



2010

Urban Youth and Europe Day



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Inspiration for Urban Youth

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Forewords from Belgium

“Towards a better future for young people in European cities” – by Minister Smet

For the first time views were exchanged at the Council of Ministers for Youth Affairs (19 November 2010) on a better future for young people from less privileged urban areas. The ministers shared their opinions and experiences regarding the following questions:

- How does the “*renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)*” reflect the issues that are important to young people living in an urban context in Europe? How can *Youth on the Move* generate added value for them?
- For many young people, growing up in less privileged neighbourhoods is a stigma that defines their chances of social inclusion. Which good practices in urban areas and cities (youth initiatives or youth organisations/NGOs) are promising activities for these young people?

The Belgian EU Presidency Youth came to the following insights based on the discussions of the Council of Youth Ministers and the “Urban Youth and Europe” event. We need to:

- explore existing youth initiatives more frequently and efficiently in order to learn from them
- learn how we can involve young people living in an urban setting more and better in the design of European youth policy
- reach a better understanding of their needs, questions and expectations
- stop regarding large cities as problem-areas but instead consider them to be experimental areas for new initiatives in the fields of housing, employment, youth work, community building, etc.
- establish links with organisations that are active in (sub)urban areas, such as networks of individual youth workers, street workers, etc.
- consider how existing European initiatives for European young people can be improved and copied

Both the practitioners and the ministers emphasised the crisis hit ‘young people living in an urban context’ extremely hard. High youth unemployment is one of the examples. In order to help these young people, measures should be taken to prevent them from leaving school early and to facilitate the transition from education to the labour market.

It is my intention to help outline the European agenda for the coming years in this field. For this reason, we are planning a conference on young people in urban areas in the second half of 2013. This conference will focus on how youth work can play a meaningful role for these young people. At the same time, this conference will be part of the efforts to support and develop youth work.

Pascal Smet

Flemish Minister for Education, Youth, Equal Opportunities and Brussels Affairs

“Europe needs to take into account the particularities of its Youth” – by Minister Huytebroeck

I participated with great pleasure and enthusiasm to the side event ‘Urban Youth and Europe’ on 27 November 2010.

- With great pleasure, because I wish to mention the quality of the organisation and the investment of all those people who made this day a success.
- And with enthusiasm, because young people living in major cities in Belgium, or elsewhere in Europe, are faced with specific issues which deserve appropriate responses.

Therefore, I welcome that ‘Urban Youth’ was placed for the first time on the European youth policy agenda and that we work together to improve the situation of young people in large cities.

Like all youngsters, young people in big cities are facing challenges in education, housing, employment, mobility, etc. But more than anywhere else, these challenges are accentuated in urban contexts. The population boom in the cities and the growing polarisation of our society aggravate the difficulties faced by young people living in urban areas. That is why we need to develop specific policies that address the challenges that young people face.

When Pascal Smet and I suggested highlighting ‘the situation of young people in cities’ during the Belgian Presidency of the European Union, we also wanted to show that we need to involve young people in policies that affect them. Because, after all, they are the experts of their own situation.

The reflection is just beginning. But it will be jointly carried on by the three Belgian Ministers of Youth and brought forward to our Belgian and European colleagues but also to the European institutions. It is fundamental that Europe takes into account the particularities of its Youth!

Evelyne Huytebroeck

Minister for Youth of the French Community

“Challenges for Urban Youth should not be seen in an isolated way” – by Minister Weykmans

The first Urban Youth and Europe Day that took place in Brussels focussed on young people in major cities and showed the potential of these young people while addressing their needs. Tensions and challenges like school dropout, social exclusion, ethnic tensions, labour and housing problems as described in this “Urban Youth and Europe” report are very relevant to young people today.

The Urban Youth and Europe Day in Brussels concluded that, in order to tackle and solve the common urban issues and challenges young people face everywhere in Europe, a structural political approach was necessary.

I fully agree with this conclusion and I welcome the intention of my colleagues Mr Pascal Smet and Mrs Evelyne Huytebroeck to initiate a long-term commitment with regard to the challenges young people in urban areas face.

Nevertheless, I would like to point out that the challenges that young people are facing in cities should not be seen in an isolated way. Moreover, I also have to consider young people living close to or between these urban areas. Their situation should not be neglected.

