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The European Youth Forum is a European international organisation, which was established in 1996 by national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations.

The European Youth Forum endeavours to serve the interests of young people from all over Europe.

The European Youth Forum is the only representative and democratic structure in Europe, made up of youth organisations, towards international institutions (mainly the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations).

The European Youth Forum has 88 members made up of national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations, which are federations in themselves, bringing together tens of millions of young people from all European countries.

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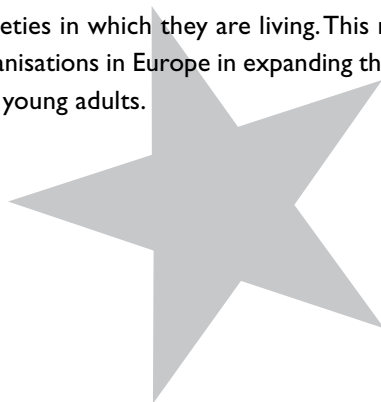
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Education has been regarded in this century as one of the key factors promoting development, social cohesion and individual prosperity. During the course of this century the education of youth has been the main vehicle through which societies have responded to changing situations. On the one hand, education and training systems have made impressive progress over the second half of this century, but on the other hand, the further we move from the era of industrial societies, the more difficult it is for conventional education systems to meet the needs of individuals and communities.

The need for change in the ways in which education systems work is widely supported. If we want education to be effective in the new millennium, education must become more open and use a wider range of resources than those are currently employed in the existing infrastructures. Education has to draw on human, social, cultural, financial and information resources from the whole of society. However, there is also a need to make education an attractive means of stimulating and developing young people's attitudes and skills to learn and understand for themselves, throughout their lives.

Lifelong learning is essential for everyone as we move into the new millennium. In order to achieve this vision of learning societies we need to strengthen the foundations for learning throughout the life of all citizens. It is essential in particular, to redesign schools and support the growth of learning arrangements other than formal schools or higher education institutions. Within the lifelong learning framework, learning will take place in communities, workplaces, families and through recreational activities. A paradigm of the learning society where lifelong learning is an important value, requires a shift of mind for all of us. We need to leave behind our belief in fundamentally organised units of education and adopt a vision of a global community where the learner is an autonomous intelligent individual who has the will and the skill to learn from any situation around him or her.

This monograph discusses the meaning and value of education other than that offered by formal schools or higher education institutions. It aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on the role of so-called "non-formal education" in the overall development of youth and the societies in which they are living. This monograph specifically focuses on the role of youth organisations in Europe in expanding the spectrum of learning opportunities for adolescents and young adults.



● 1 THE PURPOSE AND AIMS OF THIS STUDY

This first chapter introduces the study. We begin by introducing the set of guiding assumptions that allow us to focus properly on the topic. Secondly, we describe the purpose of this study and the its overall aims. Finally, the illustration of the methodological issues together with the data that we used, serve to establish a basis for further work.

● 1.1 Some assumptions and the conceptual framework

Youth organisations all over Europe are playing a more important role in policy decisions within national structures, as well at an international level. Furthermore, an increasing number of national and international organisations are offering participatory activities for young people in which they can acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are not properly provided by their schools. In this study, we take a look at how the activities and programmes of youth organisations support the overall development of individuals, their communities, and finally, societies. Hence, the focus of this study is on the educational activities of youth organisations targeted at adolescents and young adults while geographically speaking, this study concentrates on the European region.

The key concept here is non-formal education, a concept that appears to be both multi-faceted and vague in terms of terminological definitions. An analytical review of existing literature shows that it is easy to see how the concept of non-formal education has been used for different purposes, in a number of contexts, and arising out of varying traditions. Hence, this monograph analyses the meaning of non-formal education in terms of conceptual understanding and operational functions, in order to establish coherent use of this term in the context of youth organisations.

