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# Social exclusion and youth work - from the surface to the depths of an educational practice

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## Abstract

The current dominant discourse on social exclusion and youth work depicts inclusion in youth work as an instrument for inclusion in other more pivotal institutions of society. Recent studies have shown, however, that the participation of socially vulnerable young people does not necessarily yield the anticipated inclusions. Suggestions are subsequently been put forward to bring more structure into youth work initiatives. In this article, we assert that this technical reasoning fails to acknowledge the complexity of social reality. By means of a social pedagogical case study of the coming into being of a Flemish youth work field, we show how youth work actors in Flanders have come to reinforce the social exclusions they were so eager to solve. Our findings raise questions about individualistic fallacies and cultural biases in youth work practices and policies that have relevance well beyond the Flemish context.

## Introduction

The 1990s signified the rise of a participation and inclusion discourse in social policies at the European level and in the European member states. The rethinking of the welfare state in terms of pushing back unemployment brought along the presupposition of active and responsible citizens (Harris 1999); associational life was reassessed as a corner stone of democracy (Putnam 1995); and there was a shift from concerns about financial deprivation to concerns about 'social exclusion' as the entanglement of processes of marginalisation in multiple domains (labour, housing, health, education, culture ... ) (O'Brien and Penna 2008). The current intensified policy attention to youth work can be situated against this backdrop. Irrespective of the diversity in youth work (classification) practices across Europe, there is a shared preoccupation with the leisure participation of 'socially excluded' youngsters. Inclusion in youth work is considered as an instrument to facilitate inclusion in other, more pivotal, spheres of social life, in particular in education, politics and (future) employment (HM Treasury 2007, European Commission 2009). This consideration also manifests itself in academic studies; a growing body of research states that 'structured' leisure furnishes young people with a unique amalgam of skills that help them adapt to the demands of societal life. Youth work initiatives fit this category insofar as they offer activities that have fixed time schedules and clear rules, that challenge and confirm the capacities of young people and that are supervised by responsible leaders (Mahoney and Stattin 2000). Young people who participate in such youth work activities are found to have better academic outcomes and fewer behavioural problems to show higher self-esteem and to be more likely to get involved in political and social causes (Fredricks and Eccles 2006, Busseri and Rose-Krasnor 2009). These positive outcomes, however, are mostly found among those who are already included in other spheres of social life (Hooghe 2003b). The most marginalised young people are less compelled to participate in structured or 'prescribed' leisure activities (Tiffany 2008). Youth work aimed at this group, mostly open youth clubs that are by definition loosely structured, seems only capable of 'cooling out the inappropriate aspirations of vulnerable youth' (Walther 2003), 'preventing boredom' (Furlong *et al.* 1997) and 'providing a safe place in the short term'

(Halpern *et al.* 2000). It is found to be ineffective (Robson and Feinstein 2007) and even counterproductive with regard to social inclusion (Mahoney *et al.* 2001). Researchers' advise increasing the participation of marginalised groups in structured youth work or gradually upgrading initiatives that are lacking structure (Mahoney *et al.* 2004).

This straightforward chain of (pedagogical) reasoning somehow misses the point of the complex reality in which youth work intervenes. Moreover, it disregards the fact that youth work cannot be placed outside this reality. Youth work is a social field; as people from different background have a part in the shaping of a youth work field, power dynamics from the exterior will definitely enter this field (Bourdieu 1993b). In this article, we adopt a 'social' pedagogical perspective to look beyond the superficial positive relation between (structured) youth work participation and social inclusion. By means of an overview of the occurrences in Flemish youth work history that built up to reproduce socio-economic divides, we shed light on the intertwining between this educational practice and processes of inclusion and exclusion in broader society. This case study of youth work in Flanders touches upon power issues that might play a central part in youth work fields in other countries as well.