The situation of young people in major cities should not be compared against the situation of young people living elsewhere. Both groups need support and opportunities for development and participation. Both need meeting places and means of expression and both have their specific needs. In consequence, (youth) policies should take account of both groups.

Furthermore, young people’s increasing mobility also has an effect on their living environments, and this often leads to interaction. On the one hand, young people from outside the major cities can easily benefit from all the advantages and disadvantages big cities offer. On the other hand, conflicts or tensions originating in these bigger cities can easily reach the urban hinterland.

European (youth) policies should reflect this and serve all young people without penalizing one group in favour of another. This is even more vital in a Europe of the Regions, where major cities and urban hinterland already make up a common living environment.

Isabelle Weykmans

Minister for Youth of the German-speaking Community

Urban situations in Europe – introduction

Tensions and challenges

School dropout, poverty, social exclusion and ethnic tensions are just a few of the challenges today's (urban) society in Europe is faced with. Changes are driven primarily by the response of the labour and housing markets to widespread economic restructuring. Many of the new service jobs that replace traditional jobs in manufacturing and craft activities are low paid and insecure. As more and more of Europe is transformed into urban communities, large European cities prove to be challenging for local, national and European policymakers. As society in general is furthermore aging, cities, on the contrary, tend to attract a younger generation.

For example, 1.712.255 young people between the age of 15 to 34 live in the *urban core* of Madrid, Brussels and Budapest. This number is based on Eurostat data for the period 2003-2006. When looking at the calculations from previous years, we can only conclude that Urban Youth in Europe is rapidly increasing in numbers.¹ Relying on the same data, we calculate that roughly 30% of the European population in its capitals is between the age of 15 and 34.

Economic developments produce a whirlwind of social and cultural change. They lead to a loss of personal and collective identity, family breakdown, public welfare dependency and inevitably the social exclusion of certain groups and people. Young people sometimes find themselves on the wrong side of the divide. We need to rebuild the social and cultural foundations for mutual trust as well as viable economic alternatives, considerable time and resources, if we want to bridge these rifts.²

- **European youth policy makers need to be aware of their increasing important role in these matters.**

The Belgian EU Presidency Youth launches a long-term strategy

The Belgian EU Presidency Youth seized the opportunity as temporary chair of the Council of the European Union, to highlight this issue and put 'Urban Youth' on the European youth policy agenda. Young people from deprived urban areas are among the most creative in today's society. That is why the Belgian EU Presidency Youth kicked off a long-term commitment to Europe's Urban Youth to give them the chance to express themselves and show Europe a positive image of urban life. .

¹ Brussels: 122143; Madrid: 348355; Budapest: 197446 between the age of 15-24 and Brussels: 172524; Budapest: 303954; Madrid: 567833 between the age of 25-34;

<http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/setupModifyTableLayout.do>, 19.01.2011

² Note 15093/10, Council of the European Union, JEUN 45 SOC 678, 25 October 2010

The general strategic outline is to give young people from urban settings a voice in the European youth policy agenda and to acknowledge their contribution regarding the eight themes of the “renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field”:

- education and training
- employment and entrepreneurship
- health and welfare
- participation
- volunteering
- social inclusion
- youth and the world
- creativity and culture

➤ **The Belgian EU Presidency Youth initiated this project to stimulate policy makers, European institutions and academics and NGOs to examine the possibility to set up a long-term strategy.**

2010- 2013- ... -2020

Minister Smet answered to these challenges by committing himself and his administration to host an international conference on Urban Youth issues in 2013. As chair of the EU Council Youth, he took the initiative to put this subject on the agenda of the Ministerial Youth Council of 19 November 2010 in the framework of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Urban Youth and Europe Day in Brussels was a first but important step in this process. With this initiative, the Belgian EU Presidency Youth highlighted its determination and long-term commitment to examine a structural solution for the challenges young people are facing in urban areas all over Europe. The Youth in Action programme of the European Commission offers many opportunities to do so. A rock-band from Madrid, a hip-hop/breakdance collective from Budapest and a group of young artists and directors from Warsaw showed Europe on 27 November 2010 in Brussels that young people from deprived urban communities are well able to do great things with a little European support.

