

18. The origins and development of open youth centres and their operating characteristics in Flanders

Willy Faché

Introduction

As a manifestation of open youth work, youth centres did not develop in Flanders until 1952. By that time, youth clubs and youth centres already existed in the Netherlands, the UK, Germany and France, which inspired their subsequent development in Flanders. In the 1960s, open youth work flourished in Flanders. A first important milestone in the evolution of youth centre work is 1973. The subsidy scheme of 1973 launched professionalisation. The scheme also promoted, for the first time, differentiation of youth centre work according to the functions it fulfils for young people. It is also the year in which the age limit for entry to dance halls was lowered from 18 to 16, which caused youth centres to lose their monopoly in the leisure activities of young people. It effectively halted the flourishing of youth centres.

The next milestone in the development of youth centres is 1993, when Flemish youth work policy was decentralised. From that moment on, youth centres were no longer subsidised by the central government, but by the municipalities. This created greater differentiation in youth centre work. This chapter deals with the birth of youth centre work in the 1950s and further developments up to the 1980s.

Origins in the post-war period

After the Second World War youth workers and educators became worried about the negative influence of the leisure industry on the moral development of young people. A so-called third educational environment (along with the family and school) was designed to protect youth in their leisure time. The emerging generation were thought to need protection from a mentality of consumption and a commercialised leisure industry (Kriekemans 1950). According to pedagogues, uniformed youth organisations were best suited to protecting youth in their leisure time. That is why the youth as a whole are susceptible to being recruited by the youth movement. Every young person is considered to be a potential member (Kriekemans 1950). The youth movement as well as its member numbers, both in Belgium and abroad, experienced explosive growth in the period between the two world wars. This growth was not

slowed down by the Second World War, and initially continued afterwards (Cammaer 1969). It is important to note that only the youth movement was considered to be an organisation form for young people that presented an added value; other organisations were not. This view on youth work is also expressed by the government's youth policy. This rigorous idealisation of youth organisations constructed a category of "unorganised youth". Even members of sports club or a music group, who were not members of a youth movement, were labelled as unorganised young people (also unattached youth, intangible youth, unreachable youth, mass youth, antisocial youth, young people with adjustment difficulties). The classification as member or non-member of a youth movement resulted in stereotypes. The unorganised distinguished themselves from the organised by specific, common characteristics that were considered deficient in some way. Moreover, the concern about unorganised young people focused on the working class, mainly urban young workers. We find similar classifications in neighbouring countries at about the same time. During this period, the 15 July 1960 Act on the moral protection of youth, the so-called Dance Act, was voted. This act stipulated that it was prohibited for anyone who had not reached the age of 18 to stay in dance halls and drinking-houses while there was dancing going on, if this minor was not accompanied by his/her father, mother, guardian or other person responsible for their surveillance.

In Belgium, the youth movement appeared to enjoy a monopolistic position in complementary educational environment, although in actual fact it never reached more than 30-40% of young people after the Second World War. As a consequence, the majority of youth were unorganised. The flourishing of youth movements after the Second World War did not last long and was followed by a large change, in particular in the 16+ age category. The reality that the youth movement did not actually reach the "mass" of young people was initially attributed to the fact that there were simply categories of young people that lagged behind, who were not yet ready for the idealistic youth movement methodology. This so-called "crisis in the youth movement" also took place in neighbouring countries (Jousselin 1959; UNESCO 1962; Rosenmayr 1964).

Another possible cause of this crisis was to be found in the lack of qualified youth leaders to "save the numerous young people who are unfortunately still running free" (Van Haegendoren 1946, p 16). In order to solve this problem, the Interdepartmental Youth Commission and the National Youth Council (1959) in Belgium proposed, in their joint report to the government, to put members of the teaching staff at the disposal of youth movements, a proposal that was not included in an act until 1965. In the 1950s, youth workers started to

realise that not all young people were susceptible to being recruited by the youth movement. Although, in the late 1950s, the question was raised as to whether the youth movements were outmoded, the dichotomy of youth in organised and unorganised youth remained.

Organising the unorganised?

Although unorganised youth became the object of numerous specific policy measures and provisions in all western and northern European countries, it is remarkable how little attention was paid to a critical analysis of the supposed distinction between organised and unorganised young people. The distinction between organised and unorganised young people is irrelevant for youth policy. Faché (1977) examined to what extent so-called unorganised youth are “organisationally intangible”. He examined this by means of a representative sample of 14-22-year-old unmarried young people living in Flemish cities of more than 50 000 inhabitants. Some 90% of the young people appeared to have participated at some time in the activities of one or other organisation; which means that most of the so-called unorganised young people had participated at some time in an organisation.

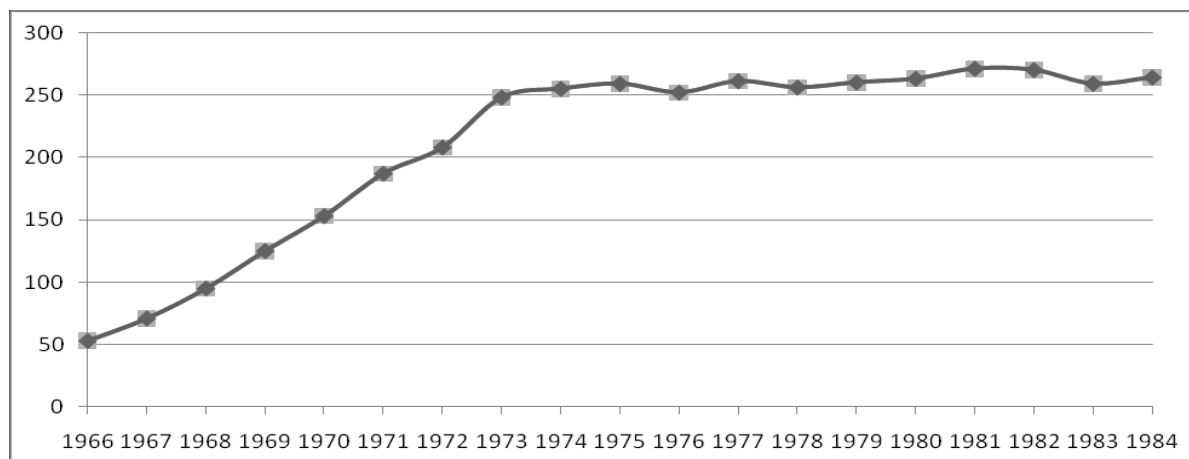
Nevertheless, new youth work forms were intended to reach the so-called “intangible young people”. In the 1950s and early 1960s, youth centre work was championed. It was considered as “youth work par excellence” for the unorganised in Flanders (Peeters 1963; Cammaer 1969). The first youth centre was founded by the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in Antwerp. Other centres were initiated later by Catholic youth movements (Chiro, see Baeten in this volume, and the Scout movement). Some Catholic youth movements even demanded a monopoly on action for the benefit of unorganised youth (Cammaer 1969). The same phenomenon was reported in other countries as well (UNESCO 1955).

