

## 8. ‘Youth Spirit’ – the ingredient that makes all the difference?

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*Thomas Dax, Ingrid Machold and Chris Gerry*

### Introduction

Children and young people grow into a world that is changing in many ways and at an accelerating pace, due to technological advances and the process of globalisation.

*“Yet, while social structures such as class and gender continue to shape young people’s life-chances, these structures become increasingly obscure as collectivist traditions weaken and individualist values intensify. Thus social exclusion is ‘collectively individualised’, with young people tending to blame themselves for any perceived failures” (Burnett et al. 2001, p.xv).*

The Final Report of the PAYPIRD project begins its conclusions with these observations on the effect of ongoing social changes on young people. In recognising the pervasiveness of the driving forces and changes affecting young people’s employment pathways and wider opportunities, we draw the conclusion that social inclusion is a multi-dimensional issue that cannot be adequately assessed simply by analysing labour market aspects alone. This holds particularly true for the threat of social exclusion faced by young people, the objective conditions and subjective views of whom cannot be understood by “rationally” analysing different patterns of behaviour and identifying what appear to be a clear set of influencing components. The diversity of personal development processes underscores the complex influence of background, context and conjuncture on young people’s strategic decisions and their resulting life pathways, not least of all their growing rejection of conventional life styles and their aspirations for alternative perspectives, solutions and adaptation strategies. The multiple determinants,

key features and rapidly changing contours of the transition from school to employment are widely reflected in the growing research focus on children and young people and their changing role in society (Jones 2002).

It also became clear in the course of the research project that, while a range of EU and national level employment-related policies have been designed for young people, these tend to neglect the rural dimension. At the same time, where policies and programmes target rural development problems, young people are often ignored.

Although participation has been an issue within the evolving consensus on integrated programmes for rural development in the EU, only limited efforts have been made to ensure all local actors are actively involved. It is only in recent years that the importance of addressing social and regional cohesion has been fully recognised, as the prospects for marginalised areas have become increasingly gloomy and as fully-effective labour market policies have remained elusive. In the political debate in countries such as the UK (e.g. Shucksmith 2000), Ireland and Scandinavia, the issue of social exclusion has gained particular priority and raised awareness over the distributional effects of sector-specific policies. While the need to adjust social welfare systems in line with patterns of social exclusion quickly became apparent, policymakers have been much slower to take on board the implications of such processes for territorial development.

Similarly, policymakers have seemed content to define rural development programmes as “bottom-up” if a limited empowerment of local activists could be achieved. However, in some cases, this led to situations in which local actors in whom greater power had been invested were seen as “local elites”.

Recent research on rural development has also increasingly focused on questions of marginality – whether of groups or individuals, or both – with young people readily identifiable as particularly susceptible to marginalisation and exclusion. Of particular relevance to current rural development and youth research agendas and, in particular, to questions of youth participation, is the warning sounded by Cloke and Little (1997, p. 281) over the care that should be taken

*“to ensure that the notion of marginalisation does not simply become a convenient ‘excuse’ by which to justify narrow description, as researchers flit from one ‘neglected group’ to another”.*

Some authors have particularly emphasised the need to analyse with greater rigour the inter-relationships and interests that link local actors (Lowe et al. 1999); more in-depth analyses of the degree of involvement of specific social groups in the Structural Funds programmes may reveal that the inte-

gration of more marginalised groups remained rather limited (e.g. Dax and Hebertshuber 2002). This failure was largely due to the fact that both the institutional framework and intralocal and local-extralocal power relations often represent only parts of the rural social system. In recent years, the systems approach has received widespread recognition as a valuable tool for uncovering precisely these types of problems and, as such, has become part of mainstream regional development policy (Scheer 1998); the same approach could also be useful, not only in revealing shortcomings in the initial conception of rural and local development programmes, but also in providing evidence to support calls for more transparent systems in which inter-relations between key actors and potential conflicts of interest are made more explicit. The need for a clearer understanding of the social processes, the driving factors behind them, and the system-dependent implications have been taken up in the rural development sphere in the design of the LEADER Community Initiative: the notion that the youth sector should be given specific recognition in rural programmes has become part of the official requirements set out in the guidelines for the 2000-2006 LEADER+ programme (Commission of the European Communities 2000, para 14.2).

