a common search is to become inspired and involved. To learn to listen and to observe and to discover different perspectives. This will inspire all to develop economic, societal and individual values for all children and young people.

***Enjoy!***  
***Involve!***  
***Participate!***  
***Learn!***

***A good guide does not lead the way, but supports to find the right direction***