This new form of youth work could soon count on official recognition and support in Flanders. In 1958, the National Youth Council drew up an inventory of all youth centre initiatives and formulated criteria for the support of youth centres. The National Youth Council organised study visits to youth centres in France, the Netherlands and Germany. In 1960, the first youth centres were supported by the Ministry of Public Education.

Rapid growth followed by stagnation

Youth centre work grew very rapidly, as is indicated, for instance, by the number of recognised youth centres, which doubled every three years, as shown in Figure 1 below.

– **Figure 1. Number of subsidised youth centres (1966-84) (Abbeloos 2007)**



The strong growth in youth centre work in the second half of the 1960s was not only the result of governmental support. The above-mentioned Dance Act (1960) provided youth centres with almost a monopolistic position within the field of leisure activities for minors. According to this act, non-commercial initiatives were not covered by it. This gave youth centres a monopolistic position in the organisation of dance parties.

The figure above shows that the number of recognised youth centres stagnated from 1973 onwards. This is the year in which the 1960 Dance Act was amended and applied only to young people under 16 instead of under 18.

According to the Flemish Youth Centre Federation, there is even a gradual relapse which lasted until 1993. At that moment, youth centre work clearly enjoyed a revival that coincided with the decentralisation of youth work policy. From that moment onwards, the youth centres were subsidised by the municipalities (9 June 1993 Act of the Flemish Parliament).

Educational views within youth centre work

In the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, the first youth centre initiatives originated in the youth movements, which also felt responsible for the unorganised youth. It is therefore not surprising that educational views about youth centre work, during this initial period, came from the youth movement scene. Some authors argued that the strong community, which the youth movement was, should form the heart of the broader youth centre community (Peeters 1963; Van Roey 1963; Janssens 1963; Katholieke Jeugdraad 1964).

The youth movements were imbued with an ideology of protection, assuming that young people had to be protected from the dangers of consumption and a commercialised leisure

industry. In order to reach unorganised youth, research on youth centres by Cammaer, Regal and Wauters (1966) concluded that youth work forms such as the open-door system in youth centres were necessary. In this drop-in work form, “the binding element is reduced to the bare minimum and these young people do not have to obey many orders” (translated by the author). This drop-in system took shape in mass events (such as the dance party), the disco-bar, the reading corner.

In the 1960, there were two main viewpoints as regards this open-door system. The first view held that the drop-in approach would serve as a “trap” for unorganised youth and would make them participate in less free-of-engagement activities, and would possibly bring them into contact with the youth movements (Van Roey 1963; Katholieke Jeugd Raad 1964). This view also prevailed in Dutch and German youth centres (Hoebink 1966). A second view considered that dance parties and other drop-in activities within youth centres had an intrinsic value, allowing young people to have co-educational and non-committal encounters in an educational atmosphere that promoted social interaction and friendships (Claus 1965; Wouters 1969).

All authors at the time were convinced that youth centres must offer more than a place for encounters and leisure activities for boys and girls. The term “(social) education” is often used, although the concept remains unspecified. This social education could be realised through a “social group work” methodology, which was developed in the United States.

The perspective of young people is slightly different. On the basis of apprenticeship reports by social assistants, Abbeloos (2007) states that young people mainly went to the youth centre to dance. We suppose this motivation was especially the case in the years between 1960 and 1973, as a result of the Dance Act (see above).

The potential functions of a youth centre

By the end of the 1960s, youth researchers started to pay attention to the (potential) functions of youth centre work from the perspective of young people themselves – an attention to the functions that youth centres have for young people. According to the Dutch youth sociologist Van Hessen (1964), family, school and work are domains in which a major part of youth life takes place. Next to, if not exactly opposed to these domains, the young person maintains and cultivates a proper domain, designated by Van Hessen as the “third” social environment. This environment is the place par excellence “to be young together”. There is no dominance of

older people as there is in the family or school. One could say that wherever there is a place for adults in this third social environment, in more than incidental encounters with young people, the term “youth work” can be used. According to Van Hessen, youth work thus lies in a double perspective. The first is one of “*being young together*”, that is to be realised by youth, whereas the second is one of “*certain ‘intentions’*” that also have to be realised. This view starts from the premise that interference by an adult may give a certain tenor and shape to this group life in the third environment, which results in an “educational” effect on the participants. Whether youth work aims at far-reaching objectives, or rather takes up more modest tasks situated closer to home, it will never be identical to just being young together. The concretisation of this added intention from the world of the non-young with regard to being young together leads to a constant search for and attempt to harmonise both optima.