The extent to which this aspect is already integrated into rural development practice is addressed in the Final Report of the PAYPIRD research project (Dax et al. 2002). Although there are just a few positive examples that can be cited in this respect, it has to be acknowledged that at least the *debate* over youth integration in such programmes and increased civic participation among young people has been reinforced at local, regional and also EU-levels. The most significant event at the European level was the drafting and adoption of the *White paper on Youth Policy* in 2001 by the European Commission (EC 2001). This initiative attempts to involve young people more in decisions that actually concern them and seeks to promote active citizenship among young people. The document recognised that young people are not looking for “purely symbolic forms of participation” (EC 2001, p. 35) but, on the contrary, an holistic view of participation is required that places it at the very heart of youth policy. While the need for strategies to mainstream intergenerational equality has been emphasised in recent discussions on young people’s participation in local development, from the few scattered examples of attempts to put these aspirations into practice, it appears that little has really altered and that policymakers still pay only lip service to the idea that young people should actually *participate* (Horelli 2000). Indeed, young people feel that their concerns are rarely addressed and that “active citizenship” will become something more than just political discourse only when circumstances make it possible to actually see the concrete results of their personal commitment.

"It is by taking part in the life of schools, neighbourhoods, local districts or associations that young people can acquire the experience and the confidence they need to go a step further, either now or later, in public life – including at the European level. It is by throwing themselves into social activities which are open to all, without any form of discrimination, that young people can make their contribution to a more solidarity-conscious society and live citizenship to the full" (EC 2001, p. 7).

Recognition of the need for rigorous, detailed and critical analyses of strategies against social exclusion lay at the core of the PAYPIRD project's objectives. A second concern related to the key dimension of territoriality – often even more neglected in debates on youth issues – which, in our particular case, places the focus squarely on *rural* areas. The fact that "youth problems" have been at their most visible in urban contexts has made it difficult to identify or estimate the full scope and diversity of the issues involved and this has meant that often the rural manifestations of the problem remain poorly specified, hidden or even totally ignored. Moreover, due to the difficulties of undertaking youth-specific studies in rural areas, regionally-differentiated data on changes in youth lifestyles and values barely exist, making the comparative analysis of different regions or types of regions almost impossible.

The attempt made in the PAYPIRD project to better understand contemporary rural youth problems centred primarily on the viewpoints of young people themselves. Putting young people's experiences at the centre of the analysis required the research teams to develop a carefully conceptualised qualitative approach that, in ethical terms, could ensure patient and respectful questioning in meticulously conducted individual interviews, and the subsequent accurate use of the information obtained. The wealth of information synthesised in the National Reports directly point to a major common issue for contemporary rural youth in the EU – namely, the increasingly differentiated situations and experiences they confront, the diverse values they adopt, and the diverging pathways to adulthood they follow. The teams' recognition of the importance of these tendencies ensured that potential individualisation trends among youth were placed high on the project's research agenda.

The synthesis provided in this concluding chapter aims, therefore, to highlight the common findings which emerge from all the partners' analyses and to make it clear that in all of them diverging paths to adulthood are to be found. The chapter also seeks to emphasise that young people tend to express their fears, concerns, plans and aspirations, obligations and preferences in a refreshing, open way – rather in contrast to the discourse of many adult politicians, policymakers and professionals and those involved

in “managing” youth affairs. While young people in all the rural areas studied tended to voice concern over the same major issues, the differences we encountered suggested substantial diversity in young people’s life situations. While, in general, interviewees freely discussed the difficulties they encountered, it became clear that there was no room for complacency in the analysis of rural social exclusion: our research probably only scratched the surface of the complex processes involved, since it was often the least and less-integrated young people whom we had most difficulty contacting, or who could not be persuaded to give an interview.

## **Key messages from young people**

Our analysis revealed that the different aspects of young people’s life experiences are extremely strongly interrelated and that, consequently, neither the transition from youth to adulthood, nor from school to employment can be understood as a linear process. Indeed, the notion of a multi-dimensional transition pathway has been explored increasingly in recent youth research: for example, the Australian youth researchers Wyn and White underlined that if we seek a comprehensive analysis of the social problems young people face, “transition” cannot be reduced to the familiar, formal pathway to adulthood through completion of formal education and subsequent integration into employment (1997, pp. 74 ff.). Not only are researchers missing the point if they reduce transition to employment pathways, but also if they see youth integration as something that involves only young people: indeed, the importance of the regional context, intra- and inter family relations, social class factors, gender issues and the marginalisation processes to which young people and adults are subjected, cannot be stressed enough.

Bearing this in mind, we propose to look at the major emerging trends to which reference was made in the interviews and which the teams interpreted against the backdrop of the specific situation and corresponding institutional framework found in the study areas. By way of this perspective, we will not only try to provide an overview of general themes that will facilitate a more detailed understanding of the common features of young people’s strategies in different rural areas, but we will also look at the differences between particular groups and types of young people. While the authors of each case study have adopted distinct thematic and theoretical focuses in presenting the views of the young people they interviewed, the

comparative analysis we attempt to make in the present chapter addresses all the major issues raised in the National Reports which we feel are pertinent to rural areas in general.