First Urban Youth and Europe Day

The two Belgian communities that are confronted with major cities, Flanders and the French Community, and their urban populations, closely cooperated within the framework of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council to prepare the Urban Youth and Europe Day in Brussels on 27 November 2010. Flemish Minister Pascal Smet, chair of the EU Council of Youth, and Evelyne Huytebroeck, Minister for Youth in the French Community, both gave their full support to this day. Local youth NGOs from Brussels, Flanders and the French Community worked together with the two national agencies of the Youth in Action programme to put theory into practice.

Paul Soto Hardiman and Frédéric Lapeyre state in their article³: *“One of their [urban youth’s] first demands is for respect, to be listened to, for the right to be different [...]”* Learning about one another is one of the first steps towards respect. Youth workers, press, academics, European and national policy makers,... came together in workshops to listen, debate and learn about several important topics:

- Recognition of non-formal learning in youth work (page 10)
- Education in an urban context (page 12)
- Multiculturalism and African youth in Brussels (page 19)
- Challenges for youth movements in Brussels (page 16)

Hardiman and Lapeyre continue: *“For many, the prospects are of a lifetime of insecurity, humiliation and drudgery. In contrast, there is the immediate gratification and kudos they can get from their peers on the street or the informal economy.”* The key questions are both “how to build an environment of mutual respect” and “how to offer tangible ways out of their problems”.

➤ **This document reviews and presents the different workshops and the questions that were raised.**

Two important questions were raised during two debates at the closing of the day:

- What should a future policy for Brussels’ youth look like in order to increase their chances of development and participation?
- How can Brussels policymakers establish bridges between various policy domains and urban practice?

These questions focussed on Brussels, being the stage of the Urban Youth and Europe Day, but the discussions were just as valid for addressing the opportunities of young people in European cities in general. In addition, the debate aimed to build international bridges and focused on the European dimension.

³ Based on Paul Soto Hardiman & Frédéric Lapeyre (2004). Youth and exclusion in disadvantaged urban areas: policy approaches in six European cities. *Trends in social cohesion* No. 9. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/Trends/Trends-09_en.pdf

- What should be Europe's role in tackling and solving the umbrella urban issues and challenges young people are facing?
 - How can Member States shape a European Urban Youth policy in a structural manner?
- **Read the conclusions of the debate on page 21.**

Action for Urban Youth – workshops

Recognition of non-formal learning in youth work

One of the problems in major urban centres is the elevated school dropout rate. Many young people find it impossible to fit into the formal context of secondary education. The underlying causes are manifold, but they often relate to social integration problems, language deficiencies and poverty. Many young people in urban areas enter adult life and the labour market with limited formal competencies or without a school-leaving certificate or diploma.

- **These young people can gain valuable skills and competencies for their lives through non-formal learning.**

Youth work works with young people in a non-formal way to develop much needed skills. Therefore, youth work has an important role to play in urban areas where school dropout is all too frequent. The recognition of this non-formal learning approach, however, remains problematic.

Both Dutch-speaking and French-speaking youngsters participating in activities of youth organisation JES (Jeugd en Stad=Youth and City), shared their experiences about competences acquired outside of the mainstream learning track. Workshop participants were also invited to reflect on what they learnt themselves in youth work or during other activities outside the formal educational system. Post cards documenting what they have learnt outside school, e.g. in youth work, will be sent to the minister for youth to show that learning takes place in many contexts.

Everybody has talents

The Brussels youth service organisation JES describes itself as a no-nonsense city lab dedicated to creating opportunities for difficult-to-reach youngsters in urban areas. JES focuses on the competences of young people. It starts from the principle that each individual possesses intrinsic talents.

One of the methods used to discover young people's talents is role-playing. During role-plays, young people are confronted with concrete social situations that require certain skills and norms, depending on the roles they play. Every situation or role demands a different type of reaction and forces the young people to themselves interacting with a diverse spectrum of actors and situations in their social (urban) context. This competence-focused methodology is at the basis of the all programmes offered by JES.

Questions for policy makers

The workshop participants came up with a number of suggestions and questions to policy makers:

- Formal education uses quantifiable indicators that can be validated. How can non-formal learning be integrated in such indicators?
- We should also ask ourselves whether it is a strength or a weakness that we do not measure non-formal learning? If youth work starts measuring competences, it will resemble school.

- At the moment, acquired competencies are not visible (enough). If youth work pretends to develop young people's competences, we need to show so.
- Why do we measure competences? Should youth work prepare youngsters only for a job (employability) or for life in general?
- How can we focus on young people and not on policy areas? Young people's needs should be considered throughout the different areas (youth mainstreaming).