## **Introduction to the Flemish case**

Flemish youth work is defined by decree as 'non-commercial, voluntary socio-cultural work organised in the leisure sphere for or by young people and under educational guidance for the advancement of the full development of young people' (Flemish Government 2008). Notwithstanding this inclusive definition, socio-economical divides are mirrored within youth work boundaries. Two large sectors in Flemish youth work each embody a different population group. The initiatives that make up the first sector, the Flemish 'youth movements', are predominantly populated by young people from the middle classes. These nationwide recreational organisations (including Scouting, Catholic Student Youth, Catholic Rural Youth ... ) are the modern successors to youth organisations that were founded before WWII. Youth movements are usually uniformed and they are notable for the fact that young people themselves, above the age of 16, run the local groups. The second sector is called 'youth social work'. Youth social work includes open youth work initiatives such as these that were founded in the 1950s and 1960s as a response to the absence of working-class youth and young adults in the youth movements. As opposed to youth movements, open forms of youth work require no regular or timely attendance and do not demand participation in prescheduled group activities. This sector also includes initiatives that were originally instigated by social workers and charity institutions to provide disadvantaged children with a recreational offer. Youth social work currently unites initiatives aimed at socially excluded youngsters, such as children from parents who are in poor labour market positions, children in chronic poverty and children from immigrant families who are yet without prospects. Most of youth social work is run by professional workers.

In Flanders, youth workers from both these sectors are concerned with issues of social exclusion as these issues spring from the contexts in which they work or are raised by policymakers. They find it hard to provide adequate answers. While youth movements are believed to create multi-competent and democratic citizens without much effort, youth social work is struggling to gain credibility as a positive influence in the lives of young people. While youth social work reaches some of the most disadvantaged young people, youth movements have to put in great effort in order to attract only a fraction of young people from socially marginalised groups. This boils down to the following paradox: 'youth work that works is not accessible and accessible youth work doesn't work' (Coussée *et al.* 2009). The

Flemish situation captures some core elements of the international discussion on youth work and social exclusion. The 'youth movements', on the one hand, resemble the positive youth development contexts as has been put forward in academic studies and policy documents because their method of youth work is *believed* to produce inclusionary effects. 'Youth social work', on the other hand, resembles those forms of youth work that have often been subject to doubt in international literature. Precisely, because this youth work succeeds in reaching socially excluded youth groups, it easily ends up in the dock, having to come up with *proofs* of effectiveness.

In the following sections, using the field concept of Bourdieu (1993a) as an analytic tool, we first describe the coming into being and 'autonomisation' (i.e. the defining of a distinct identity) of the Flemish youth work field; second, its differentiation; and last, the eventual polarisation of this field. Throughout the overview, we single out the socially constructed constraints which underlie the current youth work paradox.

## **The coming into being of the Flemish youth work field**

### **Predecessors of Flemish youth work**

The onset of youth work in Flanders, as in many other European countries, is closely connected with the rise of a broad socio-political movement that sought to answer 'the social question' by means of social work initiatives (Verschelden *et al.* 2009). Schooling and cultural uplifting were considered adequate instruments to alleviate social problems that were related to the excesses of nineteenth century industrial capitalism. The maladjusted behaviour of the unwashed was the focus of intervention (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.* 1990, Depaepe 1998). As the enlightened belief that young people needed special care and education had also gained considerable support, the youth category within the working classes would be at the heart of new initiatives that compensated for an incomplete formal education (Selten 1993). The establishment of the first Roman Catholic youth groups in Flanders (circa 1850) can be understood in this context. These local 'patronages' were directed by benevolent citizens and parish priests and provided working-class youngsters with healthy recreation and development.

Besides the initiatives that were targeted at young people, they also organised themselves, often being inspired by political themes. For one, the social question gave also birth to youth self-organisations from within the ranks of working-class militancy. As young working-class people started work much sooner than their middle-class peers, they had the same concerns as their elders and would often fight side by side for better living conditions and opportunities. A well-known example of such a youth movement is the Socialist Young Guards (1886) (Beyen 2001, Collignon 2001). Another youth movement, supported by more prosperous people, was the Flemish Student Movement (1875). This predecessor of Flemish youth work emerged from within catholic secondary schools and was involved in the struggle for the reappraisal of the Flemish language against a powerful francophone elite in Flanders (Vos and Gevers 2009). At the turn of the nineteenth century, these self-organisations also became subject to a patronising motion. This was related to the increasingly popular image of young people as a different, unpredictable and immature group. With regard to the Young Guards, it might have also been related to the fear of the socialists to lose their toilsome accumulated benefits. In any case, the Young Guards were encouraged to take part in recreational and educational activities and to hold their fighting spirit until they were grown up (Collignon 2001). The militancy of the Flemish Student Movement was likewise dampened by its adult fellow

combatants. Van Cauwelaert (1932, own italics), a prominent leader of the Flemish movement and later Minister of State, noted that it had never been the intention to 'send our boys *prematurely* into political disputes'.