While in the past, the term “youth” defined a very specific age bracket, today chronological age has become a relative factor in youth transition processes, and the need for a clear-cut definition of ‘youth’ is no longer so important. For a number of reasons relating to the extension of secondary and higher education and the conjunctural proliferation of training and work-experience initiatives to combat unemployment, throughout Europe the age-bracket normally associated with youth has gradually been widened. However, this overall trend masks significant differences between different social groups of young people. Indeed, polarisation between young people is increasing in many respects and this has even led the synthesising author of the UK youth research programme to point to the growing internal differentiation among young people, or the widening “*youth divide*” (Jones 2002) between:

- those of differing social class backgrounds, particularly those brought up in contexts of family disadvantage (not exclusively material), and those who have experienced a more privileged upbringing: through the intergenerational transmission of beliefs about family life, education and work, parents and other adult family members still have a significant impact on whether young people will face social advantage in their adult lives; indeed, because personal development is not just shaped by formal education, a host of positive and sustained incentives are required to overcome the effects of early family disadvantage;
- those young people who stay longer in education, and those who leave immediately after finishing compulsory schooling (or drop out before), risking insecure jobs, low pay and repeated (periods of) unemployment;
- school students with better, and those with poorer, prospects for educational success: those judged unlikely to perform well increasingly experience financial disincentives and/or become financially dependent on their parents should they wish to continue schooling/training; both the means necessary to fund and the positive attitude towards such investment is unequally distributed among parents;
- the majority of young people who are increasingly deferring parenthood and the minority who start families in their teens;
- males and females: particularly in rural areas, the increasing educational achievement of young women appears to be generating far fewer dividends in terms of work and pay than had been expected.

### *(1) Rural areas – a place to live or to leave?*

One of the key aims of the qualitative interviews was to find out about young people's "world views" as a whole, their "dreams" and the sources of their disillusionments, as well as their more specific thoughts and attitudes regarding their own lives. With accelerated change of youth culture, mostly addressed by trends first visible in urban areas, it seemed of particular importance to be alert to young people's observations and attitudes regarding their everyday life. Moreover, as the speed and visibility of change and response is greater in the urban than in the rural areas, it was important to assess to what extent these distinct contexts produced different types of problems, responses, aspirations and perspectives among young people and how wide was the disparity between the urban and rural experiences of social exclusion and inclusion.

The conditions encountered in the countryside are far from being uniform across Europe. As the selection of study areas in different types of rural areas suggests, local and regional responses are heavily influenced by the specificities of the context. This holds particularly true for the young people's assessment of such serious issues as whether to "stay or leave" the region where they grew up. The fact that myriad factors, not limited to economic or quantifiable variables, contribute to such key decisions regarding a young person's future, underlines the need for researchers and policymakers to more seriously take into account the influence that a region's recent and current economic performance has over people's assessment of the future quality of life they are likely to enjoy there. From this perspective, the long-lasting and widespread unemployment experienced in particular by young people in the Finnish study area, combined with the specific difficulties of local economies situated in relatively remote and marginal regions of Europe (such as the study areas in Ireland, Austria and Portugal) will impact negatively both on the *objective* local opportunity structure and on young people's *subjective* assessment of their future prospects there.

What has been shown through the personal interview is that attitudes shaped by traditional views are still more important than in urban contexts and even prevail in some local areas. In general, the assessments presented are drawn from the small community young people live in and reflect both strong attachment to and dependence on the existing social networks. The Austrian study area, where young people seem comparably deeply rooted in tradition and local culture, shows how the strength of a locality's legacy of traditional values may substantially influence the way in which young people see and understand the opportunities for and threats to their region. Though this may reflect the current situation in which few "foreign" influences have so far penetrated the region, it may equally imply that major

changes in the social structure and identity of the region are yet to come. The recent emergence of trends that have tended to undermine traditional activities and viewpoints in the area in which the study area is situated, underlines the likelihood that, as interaction with other regions, actors and influences intensifies, local changes are also inevitable. It seems, therefore, that its peripheral situation does not just constitute an economic handicap but also has an impact on the locality's social and cultural situation and the population's assessment of future life chances both there and in the wider region.

Although, to a great extent young people voiced traditional values during the interviews, it was clear that they were experiencing an inner struggle between rejection and adoption of more modern ways of life. There seems little doubt that, for example, in the sphere of computer and telecommunications technology, both the demands of work and the increasing supply and marketing of the modern amenities of life are increasingly shaping key aspects of young people's lives. However, in other more private and social spheres of life, many young people in the area do not accept the demise of tradition willingly or enthusiastically. Nevertheless, the break with area-specific, deeply-entrenched patterns of social behaviour and interaction expressed itself particularly through individualisation tendencies that can be discerned among young people all over Europe. Importantly, however, the PAYPIRD research found that such individualisation amongst young people is highly *uneven*. In many of the rural communities studied, it was found that, to varying degrees, traditional social commitments and risk-sharing solidarity arrangements persist. For example,

- finding employment by recourse to social networks (ranging from information-sharing, through exchanges of favours, to fairly explicit nepotism) remains particularly visible and influential in some rural areas;
- where local labour markets remain highly segmented, young women are often forced to remain in traditional "women's work", and even the better-qualified find their opportunities constrained by definitions of "women's work";
- the same limited development of the local labour market to some degree conditions young men to follow traditional male pathways into farming, forestry or agricultural/vineyard wage work, especially in rural areas with little alternative employment. Nevertheless, they increasingly try to widen their personal experiences and look for alternative sources of education and income that may provide greater financial independence and better prospects.