The youth centre may, for some young people, fulfil the function of an environment in which they have the possibility to “be young together”. An environment that enables non-committal encounters and casual social activities, through the presence of a bar and sitting area, a reading corner, a disco corner, a dance party. The typical atmosphere is one without obligations in which young people are free to come and go. But a youth centre differs from a youth cafe or dancing (where being young together is also possible), because of the other functions a youth centre can fulfil for young people. A youth centre is predisposed to have various functions, but the staff, the interest shown by young people, the infrastructural possibilities and so on determine to what extent this predisposition can develop. Faché (1969) summed up the following functions:

- initiation in leisure activities and qualified assistance in deepening of certain activities;
- mastery of certain skills and knowledge as required by many leisure activities (for example, photography, nature exploration, playing the guitar, recreational sports, and so on). A youth centre may offer the possibility to acquire these necessary skills and knowledge under qualified supervision;
- space and material facilities for entrepreneurial young people;
- the possibility, for instance, to repair a moped, to construct a radio or a go-cart, to develop and enlarge self-made photographs, to exhibit paintings or sculptures, etc;
- provision of information and assistance to young people.

Youth centre work is usually classified as sociocultural work. This is why assistance, welfare or care in youth centre work is not mentioned. Nevertheless, the youth centre leader is often

one of those confidential advisers to whom young people can ask personal questions. They are often confronted with young people who are in immediate need of help or have existential questions and problems they cannot solve. Most of the time, young people do not know whom they can turn to if they have any questions, or are shy about appealing to a welfare centre. Apart from information concerning the personal problems of young people, the youth centre can also systematically disseminate information about topical social issues. This information is a prerequisite for the participation of young people in a rapidly evolving society.

Youth work as a factor in social change

In the course of the 1970s, youth centres increasingly started to fulfil other functions, in particular the stimulation and support of youngsters in developing their own ideas about the future of society, their involvement in social change and social action, and in the development of a municipal youth policy. This development was stimulated by three different sources.

- a) The first source is the function of counselling and support. Youth problems become apparent in the life of the individual, but the causes of these problems are not always initially bound to the individual. The problems of young people are frequently rooted in the society in which they live (for example, shortcomings in working, housing, school and leisure environments), and not in individual inadequacies. In other words, many of the problems that young people may experience are in fact collective as opposed to exclusively individual problems.
- b) A second source lies in the societal evolutions and phenomena of the time (unemployment, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy).
- c) A third source were the social movements that certain youth centres belonged to.

The critical youth leader made his/her entry also as a result of the professionalisation of youth centre work (Faché 1974).

This evolution in youth centre work is related to changing views on the role of youth in society and the collective emancipation of young people. Youth became a factor in social change (Mahler 1982; Hartmann and Trnka 1985).

However, the number of youth centres committing themselves to supporting young people in their participation in social action and social movements remained limited. In August 1974, the socialist Manfred Janssens reacted sharply against what he called the non-committal

attitude within youth centres and their lack of commitment. A youth centre should prioritise social action and not give priority to recreation (Abbeloos 2007).

The role of public authorities and “pillarisation”

All youth centres originated from private initiatives. This is the logical outcome of the fact that, in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, youth work is based on the subsidiarity principle, which states that the role of the government is subsidiary to that of private initiative. Thus, authorities have to respect and encourage spontaneous private initiative; and, secondly, have to intervene only when the initiative does not come forth spontaneously, or when it is not up to the task required. In practice, the function and responsibilities of the government in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium were restricted to granting financial support to private initiative. This can be explained by the fact that in Belgium, the major political parties are opposed, for different reasons, to state initiatives in the domain of social policy.

Education, health care, social work and sociocultural work were all originally organised on the basis of private initiative, mainly by the Roman Catholic Church. Unlike the situation in the Netherlands, where several religious communities each act for their part of the population, Flanders only has one so-called initiating organisation, that is the Roman Catholic Church, which holds an actual monopolistic position. In the transition to the 20th century, a socialist and liberal political pillar were established next to the Catholic pillar. Flemish “pillarisation” did not take place among the different religious communities, but between the religious (mainly coinciding with the Catholic) community and the non-religious community, on the one hand, and along the socio-economic dividing line (socialist and liberal), on the other (Roelandt 1985). At the time, youth centre work was also embedded in the “pillarised” structure of society.

Support and recognition

As a result of the policy of the 1960s, youth centres could only be created if there were private sponsors, and if some private source could finance the centre for a period of about three years. After that, the government could give a grant, but a centre could only stay afloat if private sources could continue to bridge the considerable gap between the subsidy and real expenditure. It is clear that only those youth centres that could somehow rely on financial support from religious or political groups could establish and maintain a youth centre. Other

youth were obliged to organise “commercial” leisure activities (such as bar and dance evenings), because these activities were for them important income-generating sources. Government support was only related to the workload; high-quality youth work was neither supported, nor promoted. The subsidy was merely aimed at “maintaining an organisation” and not at stimulating pedagogical and social objectives (Faché 1997).

In the 1970s, a new concept of subsidy for youth centres was developed, which was meant to stimulate and support the diversification and qualitative deepening of youth centre functions. Two elements of the regulations concerning subsidies contributed to the realisation of these objectives, namely subsidisation of professionals and subsidisation dependent on the fulfilment of functions. A professional who supports a voluntary team of young collaborators was seen as essential for the promotion of a youth centre that wished to be more than a space where youngsters “could be young together” (Faché 1974). In order to allow youth centres to recruit professional workers, subsidies had to cover their salaries to a very great extent. Furthermore, the level of the operating subsidy of a youth centre would depend on the number of its functions and the extent to which these functions are realised.

Innovative and pedagogically oriented youth centres would thus have more opportunities (Faché 1997). In the new system, the subsidy covering salaries was raised to 75% of the total salary cost of one full-time or two part-time staff members. This financial support was defined according to the wage scale of a social worker. Youth centres operating with a considerable number of young people in problematic situations (for example, working with young people from working-class urban areas or with young immigrants) might be granted subsidies for two professionals. The subsidy would then amount to 95% of the first and 50% of the second salary. The second part of the subsidy was calculated on the basis of a qualitative evaluation of the realisation of functions and the participation of youngsters in these functions. A third fixed subsidy amount was granted for the rent and maintenance of the building.