### **Further towards 'one youth' work**

After WWI, the mainstream further abandoned the stake of countering social and material inequalities. As in the neighbouring countries, youth work also distanced itself from the methods and purposes of formal education. Playful outdoor activities provided an attractive offer in youth's extending out-of-school and out-of-work time. The development of generic (social) skills and identity formation became important identity markers. Youth work became a third milieu for socialisation, in addition to the family and the school or factory (Giesecke 1981, Selten 1993, Coussée 2009). Indeed, leisure time became a distinct element in the life of the masses (Tinkler 2003), but two other developments reinforced the observed change in youth work. First, the star of developmental psychology was in the ascendant. The increasing continuation of formal education into secondary education and the expanding leisure time created the conditions for firm establishment of the adolescent as a new 'species'. Youthful protest was toned down to a normal temporary phase. Youth work became a guardian of an untroubled normal (middle-class) adolescence (Koops and Zuckerman 2003). A second important influence was that of scouting. Around 1910, Baden-Powell's scouting initiative reached Flanders. This was an outdoor recreational training method to help lower-class young people to become strong dependable individuals. The pedagogical principles of scouting were found to be innovative: self-determination (giving young people responsibilities) and 'learning by doing' (Coussée 2009).

These influences, together with increasing Roman Catholic anxiety about communism and secularisation, altered the shape of Flemish youth work. The Roman Catholic Church founded new gender- and class-segregated youth organisations. In these organisations, students and working-class 'adolescents' would both have a third (supplementary and/or corrective) milieu that would enable them to be young together, to experiment and consequently grow gradually into adulthood and society. Notwithstanding some resistance, most existing youth work organisations went along with the new promising youth work fashion. The term 'youth movement' remained in use in Flanders, but it no longer referred to youthful anti-establishment activities, but to the use of an uniformed youth work method (Coussée 2009).

The myth of a self-conscious and (harmless) idealistic youth movement participant became part of common belief in the 1930s and onwards. After WWII, Van der Bruggen and Picalausa (1946, p. 116), two prominent leaders of the Baden-Powell Scouts of Belgium, wrote in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*:

*[T]he leaders of the youth movements are now taking a definitive responsibility towards the needs of youth in this changed world: physical health and fitness, moral and character education, vocational guidance and apprenticeship, education toward family responsibility, and an adequate civic education adapted to the technical and moral needs of democracy. The youth movements are firmly decided to help solve all these problems by the influencing of the public opinion and of the government, by a close co-operation with one another, by the extension of their action to the mass of youth, and by the complete and well-integrated education they aim to give to their members, alongside the family and the school [ ... ]*

## **Opposing 'organised' and 'unorganised' youth**

The rise of the youth movements in the interwar period continued in the decades after WWII in the form of increased membership. The Flemish youth work field became more and more based on the idea of youth work as a third socialisation context that supported the socially desired trajectories to adulthood. Accordingly, the youth work field rejuvenated itself. It was believed that younger children should be attracted in order to maximise the educational potential of youth work. Likewise, it was suggested that youth work should be driven by young leaders, who would be in tune with the desires of other young people. Youth work also influenced the initiation of a national youth policy<sup>1</sup> in 1945 and its further development within the new frame of the welfare state. Nevertheless, the trend towards elitism in youth work continued. First, as the focus was largely on enlarging the member group according to age, the group narrowed in terms of class. Even youth organisations that were traditionally oriented towards working-class young people lost members in the lower ranks of society. Second, Belgian youth work policy was predominantly a 'youth movement' policy. It was modelled on the (ideal- typical) socio-cultural leisure activities of the college student. Participation in the youth movement became an educational value in its own right and a normative distinction between 'organised' (participating in the youth movement) and 'unorganised' youth (denoting only the socially excluded non-participants) became firmly established in common discourse. Youth movement ideology drifted further away from the life experiences of working-class young people (Coussée 2008).

*The coming into being of the Flemish youth work field* bears witness to power dynamics that exceed the demarcations of this particular field. Nonetheless, youth work distinguished itself by symbolically retreating from this reality. Youth work's take-off entailed the gradual confinement of very different youth groupings into one 'youth territory', disconnected from their capacity for political action. A youth- adult relationship was entrenched within the youth work field and, this way, the power relations between different population groups became increasingly indisputable within the boundaries of a pre-eminently safe and peaceful territory. Youth work really became a distinct field as it created its own rules and stakes that were different from these of formal education (cf. Bourdieu 1993a), that is, recreation, being young together and integral personal development as a preparation for entering the real world. This youth movement method was, however, strongly influenced by the middle classes. The concealed lines between the field of power and the field of youth work eventually turned youth work participation into a marker of cultural aptitude.