Thus the regional and social context impacts directly on the young people's value systems and their assessment of the community and region as a place where they wish to live in the future. The chapters on the Finnish and the Portuguese study areas elaborate further on this issue. The tension felt by many young people in rural areas is clearly expressed in the paradox that "though the future looks far from promising, young people would prefer to stay" (chapter 7, p. 149). Ambiguity regarding future prospects has to be seen in the context of the transition process from school to work, in which strategies, plans, assessments and decisions are being continuously reformulated. While the issue of whether to stay or go remains central to the concerns of many sections of the rural community – an increasing proportion of young people seem to come only hesitantly to their personal decision and this indecision is fed by a multitude of local and non-local factors.

Today, when aiming at a more broadly-based approach of rural development, policy needs to focus on two distinct migration trends: "classic" out-migration and the rather more recent phenomenon of "counter-urbanisation" which has brought newcomers to certain rural areas and highlighted the importance of assessing and promoting their capacity to contribute to the sustaining of the rural economy and the provision of key local services. The prevalence and potential of rural "in-comers" is highly uneven, and to a considerable extent reflects the strategic role played by key localities in the changes that the region as a whole is undergoing. Thus it also reflects the extent to which a region manages to increase its attractiveness and organise and harness its 'rural amenities'. Only a few localities will be able to base their local development strategy on attracting incomers, since its success depends crucially on the dynamics (induced or otherwise) of the region's role and position relative to others or, in other words, what its territorial inter-linkages are and how they are developed. Moreover, even in the more dynamic and outward-looking centres of rural development, substantial inward migration is likely to challenge the relatively slow pace of life and comfortable conventions that characterise many rural communities and regions (Dey and Jentsch 2000, p.23f.).

## *(2) More than just education*

Education is widely accepted as being the fundamental prerequisite for improving the future opportunities open to young people. Furthermore, there is a general consensus in European society about the decisive value of higher education, in particular, and the need to encourage youth to stay longer in education and training. Accordingly, while there has been a massive increase in the numbers of young people continuing in education beyond the period of compulsory schooling, substantial differences in

urban-rural and inter-regional educational levels still persist. While our study broadly substantiates these trends, the results suggest that the differences found in the education and training approaches applied in each study area owe far more to national variations in education and vocational training policies, priorities and systems, than to distinctions between the local conditions – a conclusion that further underscores the importance of taking regional specificities into account both when designing and implementing policies.

While continuing education is central to the theme of the chapter on the Scottish study area, which focuses on the educational experiences, decision-making processes and resulting career choices of rural youth, it is not clear that this issue is seen in as unambiguously favourable a light in other areas. As suggested above, the phenomenon of social exclusion often involves a pronounced polarisation between the majority who benefit from education and the minority whom the system clearly fails. It may be the case that young people from poorer families “miss out”, either because they do not share the prevailing belief that education will be worthwhile, or because they cannot afford to study any longer. Over the last two decades, the shift from the state provision of largely ‘free access’ education to student cost-sharing, has had a much more negative impact on levels of educational choice, participation and outcome for young people from poorer, rather than economically secure, backgrounds (see also Jones 2002).

Evidence of this type of *educational disadvantage* was found in all the study areas. However, concern over the significant minority of young people who fail to benefit from upper secondary and higher education is most pronounced in the Irish and Portuguese reports, in which either premature school leaving or generally low educational involvement is identified as a major and persistent problem. While most past analyses of and initiatives on educational failure have had an urban bias, recent research in Ireland has highlighted the fact that the majority of educationally disadvantaged pupils live in the rural areas near small urban centres with populations of 10,000 or less (chapter 2, p. 19). As a result of this conclusion, a range of preventive measures and a specific programme – *Youthreach* – aimed at providing young people with a “second chance” in education and training, has been put in place.

The Portuguese case report suggests that a learning environment has still to be created that can counteract this sort of educational exclusion; indeed, the national educational system appears to be a source of demotivation for far too many students. In particular, young people in rural areas often have to face up to the harsh realities of life at a very early stage, at which point some begin to downwardly revise their initial dreams and ambitions (chapter 7, p. 129) – albeit in a very pragmatic way – making the adjustments

they see as necessary for entry into adult society. A lack of understanding of this revision process on the part of adults – be they parents, teachers or policy-makers – has disproportionately negative effects on the achievement of successful school-to-work transitions among young people for whom social inclusion is already particularly difficult for economic and/or family reasons.