One of the major effects of the new subsidy regulations was the accelerated professionalisation of youth centre work. However, the relative proportion of salary subsidies was much higher than expected compared to the limited budget. An increasing number of youth centres hired a professional youth worker. Their number rose between 1971 and 1974 from 34 to 104, respectively 17% and 54% of the total number of subsidised youth centres (see Figure 1). As a consequence, the bulk of the available budget for subsidies was gradually spent on the salaries of professionals. This left little money to support activities, and even less to stimulate new activities.

The professionalisation of youth (centre) work during the 1970s can be seen as an evolution, which no longer relates “expertise” to a pillar but to a group of youth work experts. “In retrospect we can say that this trend towards professionalisation undermined the ideological, pillar-bound embedding of youth centre work” (Abbeloos 2007, p. 67). This evolution fitted in with the broader climate of “depillarisation” of society, which had already started during the 1960s.

National and international co-operation

Since 1963, the youth centre workers in Flanders have gathered each year in order to discuss principally the pedagogical aspects of youth centre work. These week-long meetings are a source of inspiration for youth centre workers in pedagogical approaches. These study days led, in 1965, to the establishment of the Flemish Youth Centre Federation as an umbrella organisation for all youth centres in Flanders. Moreover, each of the three pillars had its own youth centre federation. At international level, youth centre workers gathered for the first time in Hamburg in 1963. From then on, every country in turn organised an international meeting. During the 1973 meeting in Hamburg, it was decided that every country would send an update of their bibliography on open youth work to Ghent University, which would act as a clearing house for open youth work. In 1976 these informal activities were institutionalised at international level through the establishment of a European Confederation of Youth Club Organisations, which organised conferences and exchanges of youth centre workers. Its secretariat is located in Antwerp.

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21. The early years of innovative approaches to youth information and counselling

Willy Faché

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the innovative services set up for the specific purpose of giving social support to young people by means of information and counselling, in other words youth information and counselling services. These innovative services originated in the mid-1960s. In this chapter, we will first analyse the circumstances determining the coming into existence of the innovative services in the 1960s in the United States, Canada and western Europe. Following this introduction, we analyse the discussion themes that were central to this youth service in the 1970s. To conclude, we highlight the working principles, which remained to a large extent unchanged through the years, and have a look at staff characteristics and some organisational models.

In the mid-1980s, youth information and counselling was an important topic on the agenda of the 1st European Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (Strasbourg, 1985), which included youth information and counselling among its priorities for future action and co-operation at the European level. As a result of one of the recommendations of this ministerial conference, the Council of Europe established, in 1986, the Committee of Experts on Youth Information in Europe. This is also the period in which the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) was established (in 1986). Marc Boes (in this volume) has already elaborated on ERYICA and the historical period from the late 1980s up to today, in the previous chapter. This chapter is limited to the period from the origin of the youth information and counselling centres in the 1960s to the mid-1980s. This chapter is based on our knowledge of the field in which we had been engaged from 1965 up until 1991. Our analysis draws on the documentation of the International Centre for Advancement of Innovative Youth Information and Counselling Services in Ghent, Belgium, and the findings of an international survey of “The aims, methods and organisation of youth information and counselling centres in Europe”, which we carried out in 1987-88 on behalf of the Committee of Experts on Youth Information in Europe of the Council of Europe (Faché 1987, 1990).

Determinants of the origin of innovative youth information and counselling services

It is not easy to discover the reason for the emergence of these innovative services. Why did these services come into being, and why then? The fact that partially different factors play a role in different countries makes things even more complicated. From the analysis of the literature on the inception of these innovative services and the interviews we had with the founders of these organisations, we think we can discern four determinants that played a role in the period of inception. For some services, certain determinants (for example, social criticism) played a role in their inception, whereas other determinants played a role in the course of their development. Other innovative services drew their inspiration from existing “models” when they came into being (Lascombes 1973). Depending on the degree to which a specific determinant plays a decisive role, an innovative service fulfils a supplementary role with respect to existing assistance services (for example, a service created because of the need for youth-specific provision) or it is a competing form of assistance (such as an initiative created because of criticism of existing forms of assistance).

The need for specific provisions for young people in problem situations

This was the determinant that inspired the Young People’s Consultation Centre in London in 1961. Probably the first walk-in centre for young people in Europe, which “offers [adolescents] the opportunity to talk to a professional person about problems that worry them” (Halpin 1967). “We chose, according the founder Laufer of this centre, a name which would be neutral and all-encompassing, and avoided any words which would give the impression of a clinic, or of illness. In order to assure a service which would be able to deal with those immediate problems for which adolescents sought help, and also be able to detect signs of more serious pathology, the intervening staff of the Centre consists of professional people who have all been trained in psychoanalysis and who have had previous experience in work with adolescents. There is also a psychiatric social worker, a medical adviser, a psychologist, and a legal adviser ...”. “The idea of having a ‘walk-in’ service, with professionally qualified staff, was based on the premise that there are many adolescents in the community who are in immediate need of help, but who would not seek help from many of the existing agencies. Adolescents are very frightened by the thought of mental illness, and agencies which are somehow linked to ‘illness’ or ‘trouble’ will not often make contact with those adolescents

who may be in serious need of help. Our belief was that if we created the opportunity for adolescents simply to come in and talk with somebody, we would be able to meet many adolescents at a time when intervention of some kind could well prevent serious social or psychological trouble later on in their lives” (Laufer 1964). The “walk-in” concept or “open door” concept of the Young People’s Consultation Centre in London appears to offer facilities which meet the needs of young people. In the second half of the 1960s, the open-door concept inspired the founders of the Centre for Youth Information and Counselling, Info Jeugd, in Ghent, and the Advice Centre for Young People (Jongerenadviescentrum) in Amsterdam.