➤ **All of these questions show the importance of recognition of non-formal learning.**

Thinking about education in urban contexts

Non-formal learning is one way of learning, formal education another. A group of Brussels young people from youth organisation D'Broej participated in a 'leadership training' programme. The training course tackles relevant themes for their urban neighbourhoods such as racism, social commitment and education. As part of this programme, the young people launched a survey about education in Brussels. They interviewed Flemish Minister for Youth, Pascal Smet, as first honorary respondent of their study.

➤ *What did you find most difficult during your own school career?*

The transition from primary to secondary school was very difficult for me. I went from a small rural local school to a school where I knew nobody and where habits and customs were very different. Nevertheless, I consider study and education a good way to expand beyond the environment wherein one has grown up. I myself originally come from a worker's background.

➤ *How do you see the ideal school?*

The ideal school entails a number of elements, for instance, the way the classroom is organised. What is the configuration of the students inside the classroom? What does the classroom look like? Another important thing is the way lessons are taught: is there a lot of interaction between teacher and students? Or is it more a question of 'listening to the lecture'? The use of new media and 'learning by playing' are very suitable educational methods. The use of educational computer games in the classroom is a good example of this.

➤ *What annoys you occasionally in matters relevant to education?*

I get annoyed with kids playing outside on the streets at a late hour. They will be too tired to learn well at school the next day. Parents ought to take more responsibility in curtailing this habit. I also think it is too bad that our school system seems unable to invest in youth. Too many kids are dropping out too early. As a result, they never get to master languages.

And what about Brussels?

The young people brought up in Brussels complained that there are too many structures, too many governments, too many ministers,...The structures are often too complicated. Too many people want to be involved in the decision-making processes... This means that it takes a lot longer to decide on certain issues and to implement measures.

➤ *What will happen when the structure is too complicated and there are too many decision-makers?*

The Brussels politicians who are not doing a good job or do not take their responsibilities are seldom punished for that in the elections. Citizens are sometimes too little involved in the political life or simply do not know enough about the performance of candidates on the voting lists. For example, you might see candidates elected because of their nationality (they may have the same nationality / background as the voters) rather than because of their abilities and performance. This has to change! Citizens ought to play a more decisive role in this respect during elections.

- *The problem of school dropouts keeps rising, not only in Brussels but also across Flanders. How come so little is done about this? What steps would you as minister take to counter this?*

I would like to introduce language tests into the curriculum to test the students' command of Dutch. Language deficiency is one of the main problems amongst dropouts.

It is true that also Flanders suffers from this problem, Antwerp being an example. Nonetheless, we need to do more efforts to find solutions, because few people (read: ministers, mayors, municipalities,...) are currently doing anything about it.

What does language have to do with it?

- *In this language deficiency and the resulting problems, do you see migration/cultural differences as their greatest cause and the key to the solution?*

No, it is rather of a socio-economic nature. The importance of learning a language lies in the fact that you need language to find a job. Many vacancies remain vacant, because they require suitable proficiency in Dutch and/or French.

- *Yet, there are many youngsters with an acceptable knowledge of Dutch or French that nevertheless are dropping out and fail to find employment? So what you say is not always applicable?*

They may know some French or Dutch, but that doesn't mean that their level is adequate for the job. When young people are growing up in a poor family or environment, this often means that their vocabulary is poorer as well.

This has different causes. Sometimes, their parents don't know the language themselves. Or there may be little opportunity outside of school to practise the language, e.g. not being able to watch French or Dutch TV programmes.

- *Can we therefore just blame everything on a language deficiency?*

Language is not the sole cause. There are four elements that determine success at school, according to research done on the subject. These are: language, the parents' diplomas (educational background), the neighbourhood where the kids are raised and the family's income.

Don't forget the school of life

- *What steps is education taking in this respect?*

It is not the responsibility of education alone to do something about this. Solutions can't be taken at the 'society level' only. It is also the role of the parents to give structure to the lives of their children, to teach them to take on responsibility and to stimulate them in their actions and activities.

- *In France, there is a system where students are allowed to attend class councils. Why does this not exist in Belgium? Why is a student seldom given a hearing in case of a conflict/sanction?*

In Flanders, we do have a system of student councils where students have a certain input in certain school matters. Involvement in class councils is not advisable since in that case students would have to take decisions directly affecting their peers. In Brussels, we have a system of student councils, but there is certainly room for improvement.

