



by Nadine Lyamouri Bajja

ENTER!

A 2-year project on the access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has defined “Social Inclusion of Young People” as one of its main work priorities alongside “human rights and democracy”, “living together in diverse societies” and “policy approaches and instruments”. The aim of this work is to support the integration of excluded young people by ensuring their access to social rights. It consists in working with young people who are excluded, not given the same opportunities and often discriminated against. Amongst these young people are young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Therefore, in the beginning of 2009, the Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS) launched a 2-year project called ENTER! about Access to Social Rights for Young People from Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods, with the support of the Flemish Authorities and in close cooperation with other directorates of the Council of Europe.

► What is ENTER!?

First of all, it is a multidimensional, pluridisciplinary project which involves various activities, various stakeholders and various methods of intervention. At the core of the project stands a long-term training course (LTTC) for youth workers and social workers active in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This course should represent a stable ground for bringing youth work, youth research and youth policy together. It will be accompanied by various seminars and inter-sectorial meetings on themes related to the topic, such as youth counselling and information, gender equality in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, etc. These seminars should enable participants of the LTTC, together with additional participants, to explore these specific aspects and issues further and deepen them in a common reflection. Finally, the 2-year project should lead to a concrete policy document by the Committee of Ministers and which should consolidate the

lessons learned from the project in youth policy and youth work at national and European level for young people and youth workers in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

► Why Access to Social Rights?

There are many ways of analysing the situations and challenges faced by young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, many possible sources and intervention possibilities. The realities across Europe covered by social exclusion of young people are very diverse; as diverse as the associations we make about “disadvantaged neighbourhoods”. In the current youth policy and youth work debates, we have come to the conclusion that common to all of them is the lack of access to their human rights, and more specifically their social rights. The end result of the exclusion, precariousness, violence and discrimination to which young people are directly and indirectly exposed is a violation of their human rights and a threat to their dignity.

The purpose of youth work and youth policy interventions in these contexts therefore has to include restoring conditions for equality of opportunities; and stopping or reducing accepted levels of tolerance to humiliation and exclusion. In other words, they have to restore dignity and hope. Similarly, youth projects

have to be themselves supportive of change in the way they engage with young people, in the way they relate to public authorities and in the way that they are managed. They should be truly human rights education projects, in which learning about human rights is also about acting towards making them a reality. The Directorate of Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe is currently working on an approach based on “well-being”, which might be another way of responding to the situation. What is needed in a society for all members to feel well? In relation to a rights-based approach, a valid question could be: Is it enough to work on the access to social rights to change the life of young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, e.g. would their challenges be solved if their access to social rights was ensured?

► Violence, discrimination, exclusion

It is of course a big challenge to try and define what a disadvantaged neighbourhood is, taking into account 47 perspectives, country specific situations, political, economic and historical aspects. We spent some time in exploring what makes a neighbourhood disadvantaged, what makes a place a neighbourhood, and if we should specifically work on multicultural disadvantaged neighbourhoods or if it would be too specific. As Laurent Bonelli, Senior lecturer at the University of Paris-Ouest Nanterre and member of the reference and support group of the ENTER! Project rightly pointed out, not all disadvantaged neighbourhoods are multicultural, and not all multicultural neighbourhoods are disadvantaged. Violence, exclusion and discrimination were the 3 common denominators identified to describe the situation faced by the young people we target, independent of the country they live in. It was therefore decided to put the main focus of the project on these three issues.

► Who is part of the project?

Such a project can only be successful if it is developed by a pluridisciplinary group of people, structures and institutions with various experiences and perspectives. To start with, the DYSport organised a preparatory seminar in March 2009 which brought together 20 youth workers, trainers, researchers, and other institutional partners. Together, they set the ground for what the project should and should not be, raising main dilemmas and questions to be considered. The results of this seminar were taken into account for the construction of the project.

Following this, a reference and support group, composed of 10 people from various disciplines and areas of conduct, was created. This group has the mandate *“to monitor the process of the project, to be the think tank and to provide concrete support through their expertise”*. It is com-

posed of researchers, youth workers, trainers, but also representatives of the statutory bodies of the Council of Europe, a Member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, a member of DGIII Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe, Salto Participation, European Youth Forum, etc.