## **Differentiation and hierarchisation of youth work**

In the 1950s and 1960s, Flemish youth work evolved into a more or less stable field, but outside this youth work territory, the world was changing. First, there was the import of the 'American way of life' (cigarettes, Coca-Cola, chewing gum, dance halls ... ). Later on, increasing affluence led to a general increase in (affordable) consumer goods and recreational opportunities. Youth work was put forward as a superior 'cultural' alternative to commercial consumption and public entertainment (cf. Zinnecker 1995). This alternative, however, gradually lost the monopoly of young people's leisure time. Individualisation, secularisation and commercialisation trends jeopardised the (numeric) position of youth work. Similar to the experiences of neighbouring countries, it also became clear that Flemish youth work was biased towards middle-class young people (cf. Müller *et al.* 1964). The ideology of 'equal opportunities', encompassed in the growing welfare state, and the emerging empirical studies on young people's problems and needs led to prioritising 'youth-at-risk' in discourses on youth

service. From the 1960s to 1970s, youth workers not only started to experiment greatly with new (co-educational) methods, but also new less demanding forms of youth work, 'open youth work', to reach the growing mass of unorganised (older and working-class) youth. This open youth work was characterised by a free access at any time. No membership was required. In case of a concentration of socially excluded young people, professionals were attracted to come and staff this open youth work that was perceived as 'less demanding' for young people, but all the more demanding for youth workers. The differentiation of the youth work field also encompassed the proliferation of initiatives that originated from the practices of social workers and other social-minded actors. New youth clubs, hobby clubs, youth sport activities, youth assistance centres and initiatives for socially excluded target groups enriched the youth work field.<sup>2</sup>

At first sight, the work towards equal opportunities had really changed the field of youth work. The old aim of the patronages to alleviate social hardship had re-entered the youth work field. In the main, however, equal opportunities were translated into the opportunity for socially excluded young people to have a part in established (thus middle-class) educational practices. The Flemish youth movement was the shining example for the new forms of youth work in the field. The latter could only legitimise their youth work identity (towards policymakers) in the attempt to establish a bridge between the youth movement and unorganised youth. For all that, transfers of socially marginalised young people to the youth movements were rare (Coussée 2008).

*In this part*, we came across an interesting connection between youth work and social exclusion. We already saw how youth work became a distinct field. As a result, however, the youth movements lost their attraction for working-class youth. The consolidation of a middle-class leisure culture within a separate 'youth territory' - the 'third milieu' approach - put into motion a biased process of inclusion and exclusion. The field became differentiated, but forms of youth work for the hard-to-reach were put at the bottom of the Flemish youth work hierarchy. What Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p. 199) wrote about formal education in the 1960s, was also true for Flemish youth work at the time: 'It is precisely its relative autonomy that enables [the traditional educational system] to make a specific contribution towards reproducing the structure of class relations, since it need only obey its own rules in order to obey, additionally, the external imperatives defining its function of legitimating the established order'. Indeed, the homogenisation of pathways to adulthood and the middle-class standard of leisure became deep-seated within a seemingly neutral youth work identity. The Flemish youth work field favoured the already included while this exclusionary mechanism was hidden under the disguise of an universal youth concept.

## **The polarisation of the field**

### **The youth work definition on shifting sand**

In the 1970s, Flemish youth work was shaken for the first time to its foundations. Decreasing membership figures, the ideological outburst of the late 1960s and the economic crisis worked together to put pressure on the established youth work definition. A first instance of this was the surfacing of the youth work's primary tension between individual adjustment and social change, which was triggered by the political atmosphere. In the late 1960s, the belief emerged that social intervention could no longer be about adapting people to the existing order (patronising), but should be about challenging structural constraints (cf. Thompson 2002).

This old antithesis gave rise to disputes and even secessions in the established youth movements.