Finally, we assume that it is necessary for a reader to place the need for, and the importance of, non-formal education in general, and activities and programmes provided by the youth organisations in particular, within a wider context. In other words, it is useful to analyse and recognise the situation in which formal schooling finds itself today, given the demands of the information society, multicultural communities, technological possibilities, and the changing nature of the world of work, to mention but a few. Therefore, we assume that on the eve of the new millenium, it is becoming increasingly unlikely for formal school and higher education to be able to fulfil the various needs of younger generations. A powerful reason for emphasising the importance of non-formal education in general, and youth organisations as dynamic vehicles in particular, is the assumption that despite huge investments in school reform and development initiatives, formal school systems alone are not able to meet the educational requirements of young people.

The main focus of this study is on non-formal education within the context of youth organisations. In order to have a comprehensible discussion we need to agree on what we mean by non-formal education and youth organisations. The definition of non-formal education will follow later. In this study, youth organisation means any social organisation that is set up in order to serve all young people and where young people are in charge of the operational structure.

The term youth does not just refer to a specific age group or social organisation in society, but also to quality of social life in the organisation. When speaking about youth in this text, we mean young people from adolescence up to young adults, that is, the age group from 14 to 30 years of age.

● 1.2 The purpose and aims

There is a large number of studies that have gained knowledge and insights into non-formal education activities and the role of non-formal education. Some of the studies have compared non-formal learning arrangements with those provided by formal schools and other institutions, while others have studied non-formal education within the context of development, particularly in developing countries. One common feature found in most of the studies is that they point out characteristics of non-formal education programmes and activities in one way or another. These studies are valuable in that they may lead to the establishment of criteria for determining which educational activities belong within the concept of non-formal education. Since non-formal education is mainly used and studied in the development context, non-formal education is mostly interpreted in the development setting. This study, however, has chosen to analyse and discuss non-formal education within a context other than that of development.

The main aim of this study is threefold. It aims firstly to conceptualise and analyse non-formal education within the context of youth organisations. The outcome of this analysis is primarily intended to facilitate policy development and discover operations likely to narrow the gap between non-formal and formal education. The second aim is to investigate the role of youth organisations in providing opportunities for non-formal learning in Europe. Thirdly, the study aims to collect evidence of the benefits of non-formal education in relation to overall education of young people. These three aims of the study will lead to a set of recommendations for enhancing the official recognition of non-formal education in the future.

Given these aims, the purpose of this study is to promote dialogue on the role and level of involvement of youth organisations in providing opportunities for non-formal education as one aspect of lifelong learning. It is important for all the parties involved in this dialogue to share, or at least be aware of, the different conceptions of non-formal education.

● 1.3 The methods and data

This study is semi-empirical in the sense that most of the work is based on previous studies, written documents, reports and books. In order to complete the analytical part of this study, we designed a questionnaire that was mailed to approximately 140 national and international youth organisations in Europe. For some unknown reason, the return rate was very low, with only 27 filled in and sent to us, by the time it came to carrying out the analysis. This low response rate means that we are not able to draw any representative conclusions from the data, but can however still use the responses as indicative examples that help us to understand a little better the questions behind this study.

The data related to conceptions of non-formal education were organised, analysed and interpreted in order to form a basis for conclusions. The case studies that were attached to the questionnaire were also analysed, and some of the relevant samples were included into this report.

● 2 NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

In this chapter we argue that if the purpose of schooling, i.e. formal education, is to equip young people with the attitudes, values and skills that are necessary in their lives both today and tomorrow, then schools alone are not likely to be able to create and sustain productive environments for learning. We need to integrate learning in school and out of school. We therefore clarify the term 'non-formal education' in relation to learning, and launch an initial discussion on an integrated approach establishing stronger operational links between formal education and non-formal education in European youth organisations. Since we are not able to make an in-depth analysis in this report, the discussion that follows is merely of an indicative nature and aims to promote further dialogue in other fora.

● 2.1 Dilemma of education

Schooling does not have one single purpose. In many instances, however, the basic function of education is to prepare young people to meet the challenges of adult life. In this study, we, however, deliberately adopted the view on the purpose of schooling which was so amply expressed by John Dewey and his disciples earlier this century. Our position is thus that school should provide pupils with experiences that will develop their skills of belonging and living in a democratic society both today and later in their adult life. There are many challenges already and there will be many more tomorrow. These challenges have been dramatically changing over the past few decades. In order to remain responsive enough to the demands of the world, education systems have had to undergo continuous reforms and focus on curriculum, learning materials, subject allocations, quality issues and so forth. In most school reforms, the emphasis has been on internal structures and regulations about how schools operate and what education should be like. It is only recently that the role of learning outside school, in real life situations, has come to be considered as an official mode of formal education.