Thus another important finding regarding the role of education in securing a satisfactory transition from school to employment is that much more than educational improvements and reform are required. In the first place, many young people are unwilling to pursue their studies further, when there is no longer a clear connection with improved future employment opportunities and a successful career path. Furthermore, the mismatch between higher education aspirations and local/regional job opportunities inevitably pushes many young people into looking for alternatives further afield or accepting alternative employment at home that corresponds neither to their aspirations nor their qualifications.

The uneven quality of education and training supply adds weight to the reservations young people have about the usefulness of continuing in education (chapter 5, S. 96); it also underlines the need for improved, more appropriate and better-targeted guidance on educational choices, particularly with regard to the degree of “fit” between what is available and what the labour market will require in the future. The marked degree of uncertainty young people felt with regard to what to do once they had left school (chapter 3, p. 47) left them confused, placing a tremendous burden on them at an early stage in their lives that was barely – if at all – alleviated by the support provided by official guidance systems.

The interviews in various study areas suggested that a rather different interpretation could be placed on the relatively low levels of entry into higher education encountered. Given that many rural youth are less convinced by the much-publicised benefits of continuing their schooling, it is crucial that improvements be made to local and regional structures so as to enhance the visibility and plausibility of the longer term benefits that education may bring. This is not a question of marketing, but of delivering more satisfactory pathways from education/training to sustainable employment for greater numbers of young people. While this may be practicable for the average and above-average students with supportive home environments, it may be particularly difficult for specific groups of young people threatened by multiple exclusionary processes. There exists a wide range of factors impacting on the “educational ethos” and on the general belief in the value of education, that have quite distinct effects according to generation, gender, and socio-economic class. For example, female students still have major difficulties in tight local labour markets, even if they have pursued

higher education; the children of families living in the most isolated and disadvantaged zones may find it equally difficult to benefit from market, policy or clientelist influence. Changes to education and training in support of local development therefore have to be discussed with a view to transforming employment structures and regional development dynamics. While institutions specifically created to support social and occupational integration (chapter 5, p. 99) may have an important role to play in this process, particularly in rural areas, they will need to develop “customised” approaches reflecting the obstacles that specific groups confront.

### *(3) Limited local choice*

In analysing the transcribed interviews, the research teams were made even more keenly aware of the interplay between young people’s personal perspectives, aspirations and strategies, and the opportunities provided and shaped by various contextual factors. As has been pointed out already, in different types of rural areas, young people are often torn between a positive attachment to their home, family and local culture, a negative evaluation of the current and future prospects of the locality, a curiosity about the “outside world” and a recognition that they may need to adapt to changes imposed by forces beyond local control. At its simplest, the choice facing interviewees was clear: if their personal preferences and ambitions proved incompatible with limited local educational and/or job opportunities, then they would either have to leave permanently, or commute regularly outside the region.

However, there was a much larger variety of nuances between the “staying or leaving” rationale than may have been apparent at first sight. The limited choices open to young rural people, and the influences of different factors on the school to work transitions they experience, are best examined with reference to a number of distinct spheres of opportunity – relating not only to young people’s economic life, but also their personal, social and community interactions. Principle among these spheres are those of employment, education/training, housing, physical accessibility, community participation, culture and leisure.

***Local employment opportunities.*** Interviewees referred to the weakness of the rural economy as a fundamental problem that had direct effects on the range of jobs, training facilities and career prospects available to them. These limited local opportunities tended to be judged against what was known about economic performance and the labour market both in other regions and at the national level. The heightened problems many rural youngsters face in trying to enter the labour market is due to the fact that they often have no or few, skills to offer, or that their training is inap-

appropriate. In many regions (e.g. Finland) this has led to long term youth unemployment that has persisted in rural areas, even in periods of economic recovery. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that, in the local labour market, most of the jobs on offer are temporary, as exemplified in the French study area.

***Restricted supply of education and training.*** Many young people realise very early that educational opportunities are very limited and sometimes of poor quality in the region. Difficulties are compounded by the dependence on access to some form of transport in order to reach distant schools and vocational training facilities, as well as the need to rely on family support and financing if education and training is to be prolonged.

***Local housing market restrictions.*** There is much more limited scope in the rural housing market and young people's range of choice and aspirations tend to develop accordingly. The range of housing alternatives for young people is deeply culturally influenced. As in other rural areas, in the Austrian study area, the ideal of single ownership houses prevails and building one's own house – typically with the help of friends, extended family and neighbours – still constitutes an important part of a family's social prestige. In other study areas, housing problems were also in evidence yet tended to be addressed more directly (as in the UK). However, the “stretching” of the school-to-work transition, combined with the financial constraints on providing young people with independent housing at accessible costs, have further entrenched a problem that is still largely ignored both in public debate and policy discourse.