Criticising the established, traditional assistance for youth

The creation in 1966 of the Centre for Youth Information and Counselling, Info Jeugd, in Ghent, and in 1969 the Advice Centre for Young People (Jongerenadviescentrum) in Amsterdam was inspired by a fundamental criticism against the then established, traditional youth assistance. This criticism was formulated in a creative way by developing an alternative. The notion of “alternative” was re-calibrated by these social innovations. The noun “alternative” now entered the language as an adjective meaning “based on entirely new principles, aimed at a set of other than the prevailing methods”. Their criticism concerns, among other things, the bureaucratic method (waiting lists, by appointment only), the official character of the assistance (start the counselling by asking the person’s name, address, age, daily work, etc.), the psychiatric-medical model of assistance, etc. These alternative assistance services developed not as complementary but rather as a competitive form of assistance with regard to the prevailing assistance (Faché 1990).

Innovative answers to new social problems

New somatic and psychological problems appeared among youngsters in the 1960s in the United States, Canada and western Europe. These problems seemed to be related to the new lifestyle of a considerable part of middle-class youth.

These middle-class youth saw themselves as participants in a cultural revolution rejecting a sterile, excessively consuming, overly technological, and alienating social order (Holleb and Abrams 1975). “Prominent among the standard-bearers of this revolution were the masses of freaked-out kids who began to invade the cities in the summer of 1967. These ‘hippies and freaks’ gathered in that summer in Boston and San Francisco like a convention of Gypsies to

smoke dope, drop acid, make love and listen to music". This youth were, according to a US research report (Glosscote et al. 1975), often unwelcome at traditional helping facilities, and clearly made to feel so:

The movement for alternatives in mental health and counseling arose as a part of and as a response to this time of changes. The founders of these first alternative services were in a unique position to bridge the gap between the two cultures. They were dropouts who had not completely dropped out. (Holleb and Abrams 1975)

Thus, alternative services sprang up. The free-clinic movement was born in Haight-Ashbury (San Francisco) in 1967. In the same period, walk-in counselling centres, hotlines, runaway houses, etc. were also started (Corner et al. 1972). According to the "Interim report of the Canadian Government's Commission of Inquiry into the Non-Medical Use of Drugs" (1971), in Canada too innovative services started. These services were described as (ibid. p. 417):

a human response to the social problems directly associated with the various life styles embraced by large numbers of Canadian youth. Some characteristics of this style are: a desire to travel, a disinterest in material things in and for themselves, less than usual concern with conventional standards of health and sanitation, and sexual and drug experimentation.

In the same period Release was established in London (1967). Release aimed at helping those young people who had been arrested for alleged drug offences (Coon and Harris 1969). This was a time when a number of drugs, especially cannabis, were gaining popularity with a particular segment of young people, giving rise to new social problems. Problems, as far as the police and courts were concerned, were about the question of how to treat this new kind of offender, but from the offender's point of view, were about securing their legal rights. In a direct response to this situation, Caroline Coon and Rufus Harris founded Release (D'Agapeyeff 1972). Release grew into a "life-support system" for at least a certain percentage of the typically young clientele coming to them. Linked with this it was the persuasion of Glosscote (1975, p. 3) "that we would find that getting into trouble with drugs is almost always a symptom of other serious kinds of problems in living – sometimes intolerable environmental circumstances, sometimes because one's 'head is not together', sometimes both". In all these countries, innovative services came into being attempting to provide, through innovative means, social, material and psychological assistance for young people with problems, who were not seen before and/or who were not dealt with properly .

Criticising the problem-causing societal structures

In 1969, in The Hague, the Sosjale Joenit originated from the so-called Experimentele Maatschappij, a flower-power youth group with radical-anarchist traits (Mulder-de Bruin 1978). At about the same time, the Bond voor Vrijheidsrechten in Amsterdam stimulated the

establishment of a local Release (1970), more or less after the London model. The Bond was an organisation of academics who were worried about the increasing intolerance of the “right” (De Kler and Van der Zande 1978).

Both organisations were of the opinion that assistance must lead to an insight into the freedom-hampering situations in society which, in turn, must result in actions in order to change the problem-causing societal structures and to prevent the causes of the individual problems (Arendshorst 1972; Moerkerk 1973).

Specific need of young people for comprehensive information

In the late 1960s in several countries, youth professionals argued in favour of comprehensive youth information centres in order to meet the need for information of young people that results from the following situation:

We live in a complex society that offers so many possibilities and choices. In this society young people need information and assistance to understand what is available and how they can use the services which exist. Without such assistance, many will not have the opportunity to live effective lives and contribute to their community. In order to try out new roles and experiences, young people have a tendency to distance themselves from adults, like their parents. While this distancing is important to the exercise and acceptance of independence, it often removes young people from advice and support which would assist them at this important stage of their development to independency. This fledgling autonomy must be supported by offering information and counselling in a setting which young people accept or in a language and format which take into account the problems of transition to adult life. We live in an information era. While a lot of information is available, it is usually written or presented in a way in which it is difficult to understand, and is not always relevant to the new members, the newcomers to the society. Moreover, the available information is very fragmented among numerous organisations and services. (Faché 1972, p. 9)

In Hilversum (the Netherlands, Jongeren informatie centrum) as well as in Munich (Germany, Jugendinformationszentrum (JIZ) 1967; Baumann 1988), the city youth service established a youth information centre on the basis of this motivation. The Centre d’Information Jeunesse in Paris was also established, in 1969, on the basis of this same view. It became the first centre of a network of 25 centres throughout France. This initiative of the French Ministry of Youth and Sports followed the finding in a national survey of young people in 1967 that there was a need for a comprehensive information centre where youngsters “can find information on all possible areas affecting their lives”.

Mutual influences

The history of innovative approaches to youth information and counselling services is a chronicle of change and exchange. The initial visions of the founders have been revised and revised again. One important factor that has produced the programmes’ redefinitions are

contacts with other innovative organisations. For example, Info Jeugd in Ghent drew from the start on criticising the established, traditional assistance of youth and the individual casework model. In line with a move to tackle the causes of clients' problems and thanks to the contacts with Release in London and Amsterdam and JAC Amsterdam, growing attention was paid to the societal causes of problems and social action.