In the document "*The Education of Young People – A Statement at the Dawn of the 21st Century*" produced by the chief executive officers of the world's largest youth movements, the needs of young people and the challenges they will face were summarised in the following way¹.

Young people need to

- ➔ find a secure starting point for themselves based on values, self-awareness and self-confidence;
- ➔ cope with change, which requires flexibility, adaptability and mobility;
- ➔ gain constructive control of technological progress through access to knowledge and skills;
- ➔ combat isolation by developing a sense of belonging and identity, gaining acceptance and being recognised;

(1) Towards an autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed youth. 1999. National Youth Policies. A working document from the point of view of "non-formal education" youth organisations.

- ➔ acquire a sense of usefulness, by making a contribution to the development of their community and beyond; and
- ➔ learn to recognise the value of co-operation and teamwork.

This is only one example of what young people need, either in their private lives or on the labour market. A cursory glance through the job announcements in our newspapers easily reinforces the above list of needs. Almost globally, employees are expected to know how to work and learn in teams; strive to continuously develop themselves further; communicate effectively; adapt to new situations; solve problems in a creative fashion, and be aware of their living environment, just to mention a few. These needs reach out far beyond the purposes of traditional schooling. The information revolution lies at the core of the dilemma of schooling in modern times. While the amount of information grows and sources of knowledge become more versatile, education systems have strengthened their focus on the acquiring of knowledge as a main result of teaching. This, in turn, has led to more emphasis on teaching, i.e. transferring yesterday's information to students, instead of providing them with appropriate educational opportunities to develop and exercise their minds and skills to be able to meet tomorrow's needs. Another important aspect of the schooling dilemma, is related to the new skills that young people are expected to possess when they leave school and enrol in the world of work. Narrow technical mastery has been overtaken by more general skills, including the interpersonal and social skills necessary in flexible organisations.

It has become clear that most formal education systems, particularly schools and other educational establishments, are not quite what they should be in terms of the challenges of today. From a critical point of view, one may claim that not only have the reforms to change education mostly been failures but many parts of formal education systems are also failing in terms of their existing aims and future needs². We need to address three issues at this point, that are crucial for the vision of a learning society in any country. First, it seems to be quite a common occurrence for students' interest and motivation to learn to decrease as they go from elementary school to middle school and from there on to secondary education. A learning society where lifelong learning is a basic value of its citizens, is only possible when people have an intrinsic will to learn, and the necessary skills to do so both during, and after, formal education. Therefore, one of the main outcomes of formal schooling, at least in the basic grades, should be to foster an autonomous individual who wants to understand more about himself or herself and the world around him or her, together with the appropriate ability to learn. Secondly, the ways in which traditional formal schooling is organised, do not support the construction of good identity and self-esteem. Too many young people leave education due to anxiety and depression³. Moreover, social exclusion is one of the rising problems among many European youth that is both a cause and effect of low self-esteem. Finally, in most fields, formal education alone is not able to provide students with appropriate environments to develop the relevant learning skills that are necessary for lifelong learning. There are two different kinds of important skills related to the ability to learn throughout one's life. On the one hand, a person has to have certain level of intellectual skills related to thinking and creativity.

(2) Sarason, S. 1990.
The predictable failure
of educational reform.
Can we change the course
before it's too late?
San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

(3) OECD 1998.
Overcoming failure at
school. Paris: OECD.

On the other hand, a person should also have developed the social and interpersonal skills that are required in many learning situations. Without these basic learning skills, self-development and renewal of future generations will be very difficult.