***Difficult accessibility of remote areas.*** Difficult access and disproportionate problems of personal mobility are evident in virtually all rural areas, in particular those that remain poorly integrated into regional and national life. As demand for greater integration into regional, national and European markets grows, rural society is forced to confront a series of problems. The disenchantment with their locality already felt by some young people is deepened by the feeling that they are not as well-connected to the “global” reference points as urban youth, and makes increased personal mobility a particular priority. Clearly, the range of choice available to young people can only be enlarged and their perspectives on rural life kept positive, if meaningful and appropriate answers can be provided on this issue.

***Participation in community life.*** Young people openly deplore the fact that so few dedicated facilities exist where they can meet and interact. As they get older, however, this sense of isolation and discrimination weakens, as many are forced to migrate. Those that stay see community life as heavily dominated by local *adult* elites for whom youth issues are barely relevant. For this reason, young people's integration into and use of estab-

lished social networks remains important not only in finding employment, but also in constructing a basis for their wider participation in community and public affairs. However, it was clear that their high degree of dependence on traditional institutions also constituted an important barrier to building greater confidence and participation among young people.

***The specificities of leisure, sports and 'countryside' activities.***

Despite its limitations, young people often project an image of rural life as being close to the ideal, talking about the countryside almost as if being there were a deliberate choice on their part, and justifying their strategy by contrasting the advantages they enjoy with the negative aspects of urban lifestyles. While such evaluations may vary in type and intensity from place to place and even from season to season, this strong attachment to country life is rooted in an enjoyment of outdoor sporting activities and an appreciation of "unspoilt" nature.

***Lack of cultural activities and meeting points.*** Young people in rural areas tend to view activities based on the natural environment very positively; however, the limitations of available cultural activities and the lack of specific places for young people to meet were emphasised. Given the low rural population density, proposals to fill this type of lacuna are still likely to fall on deaf ears: decision-makers for whom youth issues have low or no priority, and who may still be unaware of the longer-term effects of such facilities on a locality's capacity to retain population, would simply reject them as lacking sufficient scale and not being cost-effective.

***(4) Pathways to inclusion***

Since the project's main objective was to explore young people's pathways to inclusion in rural areas, a central point of analysis was to gain an understanding of youth development processes and the shaping of youth strategies. By extending the concept of exclusion beyond that of unemployment, attention was focussed on the analysis of young people's experiences in the context of wider social processes. In this we tended to follow the argument that

"growing up is a process of forging particular types of interdependencies - in relation to other people and in relation to institutions. Conventional youth studies all too often frame the process of growing up in terms of a movement from 'dependency' to 'independence'. This not only ignores the actual experience of major sections of the youth population (...), but also presents a vision of humanity which is singularly insular insofar as it denies the ways in which people actually interrelate and rely upon each other (...); by focusing on interdependence, the emphasis shifts to the responsibilities of society for ensuring the conditions of well-being of young people, and their

active inclusion in the mainstream of social, economic and political life." (Wyn and White 1997, pp. 149 f.)

By stressing interdependence, the above statement is not rejecting the currently active role of young people in rural areas and the individualisation tendencies to which they are subject, but rather reiterates the need for a multi-dimensional approach and an understanding of the youth issue as being just one of several emerging issues in the overall social development process. Indeed, young people seem to feel that one of the important tasks in youth development and youth studies is to avoid over-simplification and paternalistic treatment. Taking their problems seriously requires strategies that are comprehensive and yet which take account of the various forms of both interdependency and differentiation that characterise young people. Though exclusion is experienced by individuals as well as by groups, the framework for constructing improved pathways to inclusion must take account of a wider set of factors when dealing with social processes that impact on the polarisation of young people. We cannot say, on the one hand, that the rural world is complex because differentiated cultural, economic and social processes are to be found in distinct regions and localities, and then, on the other hand, adopt the attitude that, from a policy perspective, there is one best way towards "inclusion".

Although there is increased political concern over youth problems, including their limited career options and the continued out-migration of young people from rural areas, political instruments to deal with the issue remain weakly developed. In addition, the divergent needs of different groups of young people are generally ignored and, if addressed at all, have traditionally been restricted to education policy and has only recently been integrated into employment measures. This policy failure is particularly strongly felt in rural areas, whose problems have long been overshadowed by the seemingly more acute (or, at least, quantitatively more challenging) youth problems of depressed urban areas.