At the international level, there were different conferences and meetings where people could exchange information. The 1st European Conference on Youth Information and Counselling Centres took place in 1972. This conference was not located in one place but travelled from Munich and on to Erlangen, Essen, Amsterdam, Amersfoort, Utrecht, Santpoort, Ghent, Mons and Brussels, where each time youth information and counselling centres were visited. The participants came from Germany, Netherlands, Belgium and Austria (Faché 1973). In 1975, at Tihange (Belgium), the 2nd European Conference on Youth Information and Counselling Centres was organised by the Centre National d'Information des Jeunes (Brussels).

In 1985, the Centre d'Information et de Documentation Jeunesse in Paris organised the first European Colloquium on Youth Information Centres in Marly-le-Roy. The French organisers used this international conference mainly to propagate and export the French concept of youth information centres. The French wanted to obtain international recognition of the concept and protect the logo (composed of the letters I and Y). During the colloquium, an International Liaison Committee was established, composed of representatives from different countries. This would lead to the creation of ERYICA in 1986, the secretariat of which is located in the Centre d'Information et de Documentation Jeunesse in Paris. Under pressure from the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK, counselling was included in the name of this network, which changed into the European Youth Information and Counselling Association, ERYICA. This international association, which was subsidised by France, continued to carry out the tasks of the centre in Ghent (see chapter by Marc Boes in this volume). Also international comparative studies stimulated the exchange of ideas and concepts during the 1970s and 1980s (Faché 1973; Keil 1982; Deichsel 1987).

Issues of debate in the 1970s and 1980s

There were three questions at issue during the 1st European Conference on Youth Information and Counselling Centres in 1972 that continued to be discussed throughout the 1970s:

- 1) advantages and disadvantages of a comprehensive service against subject-specialised services;
- 2) the differences between, and strong points of, three assistance concepts: youth information centres (YIC), youth counselling centres (YCC), and services that integrate youth information and counselling (YICC);
- 3) the social action of the youth information and counselling services.

Comprehensive or specialised services?

In order to provide adequate coverage, a comprehensive youth information or counselling agency will usually be necessary as a first resort or a last resort, somewhere to go when you do not know where to get information or help, or somewhere to go when other sources fail. In the 1960s comprehensive services came into being in the United States, Canada and western European countries. They are comprehensive according to the target population of young people. Such population-specific services are comprehensive as far as subject areas are concerned (Faché 1972; Deichsel 1987). This principle of comprehensive provision means that any young person may walk in with any problem. This important working principle concerns the intake criteria. This means that youth information and counselling services offer help to anyone in the whole range of psychosocial, medical, juridical, and various practical questions and problems of life. The result being that the client does not need to make a self-diagnosis before calling upon a youth information and counselling service. This is not always the case with subject-specialised services, in which every request for assistance has to be as precise and clear as possible. The current intake criteria of specialised services are “persons having questions or problems in the field of ...”, followed by a restrictive list of fields, such as sexuality. As most youth information and counselling services have very broad intake criteria, they are faced with a wide variety of persons and problems. This immediately raises the question as to how these counsellors are able to handle the great variety of questions.

Youth information or counselling services?

There are, depending on the kind of social support – information or counselling – three different types of comprehensive youth services: youth information centres (YIC), youth counselling centres (YCC) and services that integrate youth information and counselling (YICC).

Before dealing with the differences and the arguments in favour of each of these types, it is necessary to make a distinction between informing and counselling. Counselling means discussing with the person seeking assistance a problem formulated by this person in order to increase their insight into the problem. The counsellor helps the client explore thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and reach a clearer self-understanding, and then find and use their strengths so that they can cope more effectively with life by making appropriate decisions or by taking relevant action. In this context, counselling does not mean recommending something to someone, dissuading someone from doing something or persuading someone to do something, but is aimed at reinforcing the capacity to take action of the person seeking assistance. The discussion must enable this person to decide for themselves in matters that affect them and their situation (Lawton 1984). In this context, informing concerns so-called “social information” youngsters require to be able to act adequately in concrete life situations, in other words to be able to function socially and societally. Young people, in particular, encounter a lot of problems because they are “new” in our society.

In youth counselling centres, the focus is on counselling as it is described above. In youth information centres, workers give information via the telephone, letters, online or in face-to-face contact. Youngsters can also consult info-stands and databases on their own. A number of organisations consciously strive to integrate both kinds of support (information and counselling) in one service. For the public, some of the integrated youth information and counselling centres seem to be only information centres; they also call themselves such because that name implies a lower threshold for young people (for example, Info Jeugd in Ghent, Belgium).

Youth information centres can mainly be found in France, Spain, Portugal and Greece. In other European countries, counselling centres for young people or centres that integrate youth information and counselling in one service are found more often.

Social action

Problems become apparent in the life of the individual, but the causes of these problems are not always, at least initially, bound to the individual. Clients’ problems are frequently rooted in the society in which we live (for example, shortcomings in the situations as regards working, housing, school and leisure) and not in supposed individual inadequacies. In other words, many of the problems that young people experience are in fact collective as opposed to exclusively individual problems.