The roots of alternative arrangements to formal schooling go back a long way. The progressive education movement in the early 20th century with John Dewey (1859 – 1952) as one of its leading figures, explored ways of offering pupils experiences that would sustain their interest to learn and produce meaningful learning⁴. Progressive education emphasised learner-centred arrangements and working methods that are built upon the idea of school being a democratic society on a small scale. However, for decades after the active period of this movement the traditional format of formal education occupied centre stage. The analysis of the reasons behind this goes beyond the scope of this study. Interestingly, at the dawn of the new millennium, many of the ideas of John Dewey are being discussed once again. It is becoming obvious from these discussions and elsewhere that formal education alone of children, youth and young adults, is not likely to be able to fulfil the expectations of different stakeholders, including young people themselves, their parents, employers, and the environment in terms of the kind of citizen that our world needs. Therefore, we need to search for new alternatives, not to substitute formal education provision, but to complement it in order to better meet the demands of the new era. One potential option is to create a new kind of co-operation, co-ordination and synergy between the different forms of education that are available to young people in our societies. In addition, the conceptual framework and relationships between the key terms must be redefined and clarified. This study focuses on non-formal education within the framework of youth organisations in different countries of Europe.

● 2.2 Non-formal education and lifelong learning

This century has been an era of learning. We have witnessed a shift in conceptions and understanding of how humans learn over the past three decades. One of the key features of the new learning paradigms includes the idea of learning being a process that is not only related to the functions of school or other organised educational settings. This conception of learning is based upon the idea and observation that a considerable amount of our meaningful learning experiences happen outside the formal education system: in workplaces, families, different organisations and libraries, just to mention a few. An another typical characteristic of our new conception of learning is that learning is seen as a lifelong process which is not limited to our formal education days.

Lifelong education which we use as our point of departure for further discussion on non-formal education, is a broad concept that is composed of formal, non-formal and informal elements during one's lifetime, that help one's personal, social and professional development and growth. Therefore, lifelong education should be viewed as a holistic concept that includes all education, whether in school, home, hobbies, media, work or elsewhere. If we understand learning as a lifelong process, then the role of education is to support people's learning and development throughout their lives. The idea of lifelong education is only possible if our societies' education systems are improved in two ways: all successive phases of learning have to be articulated according to the needs and presuppositions of a given learner, and all the

(4) Tanner, L.N. 1997. Dewey's laboratory schools. Lessons for today. New York: Teachers College Press.

parallel functions of the formal education system have to be integrated and connected to learning environments outside formal education, in order to enhance the overall process of learning and personal growth.

According to the mainstream research community, lifelong education that enables continuous development of the thinking habits and skills that are needed to become an autonomous individual and a responsible member of society comes in three forms: formal education, non-formal education, and informal education. Along with lifelong education, the term 'lifelong learning' has become a popular word in learning societies and human resource development strategies. Lifelong learning emphasises the central role of the learner more than the term 'lifelong education'. Lifelong learning, in turn, includes formal learning, non-formal learning, and informal learning, respectively. The distinction between education and learning was only of interest to scholars in educational philosophy and pedagogy for a long time. However, today, this conceptual difference between education and learning is the key to understanding one of the major shifts in educational thinking which has taken place – a shift from education to lifelong education as an instrument for personal development, social progress, and economic well-being⁵.

The idea of non-formal education is not a new one. It was introduced in the late 1960's in order to signal the need for out-of-school responses to the new and differing demands for education⁶. Educational programmes for the common good existed in our societies long before the formal education systems, as we know them today. Probably, one of the aims of introducing non-formal education at that time was to draw attention to the role of out-of-school education, thus helping to legitimate non-formal education as part of the education system. Interest in non-formal education has mainly focused on adult education. Due to contemporary social priorities in Europe, the non-formal education of adolescents and young adults has now become a subject of inquiry. Some of the driving forces behind such interest may be attributed to changing family patterns, rapidly accumulating new information and technologies, and the disintegration of traditional local communities and societies. Youth organisations all over Europe have made joint efforts to strengthen educational opportunities for young people outside their formal education, and gain the recognition of non-formal education as a true partner in the lifelong learning process of European youth.