In all of the project's study areas, researchers encountered certain difficulties in addressing issues of participation and establishing a fruitful dialogue with young people that would reveal their feelings and attitudes regarding their involvement in local community and political activities. Whereas we found evidence that young people make substantial efforts to "include themselves in the community's social, cultural and political life", we were forced to admit that most of them also expressed their concerns about "the extent of their exclusion from consultation and decision-making in these spheres" (chapter 7, p. 142). However, it has to be remembered that the young people interviewed were not exclusively those threatened by exclusion. On the contrary, a comprehensive study of exclusion was only

thought possible if young people from all social groups were included in the sample. Directly approaching interviewees from more excluded categories of young people ran the risk of further socially stigmatising them; clearly, in order to focus solely on the plight of those who fall victim to exclusionary processes would require more long-term study, the collection of other types of empirical data and different interviewing arrangements.

As a result, those young people most seriously effected by exclusionary processes could only be accessed in specific cases. Even those tend to underline their inclusionary capabilities and links to local society and peer groups, which gave the impression that few interviewees felt they were completely excluded or had excluded themselves from the community. However, what little the interviews reveal on the integration of this group of young people, would suggest that they experience a particularly high degree of dependence on adult leadership and that the existing local institutions and rules somewhat inhibit the translation of young people's own ideas into concrete action that can have sustainable impact both on their future involvement and on their environment.

Most case studies presented in this book reflect extensively on how to raise the level of young people's participation and discuss policy measures that might cope better with the increasingly diverse circumstances and pathways that young people experience (chapter 3, p. 57). The series of youth-specific programmes that were studied in the project, focussed primarily on the promotion of youth involvement in local networks, such as those provided through the LEADER Community Initiative or other experimental, youth-specific local action programmes (particularly, chapter 6, p.119), the *Youthreach* programme in Ireland (chapter 2, p. 19ff), the creation of the Suomussalmi Youth Workshop in Finland (chapter 4, p. 67), and the role of the "Centre de Resources" in France (chapter 5, S. 87).

It is essential to realise that quantitatively and qualitatively enhancing young people's local participation is made particularly difficult by the divide that separates, on the one hand, young people's aspirations and their approach to taking action and, on the other, adult thinking on how to address local and regional affairs. There is also a widening gap between a public discourse that increasingly stresses a commitment to integrating all social groups in the discussion, formulation and implementation of local development measures, and the practical inclusion of such groups as young people, children, women (to some extent), ethnic minorities, and the disabled into the very same processes. To bridge this gap, it is essential to recognise that the widening and deepening of youth participation takes time: it is a task that cannot be put off to some later date, but rather that their current concerns need to be taken seriously into account and mechanisms developed to raise participation and awareness on both sides.

Bearing in mind that young people threatened by exclusion constitute one of the most difficult target groups to address, policymakers have to realise that there is a grave risk not only of failure, but also of further stigmatisation and exclusion of “marginalised youth” if measures are oriented directly towards them from the very beginning. A more comprehensive and integrative approach is required, allowing lessons from a more detailed analysis of the problem to be factored into programme conception and design.

A much greater range of policies than those explicitly targeting youth have significant implications for young people in rural areas and this may explain why interviewees rarely referred explicitly to current youth-specific policies, but rather expressed their views on a set of measures that seemed to determine their perceptions of what actions were being taken and whether young people were being supported or not. Since local/regional influence on general policy is minimal, specifically territorially-designed programmes are of particular importance and deserve more detailed attention. However, it has to be said that the potential implicit in the youth-specific aspects of existing programmes hardly constitutes a basis of information for enhancing youth participation. The information available on the youth dimensions of policy is limited in many respects and there is ample scope to improve programme performance with regard to young people’s needs. However, discussion on youth specific programme design has only begun very recently and some local and regional initiatives have already turned their attention toward young people’s problems, with the strategic aim of giving them greater priority in the future.

If democracy is seen as requiring that all groups in society have the right to be informed, accepted as “partners” and to contribute to and shape the future, the concept and practice of participation becomes a fundamental issue. As both political attitudes and life style aspirations are forged substantially during childhood and youth, the role of schooling and home-based socialisation is pivotal to inculcating both a clear sense of what participation is in principle, and an active attitude towards participation in practice. The recognition that, besides being essential to meeting the equality and equity needs of different sections of society, an effective public, community and political process is also crucial to ensuring young people’s involvement and integration in society, is particularly pertinent to bottom-up local development in general, and to grass-roots regional and rural development programmes in particular. The objective of active citizenship, i.e. integrating young people as active agents in local development challenges the orientation, content and priorities of many of today’s policies and programmes and points to the need for considerable shifts in local social structures and power relations, some of which are already ongoing.