- *The 'sanctioning system' at schools could be better. Isn't it more advisable to concentrate on measures to repair and restore the bond between student and school rather than to expel a student?*

There are in fact systems that deal with students who are experiencing difficulties or behavioural problems. For instance, we have a time-out system whereby youngsters are temporarily taken out of school to give both parties time to cool off but where subsequent efforts are made to re-admit the student into the school track.

Making schools better

- *Is it possible for students to follow lessons at a school without heating?*

No, that is prohibited. There is a law that determines minimum acceptable temperatures inside schools. Below those set temperatures, no classes should be taught. If that proves to be an on-going problem, you definitely should report it and we'll look into this.

- *Why is there a head cover prohibition at school?*

This is indeed a difficult question, having to do with two different principles that both are of importance:

- You are allowed to wear anything you like on your head.
- You should be free to select the school you want to attend.

At a given moment, an imbalance between these principles arose. In certain schools, some girls that were not wearing or did not want to wear head covers were pressured by others to do so. Their freedom of expression and action was infringed and this affected the atmosphere within the school. As a result, some schools decided to impose a ban on head covers. This fuelled the controversy even further, since girls who want to wear head covers will only go to schools where head covers are still allowed. This hinders their free choice of school. Here we are faced with the question: is it the task of the government to impose the rules or is this up to the schools themselves? This debate is currently in full swing.

It is important that this debate is seen in a wider context. It is not just a question of the hijab, but also about discussions whether or not boys and girls ought to be allowed together in the same swimming pool, or if the Theory of Evolution (Darwinism) should be admitted,...

- *Should the number of students be limited per classroom?*

This sometimes depends on the individual situation. In a given context, it certainly appears desirable to reduce class sizes so that teachers are able to work more individually with the pupils.

- *Pupils have to choose at young age what type of subjects they want to follow. This leads to young people taking the 'easiest' options, which blocks their opportunities later in their school career. Can this be organised differently?*

The system for choosing a study orientation (selection your subjects) is being reworked at this time. It is the intention that in the future pupils select a study orientation only in their third year of secondary school. The first two years of secondary school are to be about equal for all students. The idea is to be able to offer everybody a very broad gamut of subjects so that pupils have sufficient time to find out what suits them best and in which area they wish to pursue further specialisation.

- **In conclusion, the minister invited the young people to pay a visit to his office and follow up on this conversation.**

Challenges for Youth Movements in Brussels

One out of ten young people in Brussels are members of a youth movement. At the occasion on 'Youth Movement Day' the youth movements from both Brussels Communities gathered around 'a campfire' to exchange experiences, projects and pitfalls. They talked about Brussels youth movements, their philosophy, their role in the metropolis and the opportunities that youth work can offer in an urban context. In this 'campfire workshop', they also grilled policy makers (figuratively) to speed up the social debate around youth work in big cities.

Between traditional movement and urban influence

In the first part of the workshop, the various youth movements active in Brussels were presented. We notice the return of the traditional youth movements. These traditional youth organisations are assimilating well with the specific, often multi-cultural, urban context. All youth movements in Brussels have all together some 23 500 members spread over 140 local groups. A selection of them was present at the Urban Youth and Europe Day and presented their projects.

Akabe (Anders Kan Beter)

- A segment of the Scout and Guide Movements in Flanders
- Target group: Mentally challenged youngsters and children
- Focus on the inclusion of children and youngsters with fewer opportunities
- 1 Akabe group in Brussels with a dozen or so members
- Located on the premises of the scout group in Ganshoren
- Structural problems: Dutch-speaking group, a young and small group, lacking infrastructure.

BiNT (Moroccan for 'girl')

- Project reserved for girls only: the target group is composed of different cultures.
- Conducted in cooperation with Chiro Brussels.
- Girls get leadership training from Chiro.
- Animator project by Chiro Molenbeek.
- Youth leaders are mostly students.
- Need for more over-12 year-olds taking leadership.

Scouts Schaerbeek (French-speaking)

- 36 members, girls from different backgrounds, mixed target group
- Using schools to advertise their activities
- 150 scouts participate in Sunday activities. Summer camp.
- A lot of travelling on public transport to go beyond their own districts/neighbourhoods, to acquaint children and young people with other districts in the city.
- Up to 12 years, they travel for free on public transit, thus getting the opportunity to visit parks outside of their area.
- They also participate in 'special' activities such as swimming or in activities organised by the municipality.