Where does the term 'non-formal education' come from? In the 1970's this term became widely used to describe programmatic alternatives for youth and adults who did not have the possibility to attend formal schooling or who were poorly served by schools, or who needed to supplement the education they had already received. Thus, non-formal education came to be seen as a viable strategy in development and it is expected to achieve a wide variety of objectives, such as promoting economic growth, improving people's living conditions, and consolidating civil and political rights. The educational crisis of formal schooling made people search for alternative solutions, and thus, non-formal education was given more emphasis in national development plans. However, non-formal education has, to a large extent, been planned and implemented in rural development and in developing countries.

(5) Blunt, A. 1988. Education, learning and development: Evolving concepts. *Convergence*, 21(1), 37-53.

(6) La Belle, T. 1982. Formal, nonformal and informal education: A holistic perspective on lifelong learning. *International Review of Education*, 28(2), 159-175.

Formal education is normally understood as a hierarchically structured, chronologically graded educational system usually provided or subsidised by the state which runs from primary school levels to secondary education, to higher education institutions. Therefore, formal education is always hierarchical in nature and is based on certain qualifications or degrees⁷. *Informal education*, on the other hand, refers to a lifelong process whereby we all acquire attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from everyday experiences, such as family and friends, work and hobbies, mass media and libraries. That is why informal learning is experiential and non-institutional in nature.

The term 'non-formal education' is difficult to define because it is very much depends on the situation in which it is discussed. In most available publications, non-formal education is defined through its relation to formal and informal education. For example, for both academic discussions and practical purposes, non-formal education is generally taken as referring to the motley assortment of organised and semi-organised educational activities which take place outside the normal structure and routines of the formal system and which are aimed at serving the many and varied learning needs of different subgroups in the population, both young and old⁸. Certain other definitions describe non-formal education as "an educational activity that is not structured and takes place outside the formal system"⁹. Furthermore, non-formal education is neither formal in nature – it is an organised activity outside the established education system - nor is it informal, because it is organised for certain purposes. Hence, it is obvious that this way of defining non-formal education is essentially a negative one. In addition, the view of education represented by these definitions is functional in nature, equating education with learning regardless of where the learning takes place and who the actual learners are. The major problem in trying to find conceptual clarifications of non-formal education is related to the difficulty of establishing an universal definition that would fit all ages, situations and circumstances. It is particularly interesting to try to give shape to this concept within the context of youth organisations in Europe, which will in fact be the focus of the discussions in the next chapter.

However, there is one issue which deserves our attention. before we leave the conceptual discussion on non-formal education In order to be able to differentiate non-formal education programmes and activities from other forms of education, we need to be clear about the differentiation criteria to be used. This is important in itself, because we need to have a common understanding of these terms if we are about to build joint policies, programmes and activities to promote non-formal education in Europe. Both formal and non-formal education are purposefully organised and directed in order to facilitate particular kinds of learning¹⁰ which therefore implies that there is a link between these two types of education. The most commonly used method of deciding which educational activity we are dealing with, is called 'negation followed by enumeration'. This means that we need to first define the limits of formal education in a given situation, and then non-formal education is comprised of all the educational programmes and organised activities which fall outside this definition. In most European countries, formal education includes all compulsory education, secondary education and professional training leading to qualifications, higher education and teacher training. However, the decision on what is to be included in formal education may vary from one country to another, which in turn leads to situations in which it is difficult to define the limits for formal education.

(7) Coombs, P.H. 1989. Formal and nonformal education: Future strategies. In: Titmus (Ed.) Lifelong learning for adults. An International Handbook. Pergamon Press: Oxford.

(8) Ahmed, M. & Coombs, P.H. 1975. Introduction. In: Ahmed, M. & Coombs, P.H. (Eds.) Education for rural development. New York: Praeger.

(9) Committee on Culture and Education, 1999. Non-formal education. Preliminary draft report. Council of Europe.

(10) Simkins, T. 1977. Nonformal education and development. University of Manchester, Department of Higher Education. Manchester: Manchester Monographs #8.

Hence, the decision as to which educational programmes should be known as 'non-formal' may vary from one situation to another.

