Preface by the European Institutions

Inclusion : the perspective of the European Commission

The European Commission and the National YOUTH-Agencies are currently implementing a "Strategy for the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities into the YOUTH- programme". The strategy responds to the challenge that many young people in Europe are deprived from participating in trans-national activities, be it because there are many obstacles or because youth workers and trainers are not sufficiently prepared to assist this target group to participate. The term "young people with fewer opportunities" refers to the obstacles to participation and is not intended to stigmatise this group. These obstacles can be of a socio-economic, cultural or geographical nature or may be the result of a physical or mental disability. By 2003 we want to increase substantially the share of this target group in the YOUTH-programme and consider related projects a high priority. The different actions of the YOUTH programme offer many occasions for young people with fewer opportunities, for example, the short-term projects in the European Voluntary Service (Action 2) and projects created and led by youngsters in the framework of Youth Initiatives (Action 3). Additional funding for projects with this target group has been made available. The inclusion strategy aims at areas such as information, motivation and training; creating networks; co-operation between National YOUTH-Agencies in the field of inclusion; transfer of best practices and experiences; and quality monitoring. In addition, existing training tools (such as SALTO-YOUTH, the YOUTH staff trainings and, last but not least, this T-Kit) are being orientated towards inclusion. The present T-Kit therefore represents an important tool in this overall framework and will certainly contribute to the shaping of an always more inclusive Europe for young people with fewer opportunities.

Pierre MAIRESSE

A strategy of change : the Council of Europe's point of view

If there has been one loser of the three governing ideals of the French revolution – freedom, equality, fraternity – during the 90s of the previous century it is equality. Post-modern society values individualism and difference higher than ever before and the social virtue of solidarity appears like an old fashioned relic of the past. The governing slogan of the Council of Europe's campaign against Racism, Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia and Intolerance "ALL EQUAL – ALL DIFFERENT", which meant to put the principles of equality and difference into a kind of eternal balance and unbreakable interrelationship, has skipped out of balance and into the direction of inequality and difference. This has happened not only as a kind of temporary failure of delivery of the political system due to an under-financing of the welfare state, but it is on its way to becoming a new legitimacy of power, threatening directly the principles of social cohesion, equity and fairness. The signs of these developments are only too well known: high unemployment rates, a decrease of equality of opportunity in education in many countries, but also marginalisation, social exclusion and discrimination for many young people in the enlarged Europe. And when we speak about the considerable economic, social and political differences within the 45 member states of the Council of Europe, there are whole geographical regions of Europe that appear as marginalised in their entirety.

Youth policy is about inclusion and access. Where inclusion and access are assured, policies function, where this is not the case, they don't. There are many reasons from armed conflicts to political and economic system changes and economic crises which may explain short and medium term unbearable differences within the social situations and the life prospects of young people in Europe, but this is not a reason to leave behind key values of European society such as social justice and equality of opportunity. All it should mean is to concentrate forces and to combat the circumstances, which have created these hostile conditions. However, no solutions will come out of the blue. Next to political and social action young people at local level, in associations and networks, with their friends and peers will have to take their share of the effort needed to live in a better world. This effort means participation and active citizenship, it means to 'occupy' the European space and it means to make one's voice heard and to advocate one's interests. All this has to be learnt. The interrelation between learning and participation is very strong. The T-Kit on social inclusion is more than just another educational tool; it is one of the foundations for a strategy of change.

Peter LAURITZEN