► The LTTC – long-term training course

In September 2009, we started a long-term training course on the access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. 32 participants from 24 countries were selected to take part in the course. All of them are working directly with young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and to the first residential seminar, they brought with them concrete experiences, challenges and a lot of motivation to bring social change. The course will last until 2011 and includes different aspects:

1. Residential seminars

Participants met for an initial seminar in September 2009 in Strasbourg. One of the main outcomes of it was the development of 32 projects which participants will implement back home over the next year. A consolidation seminar will bring the participants back together in September 2010 in Budapest to look into where participants are with their projects, which competences they still need to develop and what support they need. Finally, an evaluation seminar should take place in 2011 to finalise the process and make conclusions on the LTTC. In between the seminars, participants are provided with a range of support measures to help them overcome challenges and develop competences.

2. Support measures

- **Mentoring:** The team of trainers set up a system of mentoring. Each participant has a mentor who follows their project development closely, provides them with advice and gives them feedback on their projects.
- **Project visits:** In spring 2010, the mentors will visit some of participants’ projects or organise regional meetings with the mentees to check how they are going and share the reality of a project itself. This should be an important moment to take stock of how participants are feeling and what needs to be readjusted in the course.
- **Common meeting:** In 2010, we would like to organise a meeting with all stakeholders involved in the course: the participants, some of the young people benefiting from the projects, local authorities, institutional partners etc. This meeting would be a key moment for sharing, but also for making sure that young people are directly involved at some stage in the development of the project, and on a long-term perspective, in the final policy document...
- **E-learning:** Another important element of the course, apart from the residential seminars, is the e-learning platform developed for the LTTC. Once a month, an online unit with

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concrete tasks is developed by the trainers' team. Participants thus keep working intensively on the course, sometimes having to solve some tasks in groups. This platform helps to link the course to participants' local reality and to enable the transfer of competences developed directly into their youth work practice.

- **Funding:** The European Youth Foundation has defined the 32 projects of participants of the LTTC as a priority area for funding of pilot projects in 2010. This should enable participants to get financial support in their project implementation.
- **Website:** a website for the overall ENTER! Project is currently under construction. It should be a public space for sharing participants' projects with the outside world, but also a place where the young people themselves can have a space to get involved and express themselves about what the ENTER! Project means to them. Finally, this website could also serve as a connexion place between local authorities, various stakeholders involved in the project, plus researchers interested to contribute or share relevant findings.
- **Evaluation and documentation:** In order to keep track of each step of the project, a documentalist collects all information. The documentation of each seminar of the LTTC, but also of the online learning items, will be published and made available. An external evaluator will follow the whole process of the LTTC and evaluate it in relation to set criteria. The ongoing evaluation will help the team and the institution to readjust regularly and improve the course, and the final evaluation should help us to see if our aims were achieved and to take some lessons for the future in this field.

► And as a result?

It is of course difficult to know now what exactly will come out of the course and the project. We expect 32 projects to be developed and implemented, thus touching possibly 900 young people in Europe and bringing social change. But in order for the course to be a success, various aspects have to be considered:

- **We need to make sure that the projects are sustainable.** Therefore, a set of criteria for projects with concrete indicators was developed and worked through with participants.

- **The project needs to be carried by more than just the participants:** we believe that it can only work if the local authorities are partners and support the organisations that run the project. Therefore, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe is an important partner. They will try to support participants in putting them in contact, when needed, with representatives of local authorities. The participants also need to be supported by their organisation or association in the project, making it an organisational aim rather than just a personal one.
- **The course should not only focus on the projects.** They are, of course, an important element, but competence development for participants is as well. At the end of the 2 years, they should have developed concrete skills and knowledge to deal with exclusion, discrimination and violence in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Through the mentoring system, participants have the possibility to work on their own competences and what they need, with one-to-one support from the trainers.
- **Finally, participants' experience should be the basis to feed into the policy recommendations which will be developed at the end of the project.** This bottom-up approach is innovative in itself and therefore very promising, as the grass roots level youth work will be combined with the European, institutional perspective in order to develop inclusive and realistic recommendations.

The strength of the ENTER! Project is that it is and will be under construction throughout its development, depending on needs which arise, projects developed, involvement of partners. I believe that this is a positive thing, because the Council of Europe is willing to listen to youth workers' experience and expertise, to accompany them in building bridges and to look together how the institutions and the young people themselves can respond to exclusion, violence and discrimination in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. We hope that both the projects at local level and the policy recommendations will bring some relevant, sustainable social change.

As Rui Gomes, head of the education and training division of the DYS told participants of the LTTC: ***"A good carpenter is one who gets the idea that he is not just building a door, but a cathedral." In the same sense, participants should not just aim to develop their projects, but to contribute to the protection and respect of Human Rights in Europe.***

For more information on the project you can also visit the website: <http://enter.opencontent.it/eng> ■

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