In summary, non-formal education is defined as *organised and semi-organised educational activities operating outside the structure and routines of the formal education system*. This view emphasises the way in which education is delivered, and is formulated in terms of two criteria. One criterion is concerned with 'organisation' and the other with the 'relationship to the schools system'⁽¹⁾. The first criterion allows for an 'either – or' classification, whereas the latter cannot totally distinguish non-formal education from formal education. In order to be non-formal, a programme or activity has to have a component that includes the intention to educate, that is to achieve some predetermined goals that can be assessed or at least discussed afterwards, using some reliable criteria. If this intention is missing and the educational purposes are not spelled out, then we do not refer to non-formal education here but rather to informal or incidental education. For example, youngsters pick up attitudes, skills and methods of leadership by participating in an activity organised by a local sports club. However, the aims of this activity are not specified in terms of educational development or growth but rather are seen in terms of helping these young people to work with youth sport groups in their communities. Since this activity is not organised to meet specific learning goals, it is likely to be called informal education rather than non-formal education. Another example of the conceptual complexity of non-formal education is illustrated by the following: a university offers its students an elective study unit within the social sciences programme that is organised by a voluntary community service organisation called 'Young Help' that is run by a group of local young people. Through active participation and reporting back on their experiences, students may gain up to three credit points from this programme. The programme aims at learning practical skills and attitudes related to community work in relation to selected theories on human resource networks. Students are assessed according to their reports and seminar presentations. Clearly, this study unit is semi-organised, but it is organised by a non-governmental organisation that is not part of the formal education system. Now, is this study unit formal or non-formal education? It could be regarded as formal education since it is part of the certified degree issued by a formal institution, namely the university. However, this study unit, that mainly takes place outside the formal education system, is more non-formal than formal in nature, especially as far as the style of learning is concerned. On the other hand, young people who participate voluntarily in Young Help's activities may or may not learn the same things and more, compared to the university students. Yet, if the participation and the achievement of these volunteer young people are not measured and authorised, then this is clearly a case of non-formal education and learning.

These examples highlight the complexity of extending the recognition of non-formal education to the formal certification and qualification systems. The increasing emphasis on quality in education in general, and post-compulsory education and training in particular, has led to various means of quality control, such as assessment and evaluation of various kinds becoming a normal part of educational routines. Given the high stakes placed on achievement, outputs and control mechanisms within existing education policies, it is predictable that all recognised educational achievements will be monitored in one way or another. This in turn means that further recognition of non-formal education will raise the

(1) Patel, R. 1990. Nonformal education in development: A conceptual analysis. Department of Education and Psychology, Linköping: Linköping University.

question of how to measure student learning outside formal settings and how these measures should be quantified. The issue of recognition is not just a matter of who has the legitimate right to offer educational services but also, how to quantify the learning and growth of people that they have achieved elsewhere. The issue of recognition is discussed in more depth in the second section of this monograph.

In attempting to find a conceptual clarification, we should try to approach non-formal education and learning using descriptions that can be related to any particular method of learning. For example, defining non-formal education as “teaching tools and learning schemes that are seen as creative and innovative alternatives to traditional and classical teaching systems” can easily lead to loose and confusing meanings. In this study, however, we are not so much concerned with issues of definition, but rather with the search for a concept that is applicable to the situations in which the youth organisations operate. Thus, we mainly limit ourselves to looking for examples of non-formal education programmes and activities in different parts of Europe and drawing useful lessons from these that might be helpful in other situations.

Integration is the key concept in UNESCO’s lifelong learning strategy¹². Vertical integration connects consecutive educational phases and the successive learning experiences during the course of an individual’s life in order to promote continuous personal development and growth, according to the needs and preconditions of age and life situations. Horizontal integration, in turn, means taking all different educational and learning modes into account, whether in school or university, work or recreation, or in family or community, as regards the overall education of an individual. Herein lies one of the most promising options for bringing non-formal education provided by youth organisations and formal education closer together. Vertical integration requires stronger *co-ordination* between the different phases and types of education provided by various institutions, whereas horizontal integration requires closer *co-operation* between the parties involved in the provision of education programmes and related activities, and the development of respective education and youth policies¹³. In this study, co-ordination, co-operation and redefining common resources are the key elements of the paradigm that will form the basis for the holistic education systems of learning societies in the new millennium.