Youth information and counselling centres differ greatly in their vision of their role in relation to these societal causes of personal problems and thus in their conceptualisation of social action. Four different roles can be distinguished throughout Europe:

- Assistance to young people and social action are integrated. In a first approach, the workers should, over and above the giving of information or counselling, make their clients aware of the societal causes of the clients' problems. They should motivate and involve, when possible, their clients in social action, through which societal changes may occur. The workers regard their clients as people who report societal shortcomings and as potential collaborators in social action. Therefore, they are mainly interested in those groups of clients that report societal problems (for example, Sosjale Joenit in The Hague) (Mulder-de Bruin 1978).
- Assistance to young people and social action run parallel. To bring about societal changes is a difficult and complex process. From a second point of view, it is not justified to involve clients in this action because they already faced their personal problems. Indeed, clients will feel even more powerless if social action fails. But the defenders of this point of view feel that, in the long run, counselling only makes sense for the client and the counsellor if at the same time efforts are made to weaken or eliminate societal shortcomings. If not, it may be feared that counselling will operate as an alibi for the continuation of these societal problems. Contrary to the first viewpoint, social action is regarded as an activity that runs parallel to individual help and is undertaken by the counsellors without the clients' involvement (for example, Info Jeugd in Ghent and most JACs in the Netherlands) (De Turck and Martens 1978; De Beer 1980). If the clients in this approach are made aware of the societal basis of their problems, this is not in order to motivate them to social action, but in order to help them in their process of internalising new rights and opportunities (emancipatory help). It is known from experience (cf. women's emancipation) that people who have adapted to deprivation or discrimination oppose changes even if they will benefit in the long run.
- Assistance to young people and drawing attention to societal problems as a parallel task of workers. In this approach, counsellors should in the first place concentrate on helping the client. Yet the counsellor should report back to other appropriate organisations on which effects of their policies and societal structure are impairing the development of young people. This feedback function is seen as an additional function running parallel to the helping process.

- Only assistance to young people. From a fourth point of view, the only function of youth information and counselling centres is to give assistance to young people. The youth advocacy function, the feedback function, or social action are then the job of other agencies (most youth information centres).

All four of the above-mentioned approaches are to be found in youth information and counselling centres. However, they do not occur together in one centre. They constitute a basic choice. Most centres in Europe express their preference for assisting young people and, parallel to this, “putting pressure” by drawing attention to societal problems, but not including the client in social action (model 3).

Working principles of youth information and counselling services

Bringing youth information and counselling services under a common heading means that all of these services have some key features in common. These alternative forms of youth assistance differ fundamentally from established services of care, because of their low threshold. This low threshold is enhanced not only by the comprehensive service, but some other working principles contribute to the accessibility of youth information and counselling services: youth-friendly opening hours, immediate help, no fees, anonymity, confidentiality, client-centred approach and the informal attitude of the workers. We explain some of these principles in more detail and also focus on some other principles that grew out the innovative work in many centres (self-determination, prevention, outreach) (Faché 1987, 1990).

- Immediate help when the client asks for it: potential clients can just drop in and are helped. Many established services only provide help on an appointment basis. To provide help when help is desired, opening hours at youth information and counselling centres have been adapted to the students’ and working youth’s leisure time. This means being accessible in the evening as well as on Saturday afternoons.
- Confidentiality: many young people fear being caught in all kinds of dossiers and files. This fear is strong enough to keep them away from help in order to avoid identification. Therefore most centres provide anonymous help.
- A client-centred approach: instead of fitting the client’s question within the help offer of the service, the counsellor in a youth information and counselling centre takes their cue from the need of the client, and, together with the latter, tries to find a solution to it in a creative and innovative way. This also involves the client being the real principal, even

when minor clients are concerned and “parental authority” becomes an issue. A client-centred approach also means that the definition given by the client to his problem operates as a starting point for informing and counselling. It also means that the client will have to choose a possible solution, and that the first steps in the right direction lie with them.

- Self-determination: Biestek (1961, p. 103) provided a definition that is congruent with the definition of most workers: “The principle of client self-determination is the practical recognition of the right and need of clients to freedom in making their own choices and decisions The client’s right to self-determination, however, is limited by the client’s capacity for positive and constructive decision making, by the framework of civil law and by the function of the agency.”
- Preventive interventions: youth information and counselling centres have developed a variety of primary preventive interventions targeted at large numbers of young people. Some youth information and counselling centres have developed and disseminated “do-it-yourself information” in the form of leaflets on contraceptives, unemployment benefits, rental acts, drugs, etc. Next to these comprehensive youth information booklets, there are also more specialised leaflets or booklets dealing with one problem category (study grants, living alone in lodgings, unwanted pregnancy, etc.).
- Outreach: in Germany youth advice and counselling was for a long time seen as an integrated part of youth work in youth centres. These youth workers in youth centres and clubs are frequently approached by young people in trouble, but they do not always have the information or skills to help. In these cases, they must be able to use the staff at youth information and counselling services as consultants. This approach has also gained ground in other parts of Europe.

Staffing

Youth information and counselling centres range from those with a small group of volunteers providing a service one or two evenings a week to more substantial agencies staffed either by paid full-time and part-time personnel, or by larger teams of agency-trained volunteers coordinated by paid workers. The selection of both paid and unpaid workers greatly differ in the various agencies. According to the most extreme point of view, no selection is needed. In opposition to the advocates of no selection, the majority of the agencies operate standards of

selection, for example, professional training in psychology, psychiatry, social work or youth work. The structure of teams obviously varies according to the kind of service provided. In agencies focusing on counselling, there is a predominance of social workers, psychologists, and educators. The staff in information and documentation centres (for example, the CIDJ in Paris) primarily consist of documentalists, computer specialists and related professionals.

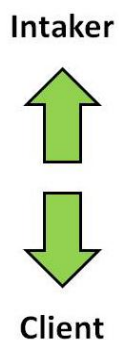
Consequently, the youth information and counselling services have shown some attempts to increase the participation of young people by using peer-group counsellors, successfully backed up by a network of professional counsellors (Mercier 1984).

There are also youth information and counselling centres exclusively staffed by young people indigenous to the youth communities they serve. Their requirements for staff have little to do with formal education and training programmes. They come close to being self-help groups.