All three presentations showed repeated attempts to cooperate with the parents of the children and youngsters. In many cases, the parents are even less integrated than their children are. It is very difficult to involve young people in the youth movement if they are not supported at home. When the parents cannot afford financially to send their children to the activities, the youth movement searches for financial resources so that no child or youngster will be left behind.

Challenges and stumbling blocks

Following the presentations, the participants, youth workers, and youngsters joined in a debate about the challenges and the pitfalls confronting Brussels' youth movements. The following points were raised and should be tackled by policy makers:

- Bicycle paths in Brussels (where they do exist) are often unsafe, meaning that people are severely limited in their movements (by bike). In other words, group outings on bike are difficult to not possible in Brussels.
- Public transport is free up to 12 years of age. After that, the youth movement has to pay for travel passes for the young people. The price of the travel tickets is an obstacle for a number of parents.
- Diversity in the existing youth movements is not always easy. It is sometimes not possible to accept all children or to make extra efforts to approach all groups in a district. The will is there, but the capacity is often missing. There is a shortage in youth leaders and a lack of adequate infrastructure.

Good practices from the Francophone scouts: a person from the immigrant community and a scouts leader team up to motivate immigrant youngsters to participate.

- Youth movements are asking for more support from the schools. Teachers still take a somewhat standoffish view vis-à-vis the youth movements. In answer to this: the Flemish Community Commission is trying to harmonise culture, sports and youth to create more cooperation and cross-fertilisation.
- The mentality persists that volunteer work is a bit crazy.

- Not all youngsters can afford the luxury of getting involved in a youth movement.
- Two different youth policy plans (from the two Communities) are counter-productive for the Brussels youth movements. They prevent joint activities with one another.
- Spaces for youth movement activities are difficult to come by in Brussels.

Participants pointed out that the Brussels Region has a particularly complex institutional composition. The big number of institutions and administrations intimidate youth workers, youngsters and youth movements who attempt to submit their specific demands.

A road to improvements?

Both Communities in Brussels are trying to tackle the challenges that youth movements are confronted to. The Flemish Community Commission has prepared a new youth policy plan consisting of nine strategic objectives. The French Community also presented its own youth policy plan.

- **Could an integrated Brussels youth policy plan proffer a solution to current problematic areas?**
We leave it up to the competent ministers to debate that issue.

Multiculturalism – African youth in Brussels

Across the globe, big cities attract people like magnets. European major cities are melting pots where multiple nationalities, mentalities, cultures and skin colours mingle. This multiculturalism is undoubtedly one of the prime reasons why European urban centres are more than ever creative breeding grounds for people from all kinds of backgrounds.

But it is not enough that diverse nationalities, outlooks, mentalities, languages and cultures live together to come to creative cross-pollination. The melting pot does not always melt well and often leads to the exclusion of certain social groups. Immigrant groups are constantly confronted with the challenge of social integration.

- **Representatives of the African (youth) community in Brussels, primarily from sub-Saharan regions, were invited to the Urban Youth and Europe Day to suggest possible solutions to these challenges.**

Giving a voice to African youth

Very few African young people find their way into the regular youth work in Flanders. The same is the case for Brussels, despite a larger presence of young people with African roots. Brussels nevertheless counts 500 organisations that are actively involved in the life of the black African community. Recently, a forum for African youth was created: 'Etats généraux de la jeunesse africaine (EGJA) – Estates General of African Youth'. This forum brings representatives of these organisations together to reflect on the place of the African community (with specific attention to black youth) within Belgian society and Brussels in particular. The forum counts 90 representatives (delegates) from African community organisations in Brussels, who are divided over three committees discussing specific themes:

- History and culture
- Youth and citizenship
- Family and education

The Estates General of African Youth promotes values such as mutual respect, solidarity, tolerance and dialogue amongst communities. Within this context, they organised a conference in April 2010 on the theme of '*plus jamais sans nous – never again without us*'. This conference built on the feeling that emerged over the last ten years within the African community of 'feeling at home here' ('*on est chez nous*'). In the past, many young people thought rather the contrary: "*Why should I be interested in a country that isn't mine to begin with?*"

The Minister for Youth of the French Community, Ms Huytebroeck, attended the conference and emphasised the reciprocal commitment:

- ***"Il faut donner la parole aux jeunes ! Ils sont peut-être d'origine Africaine, mais ils sont tout d'abord des Bruxellois. Il faut montrer le côté positif de la jeunesse."***
(We need to give a voice to the young people! They are maybe of African origin, but they are first and foremost sons and daughters of Brussels. Let's show the positive side of youth!)