Nevertheless, as the big youth movements largely remained in their familiar youth territory, the real danger for this 'youth' work came from the changed youth concept. The struggles in the youth work field at the time not only bear witness to overall political tensions, but were also reminiscent of the altered social position of youth and the then (social) pedagogical plea for the revision of the educator- pupil relationship. The priority given to the perspective of young people meant that the distinction between organised and unorganised youth became irrelevant. The point of organising a strictly leisure-oriented youth service was questioned (Giesecke 1984). These initially emancipatory approaches departing from young people's life experiences were then smothered by the economic depression. Financial state support for informal education became more difficult and youth work initiatives were urged to show their added value. Furthermore, society no longer held pedagogical expectations of young people, but focussed on skills and competences that were valuable from the perspective of integration in the labour market (Van Ewijk 1994). These evolutions are very similar to what happened in the UK, in particular, Thatcher's effort via the Manpower Services Commission to shift the focus of youth work from social education to social and life skills (Davies 1999).

### **Casting out youth social work**

The Flemish youth movements (still granted state support) reacted to these challenges in a rather self-willed manner. They complained about the government's preoccupation with youth welfare issues and its neglect of 'genuine' youth work. The after war defining characteristics were revived in a defensive reaction. 'Real' youth work was situated in leisure time; it was youth-oriented and youth-driven, general, informal, recreational and group-oriented. Youth work was said to contribute to the personal and social competences of young people, to be emancipatory, precisely because it did not have to focus on (economic) outcomes. Initiatives that exceeded the third milieu by developing activities that connected to broader working, learning and living conditions of young people were no longer seen as 'real' youth work. As a matter of fact, youth assistance centres were transferred from the (Belgian) youth service to the (Flemish) welfare department during the regionalising of the Belgian state (Coussée 2008). The remaining initiatives in the youth work field became polarised. On the one hand, there were the 'traditional' youth movements who could afford to withdraw themselves (anew) from social concerns, because of their privileged position. On the other hand, there were the various types of youth work for socially excluded youth. Professional youth workers did feel that the organisation of non-committal activities (parties, drop-in, and so on) was an effective way to reach 'their kids'. Nonetheless, they were uncertain about how to bring social change if their activities did not surpass plain leisure and recreation (cf. Van der Zande 1990). Moreover, as the new forms of youth work were still judged on the basis of youth movement criteria, they were in a rather weak position to defend their interests. This explains their striving for separate recognition by the state. In short, by holding on to a youth work definition that was thought emancipatory but led to a loss of political and pedagogical vigour, the youth movements initiated a replication of socio-economic inequalities within the youth work field.



## **A polarised field and the youth work paradox**

In the 1990s, associational life was rediscovered as a place to bring about democratic citizenship and social inclusion for young people (Putnam 1995, Hall *et al.* 1999). This idea was backed up by empirical studies on the positive effects of youth participation (Hooghe 2003a, Fredricks and Eccles 2006).

In Flanders, this participation discourse supported the two-track approach towards youth work initiatives. Pedagogical expectations re-entered the youth work field. The abandoned distinction between 'organised' youth and 'unorganised' youth made way for the fashionable terms 'participation' and 'non-participation'. The Flemish youth movements seemed to meet the - familiar, but revived - expectations rather easily. They had survived the hard times, refashioned their rules, regained members and were finally celebrated for their cultural potential. Once more, they were encouraged to make their wholesome recreational offer accessible for socially excluded young people. Youth social work, on the other hand, fell between two stools. In one respect, it had a derived youth work identity being asked by policymakers to provide qualitative recreational group activities. In another respect, their youngsters - once working class, now belonging to new socially excluded population groups - remained at the heart of concerns for social problems. The social education of these youngsters was considered a crucial task. Because some would have doubts about the prospects of participation in youth social work, a popular strategy was to direct youngsters to 'more mainstream' initiatives, risking to have them fall beyond the reach of social services altogether (Van Assche 2003, Coussée *et al.* 2009).