Organisation of information and counselling activities

The following three models serve as a basis for the organisation of information and counselling activities:

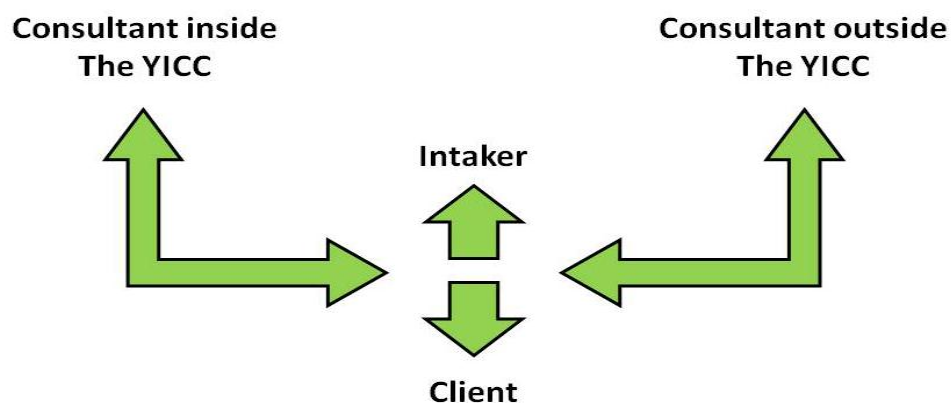
- A team of front-line workers operates on a rotational basis when clients arrive with any problem that they might have. The counsellor must work together with the client to achieve an effective amelioration of the client's problematic situation. Due to continuous training and constantly updated documentation and knowledge, these workers often succeed in helping their clients in an effective way.



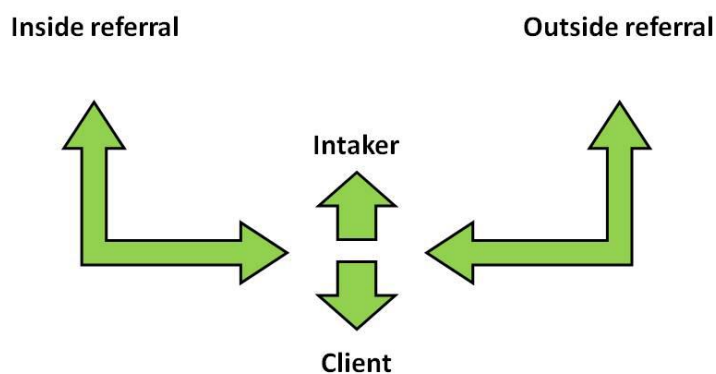
But the diversity of problems facing workers at a youth information and counselling centre sometimes leads to the situation that their knowledge or skills are insufficient to offer effective help. Problems regarding social law, for instance, mostly require an up-to-date

knowledge of legislation. Medical, psychiatric or juridical problems mostly require professional expertise.

In a second organisational model, a consultant is used by the initial contact person in order to help them with some aspects of a problem. The front-line workers make an appeal to the consultant when they become aware of the fact that they lack the expertise to offer effective assistance. The consultant can be a colleague with specific expertise (for example, a lawyer, a psychiatrist, a physician) who works in the same agency or a consultant from another helping agency.



- When the contact person feels unable to provide appropriate assistance, then they can refer the client to a more experienced colleague inside or outside the agency. This is mostly the case for medical, legal, psychiatric, drug and employment problems.



In the youth information and counselling centres, referral shows some specific characteristics. Firstly, innovative centres never refer a client to an agency but always to a particular person. Secondly, the initial contact person remains responsible for the client, when referring them to a specialist. The decision to refer the client is a joint one. If this referral does not yield the anticipated result, the counsellor must be “on hand” to receive the client again and to go

through things a second time in order to find an alternative solution. In this way, it is possible to avoid the client getting lost. Therefore, the youth information and counselling centres make an agreement with outside helping agencies that the client may be referred back to the worker if the agency is not able to offer effective help to the client. In this respect, youth information and counselling services differ from established services that constantly refer clients to another service without referring them back to the original service. Moreover, the worker in a youth information and counselling centre tries to sustain an open relation with the client he/she refers to a specialist by telling the client that they can always return “if it does not work out”.

The above-mentioned organisational models do not play the same role in the helping strategy of each youth information and counselling centre. The degree to which one of the models is dominant strongly depends on the expertise of the contact team, the scope of the intake criteria, and the policy of the agency. In certain centres, referral of clients occurs so frequently that they operate rather like a switchboard in the network of helping services. In order to limit referral as much as possible, other services invite specialised professionals (such as lawyers, physicians, career counsellors) to come once a week, on a fixed day and time, and help young people with specific problems. In the leaflet distributed by the centre, the days and times this assistance is directly available in the agency are mentioned.

Evaluation

If we were to evaluate youth information and counselling centres during the early years, we could say that these agencies introduced many innovative elements into informing and counselling young people. This is due to the fact that the fundamental point of departure of most comprehensive youth information and counselling centres is that they are client centred rather than method centred. Instead of fitting the client’s question within the method of the agency, counsellors in the youth information and counselling services take their cue from the needs of the client, and, together with the latter, try to find a solution to the client’s problem in a creative and innovative way. Innovative services are open to experimentation with different methods. They are not constrained by tradition (Faché 1989).

The following innovations are illustrative: immediate assistance when it is requested, whereas it was normal to make appointments for a specific day and time; anonymous assistance instead of the traditional questions about name, address, and age; the client (even if they are a minor) is the one who defines the task of the worker, whereas it was normal that the parents of

the minor did so; assistance free of charge; attention paid to societal causes of particular problems instead of looking for individual inadequacies and adapting the client to the demands of society; the continuing responsibility of the worker in case of referral of the client instead of being content to simply refer the client elsewhere; treating the client as an articulate and competent person in relation to their own life situation instead of being patronising; not using too specific intake criteria; and systematic attention paid to preventive strategies.

As the workers enjoy a large degree of freedom of action and are exceptionally responsive to the needs of their clients, it is the youth information and counselling centres that have drawn attention to specific problems and the societal causes of particular problems that have been ignored by traditional helping agencies. They have also enlarged the scope of the service to youth in distress.

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