Challenges and solutions for African youth

Closely connected to the presentation of the Estates General of African Youth, the workshop continued to discuss a number of problematic areas that policy makers should address and try to resolve. The forum was just a first step. We also need to continue searching for structural solutions to engage African youth into youth work and society in general. This needs to be achieved by increased contacts, by finding common interests, etc. Here are some challenges that need solutions:

- African young people are often approached by 'a Dutch-speaking organisation' or 'a Francophone organisation', rather than being gathered around common views, interests, feelings, etc. Youth movements are trying hard to adapt to the type of organisations that African youngsters are looking for, but they are often unsuccessful in their attempts to change their approach. They often have too little expertise. They cannot fill the existing gap. We need to look more for communalities.
- Aside from the non-formal organisations, education does not always offer immigrants equal opportunities. Amongst immigrant societies in Belgium for instance, the Congolese population holds the largest number of diplomas. Yet, they face serious unemployment. The equivalence and accreditation of African diplomas is problematic. Often, diplomas from African schools and universities are not recognized. This needs to be tackled at political level: bilateral agreements between for example the Congo and Belgium could remediate. At the same time, African nations need to develop quality education so that the diplomas are equal in terms of their academic worth.

Debating Urban Youth in Europe

Searching for strategies and solutions

Growing up in an urban environment is a challenge. It is a demanding experience, not only for the youngsters, but also for their social network and the environment around them. For certain groups of young people, growing up in a big city is a positive challenge as a city offers many opportunities for personal development. Unfortunately, there are other young people who seem unable to seize these possibilities. For them, living in an urban area turns into a struggle.

We however do not want to focus on missed opportunities and problems that young people in Brussels have faced in the past few years. On the contrary, this debate is looking for strategies and sustainable solutions within a broader policy context.

- **How can a future policy for Brussels youth improve young people's opportunities for development and participation?**
- **How can Brussels policy makers build bridges between various policy areas and the urban reality?**

In addition, the debate also builds international bridges, because young people in various European cities face similar challenges. Every now and then, a few good practices find their way to cities abroad via international networks. This shows how important it is to embed international cooperation and networking in a European policy context.

- **What role can Europe play to tackle common urban problems and challenges vis-à-vis youth in different countries?**
- **How can Member States develop a European Urban Youth policy?**

Truus Roesems, the president of youth organisation JES (Youth and City), presented some figures to launch the debate.

- In the coming years, the number of young people in Brussels will rise steeply, in contrast to Flanders.
- Secondly, the educational sector in Brussels is facing big challenges due to poor school performance.
- Finally, young people in Brussels are confronted to high unemployment rates, especially in some concentrated areas.

Combining formal and non-formal learning

- *"In school context, there is seldom question of passion or talent."*
- *"Reverse social mobility: from engineer to street sweeper... It happens if your diploma is not recognised."*
- *"Many young people perform poorly in school because of language problems."*

A first round of remarks and questions pointed out the challenges the education system is facing in Brussels. Low school performance is a major problem, as was pointed out in the workshops. In Brussels, many pupils from immigrant background drop out of vocational school without adequate education and without a qualification.

Aside from language and migration factors, socio-economic disadvantages cause pupils to drop out of school, with disastrous consequences. Some Brussels districts have very little to offer to young people. Furthermore, these young people have very limited mobility: they seldom venture outside of their neighbourhoods.

Minister Smet however emphasised that education alone is not enough to stand up to this sort of challenge. The panel pointed out that young people need to get a relevant place and purpose in society. Non-formal education offers an alternative to those young people who are uncomfortable with the formal education environment or who simply give up on education. An informal environment allows them reconnect with a broader social network. Involvement in youth clubs and associations has beneficial effects and needs to be reinforced. This type of involvement builds bridges between formal and non-formal educational venues.