## ‘Youth spirit’ *can* make a difference

The research summarised in this volume took on the challenging task of trying to compare young people’s views and forms of policy action across selected rural territories in Europe. As many youth researchers have repeatedly stressed, there exist insufficient systematically comparative data on the basis of which territorial differences in school-to-work transitions and young people’s values and viewpoints can be accurately assessed (Wallace and Kovatcheva 1998). However, as our analysis shows, it is not just that different localities face distinct situations and have different development trajectories, but that rural youth experience an *uneven development of individualisation processes*, i.e. their school-to-work transitions are differentially marked by inclusionary and exclusionary factors. While the experience of rural and urban youth may be quite distinct, comparison with the findings from research on young people’s integration/marginalisation in urban areas suggests that there is an overlap with regard to the major issues affecting young people. Nevertheless, the experiences voiced by our young rural interviewees provide an eloquent elaboration on some of the paradoxes that all young people confront, caught as they are between the supposedly diametrically opposed world views that we associate with the words “urban” and “rural”.

However, even if for most young people the urban-rural distinction is not so clear-cut, they nevertheless have to cope with a number of specific problems arising out of the fact that they live in rural areas. In many of the interviews, young people referred to certain features of rural life that suggested that remoteness matters particularly to young people. The diversity of regional contexts, the influence of different institutional arrangements and the impact of distinct regional identities all exert a strong influence over young people’s assessment of their own future prospects and quality of life in their regions of origin. The Finnish, Portuguese and Austrian study areas provide particular examples in which the impact of territorial and/or regional specificities have been most evident:

- In the very peripheral study area in Finland one would have expected to encounter a much greater threat of out-migration among young people, particularly since the unemployment rate is one of the highest in Europe. Yet attachment to the area seems extremely high and young people appreciate the security and quality of life that their traditional rural community affords (chapter 4, S. 73ff).
- In the Portuguese study area, situated in a major vineyard area, young people were found often to be simultaneously active in vari-

ous groups and activities. Many local organisations, cultural associations and sports clubs are extremely popular with young people (chapter 7, p. 142). These local advantages, along with the support provided by close-knit local social networks, caused many to suggest in their interviews that their most likely future was to stay in the region, notwithstanding the many social, educational and employment problems that they confronted.

- In recent years, young people in the mountainous Austrian study area had seen little improvement to their prospects. With weak economic performance and a strong orientation towards outside regions, community spirit had fallen to very low levels, and it was only recently, following a re-orientation of policy emphasis towards the exploitation of regional strengths and meeting youth needs, that young people have begun to upwardly revise their evaluation of rural life in general, and the existence of specific rural amenities in particular. It seems that this shift in perspectives was only possible once young people were convinced that decision makers accepted the key role of cultural development and interaction in local development (chapter 6, p. 116).

Furthermore, our interpretation of the many statements made by young people during the interviews, not only allowed us to gain a better understanding of their perspectives on a wide range of topics, but also how the views and positions they adopt are seen by adults. Very often youth behaviour and action is seen as immature, irrelevant to local issues and/or unhelpful in identifying solutions. Indeed, adults often dismiss young people's views without trying to understand their world-view or making any effort to identify alternative means by which to achieve greater youth participation. This type of attitude fuels young people's dissatisfaction with rural society and further encourages them to associate life in the city (or in other, more prosperous regions) with freedom from the constraints and barriers they face at home.

Nevertheless, the ongoing debates on how to increase participation in local development and tackle social exclusion processes, along with the recognition of the problems young people face in their transition from school to work, provides momentum for the widening and deepening of youth specific initiatives. Beyond introducing youth as a cross-cutting issue in evaluation programmes, it is important to highlight positive examples in which programmes specifically targeting young people have been successful. While such cases can be of particular value in policy and political discourse, they can play a crucial role in convincing young people that policies can be

developed that address their specific problems and thereby widen the scope and intensity of youth involvement both in the policy process and in local development initiatives.

When exploring young people's integration in rural society, we came across evidence of the *polarisation* to which they fall victim, with some more integrated and others much less integrated into community life, education, employment, and with different groups and categories benefiting to rather different extents from local and non-local opportunities. Yet the existence of such differences is rarely publicised or identified as a major regional problem; instead the "plight" of the rural areas is simply juxtaposed in a general manner with the more favourable urban economic context, almost as if such duality were natural. It has to be remembered, however, that significant social processes cut across the diverse and complex experiences of young people, the implications of which are not only important for young and old alike, but for society as a whole.

It is therefore a matter of deep concern that an understanding be developed of what "being young" means in different contexts, and how young people cope with the changes currently affecting rural life and youth development. In this regard, it seems important first of all to listen to what young people have to say, then to be open to the alternative approaches to problem solving, development and participation that young people directly or indirectly articulate. Only a society that is genuinely open to dialogue with those with different, divergent and sometimes uncomfortable views can create the space in which to promote real participation and increase the integration of those currently or potentially threatened by social exclusion.

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