*In the last parts of this youth work history*, it became obvious that Flemish youth work itself was an active agent in the construction of the youth work paradox (youth work that works is not accessible, accessible youth work does not work). As a final reaction to the challenges of the 1970s, youth movements withdrew into the leisurely 'third milieu' they had claimed for themselves in the preceding decades. Youth social work, for its part, went looking for a place of its own as it was cast out from the youth work field. This way, self-preserving actions of youth workers within the two camps contributed to a further distinction between youth movement work and youth social work. Today, youth-led youth movements and professional youth social work seem largely unable to close the historical gap in order to jointly address social processes of marginalisation. In addition, many youth workers and policymakers still carry out the normative 'third milieu' logic of the youth work field, thereby unable to go beyond a preoccupation with capturing socially excluded individuals in so-called fun and 'instructive' youth (movement) activities. As a result, youth work (policy) risks missing out on the opportunity to go beyond the mere management of leisure activities and to really get involved in young people's divergent quests to find a dignified place in/against contemporary social structures (cf. Foreman 1987). On the other hand, in the preceding sections we also touched upon tensions in the heritage of Flemish youth work, such as tensions between individual adjustment and social change, between youth as not-yet-adult and youth as active participant, between targeting and universalism, between being led by agency and oriented towards life experience, between being aimed at self-preservation and being aimed at social justice and equality ... This ambiguous nature of the Flemish youth work field allows for escape routes from the historically constructed reproduction mechanism in Flemish youth work. Indeed, it allows for imagining youth work as a social actor with the potential to question 'the world as it is' on behalf of young people, including its own constraints (cf. Shaw 2008).

## **Discussion: changing the terms of the youth work discussion?**

Our Flemish youth work is rather unique because it is very much influenced by the youth movement method, resulting in a strong focus upon leisure and recreation. It also reflects a corporatist policy in which socially excluded youth groups and affluent youth groups are joint together. This last singularity, however, makes it more easy to see (and challenge) exclusionary mechanisms that might also be present, but are difficult to discern, in places where provisions for socially excluded young people rest under a separate heading. With regard to the international discussion on youth work practices and social exclusion, our 'Flemish' study contributes to this discussion in a relevant way: it prompts youth work actors to think beyond the individual adjustment of socially excluded young people.

For one, youth work is not a neutral territory. In this article, we have shown how (Flemish) youth work is not a versatile instrument for social inclusion, but part of social life and therefore inevitably a co-carrier of processes of exclusion (and inclusion) in society at large. This way, power inequalities from the dominant fields of social life tend to become reproduced within and by youth work. Although the specific circumstances of the Flemish youth work paradox do not allow the making of bold generalisations, we do think it is fruitful to apply the 'active agent' concept to study youth work policies and practices abroad. It has been argued that middle-class images of pathways to adulthood also affect youth work practices in other European countries. For instance, cross-national tendencies of standardisation and formalisation lead to paradoxes similar to these in Flanders: the most difficult to reach are excluded from youth policy because it becomes too difficult to reach the anticipated outcomes with them (Colley and Hodgkinson 2001, Davies and Merton 2009). However, as in Flanders, counterproductive mechanisms may also result from (re)actions of youth workers themselves. Can youth workers escape from judging socially excluded young people and their families on middle-class norms - especially if these norms have worked for them (see also Starr 2003)? And what happens if youth workers distance themselves completely from social policies? Do they not unwittingly enable the worst of these policies (see also Lorenz 2005)? Because youth work practice is inevitably involved in the shaping of society, youth workers need to reflect upon the larger significance of their interference in young people's lives (see also Giesecke 1964).

Finally, the core implication of this study concerns the limitations of the discussion we started from. In this discussion on youth work and social exclusion, the seeming main problem is an inability to contribute substantially to the inclusion of socially excluded young people. Our study raised the understanding that this formulation of the problem is only obvious and true within a certain decontextualised logic. Suitable leisure participation and successful social inclusion is mostly defined by the privileged in society, regardless of the specific histories, needs and opportunities of the young people involved. Indeed, this article shows that the pursuit of social inclusion in such a way also brings along exclusionary mechanisms. As Good Gingrich (2006, p. 314) puts it: 'Is inclusion, to the degree that it is made possible for them, preferable to the exclusion that was defined as such for them?' Moreover, to go beyond a logic of reproduction in youth work practice, policy and research is to go beyond a discourse that narrows down social progress to the inclusion of uprooted individuals. This understanding puts to the fore questions that go beyond predisposed questions on institutional efficacy and individual mobility and questions that encompass a structural reading of obstacles to humanization (cf. Freire 1970). How do contemporary youth (work) policies and youth work arrangements relate to a striving for more equality and justice in society as a whole?

## Notes

1. In Flanders, we had a national 'Belgian' youth policy until 1970. In 1970, in a first reform of the Belgian state, youth work policy was transferred to the cultural regions: the French-speaking, German-speaking and Dutch-speaking (Flemish) community.
2. This differentiation of the field still continued in the following decennia. Especially youth work with socially excluded groups expanded.

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