The formal education system is faced a multitude of cultures and educational backgrounds. Other professional and recreational sectors can help taking on this challenge. The various partners involved in the Urban Youth and Europe Day showed that this is already happening in Brussels to a significant degree. Nonetheless, it does remain quite a challenge to recognise young peoples' skills acquired in different environments.

Time has come to build bridges between the various policy domains related to youth. We should be looking for cross-pollination between public places and youth policy. In addition, the panel members are convinced that policy makers need to recognise that Brussels education has not been adapted to its urban reality. Brussels itself has nothing to say about its educational system. Therefore, an adaptation of the system is urgently needed, either in the form of one single Brussels educational structure or otherwise.

Bridging the Brussels Communities

- *"It is sometimes impossible to cooperate across Communities because of different policies, structures and regulations."*

Cooperation between the Flemish Community and the French Community in Brussels are virtually inexistent in Brussels, because virtually impossible. This is a missed opportunity. Policy should be based on young peoples' needs. This should be the basis for the offer of youth services. The needs of young people in an urban context should not be limited by language or other societal divides.

The panel members therefore recommended that policies should surpass language and institutional differences. It is more effective and efficient to solve challenges confronting youth, when different stakeholders work together. The ministers present expressed the will and desire to work towards a joint youth policy for the Brussels Capital Region. This kind of joint policy plan needs to start from the needs of the children and young people and receive the necessary resources to make it a success.

Minister Smet pointed out that cooperation between different policy areas can only be achieved when the government makes young people a priority. Policy makers tend to focus on the direct results of their decision, without thinking what consequences their policies have for children and young people's realities. But also young people themselves have to take some responsibility and accountability for their own actions and do away with their fatalistic views. Youth clubs, associations and local partners can provide great assistance in this respect.

Europe for Urban Youth

Europe also has a role to play in the development of urban policies, tailored to suit young people. 60% of the European population lives in cities, many of them are young people. The problems in most urban areas are the same: education, employment, social commitment,... The European Commission should stimulate policies that address these challenges. There already exists an EU Youth Strategy, but according to Floor Van Houdt (European Commission) the concept of 'Urban Youth' should be further developed.

The panel members agreed that the European Union could identify good practice examples and support the exchange of expertise in Urban Youth matters. The Commission could feed and inspire the interventions in urban areas in the field of youth. The more stakeholders cooperate and learn from each other, the less they need to reinvent the wheel. Coping with the challenges that young people are facing nowadays will become easier.

Giuseppe Porcaro (European Youth Forum) considers the European Youth Strategy to be a key step in this process. The European Youth Strategy provides a framework that leads to better European policy developments in the various sectors that are of importance for children and young people.

Urban Youth issues can only be addressed in a meaningful way, if the needed structural and financial support follows. Different European programmes financially support Urban Youth programmes. However, as the European Commission pointed out, these funds and programmes are not fully used. One reason is the complexity of the funding and application system and the need for strong (financial) management skills. As a result, European structural funds such as EFRO, ESF and the like remain often inaccessible to smaller organisations and individual initiatives. Another reason for limited use of those programmes is their content: the existing funds do not explicitly address youth (work). They rather emphasise regions and socio-economic themes, which traditionally are implemented by other actors. In contrast, there is Youth in Action, a programme explicitly for/by young people and youth workers.

➤ **Where are we heading with youth policy in Europe after the Belgian EU Presidency Youth?**

Ministers for Youth Smet and Huytebroeck emphasised the need for on-going attention to innovative urban projects. Existing programmes such as Youth in Action need to remain accessible to disadvantaged groups and offer them opportunities to acquire skills and competencies and to exchange experiences. Minister Smet proposed to organise a European conference in 2013 about youth in an urban context. In the meantime, the panel expressed their hope that Europe will stimulate a dialogue amongst urban actors, that they help share good practices (peer learning) and

gather relevant data at European level. Such information can be shared through the European Youth Forum and the structured dialogue process.

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Links and literature on Urban Youth

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Enter! Access to Social Rights for Young People from Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods

<http://enter.coe.int/eng/Introduction>

ENTER! is a three - year project (2009 - 2012) developed by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe and it is part of the work priority on social cohesion and inclusion of young people.

The three-year project aims at “developing youth policy responses to exclusion, discrimination and violence affecting young people in multicultural disadvantaged neighbourhoods”. It is seen as a vehicle to develop the impact of non-formal education interventions in relation to the social rights of young people on European, national and local youth policy realities.

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