● 2.3 An emerging perspective: non-formal education for youth promotion

In the 1970’s when the promotion of non-formal education appeared, many educators presumed that this would result in more coherent planning between government administrations responsible. Despite many good intentions, this only actually happened in a small number of countries¹⁴. Nevertheless, the introduction of non-formal education as a new concept, did extend the perspectives and possibilities of policy makers and educators beyond school alone. At that time, many saw non-formal education as a substitute for school education, or a second choice for those who had dropped out of the school system for one reason or another. It was only afterwards that non-formal education came to be seriously considered as a complementing element in overall education and learning for youth and young adults.

(12) UNESCO 1973.
Recurrent education; a
strategy for lifelong
learning. Paris: UNESCO.

(13) See Sarason, S. 1997.
Crossing boundaries:
co-operation, coordination
and the redefinition of
resources.

San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

(14) UNESCO 1992.
Education for All:
An expanded vision.
Paris: UNESCO.

Within the framework of the learning and growth of all young people, the essence of non-formal education lies in the ways in which it contributes to the basic learning needs of young individuals and their communities. Indeed, the emerging importance of non-formal education as a complement to the formal education of youth and young adults can be explained by its dynamic response to the challenges of the present and coming times which is well known to educators, policy makers and the young generation itself. Whereas formal schools tend to emphasise the traditional teaching of knowledge from the past and present at the expense of education and identity building, non-formal education should focus, among other things, on supporting the growth of autonomy and the development of the value systems of young individuals. This does not mean that there should be a clear distinction drawn between the two modes of education in terms of their foci.

Rather, there is a need for clearer co-ordination and co-operation between formal and non-formal education. First, the representatives of the formal education system should clearly admit that in the given circumstances, schools are just not able to change enough to be able to satisfy all the educational needs faced by the youth of today. After all, for a long time from now, schools will continue to carry with them the culture of school learning that is dramatically different from learning out of school.

That is why schools need to co-operate and co-ordinate their educational operations in order to break away from a symbol manipulation mode of learning towards reasoning in context, which is the standard way of learning outside of school. Secondly, it is paramount for all those involved in the education of youth and young adults to realise that it “takes the whole village to educate a citizen”. In other words, in order to provide our young people with rich learning environments, we need to combine our efforts and understand that the quality of education can only improve if there is positive interdependence between the different modes of education.

All educators of the same target groups should share the same overall goals: educating autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed youth and citizens. Therefore, we should also affirm that this goal can only be achieved by joining together, as well as co-operation and co-ordination. This intention should be visible in countries’ education and youth policies, and should be taken into account in the qualifications and recognition of education and training within countries’ education systems. Finally, there should be more co-operation and co-ordination at the policy making level in order to promote an integrated approach to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Some argue quite correctly that non-formal education is insufficiently recognised and does not receive sufficient resources to make it possible to respond to increasing demand¹⁵.

Recognition of non-formal education as part of the overall education of young people, in terms of the credits people receive from being involved in youth work, is facing particular obstacles that vary from one country to another. One obvious problem is that of assessing the quality of learning and achievements outside of the formal qualification structures. As we argued earlier, it is difficult to measure how much young people learn in youth associative life outside school, for example in community work, voluntary services, sports clubs, or Girl Scouts, using the traditional criteria and qualifications available. This, in turn, leads to a

(15) Towards an autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed youth. 1999. National Youth Policies. A working document from the point of view of “non-formal education” youth organisations.

situation where the educational value of youth work is not clearly understood or may even not be accepted as a significant element in the education and training of young people outside the youth sector. The youth organisations face the potential challenge of proving that learning outside formal schooling is valuable and sometimes even more relevant for individuals than what they learn in formal settings. Furthermore, youth organisations should discuss ways in which the quality and quantity of learning within youth activities and programmes could be monitored, assessed and measured.

There is a growing awareness that little is known about how many different types of non-formal education programmes actually exist, and who participates in them. Programmes are highly heterogeneous, and the terminology used to describe them is often confusing. Moreover, there is a lack of information and reliable statistics on non-formal education. Therefore, it is rather difficult to create a picture of the overall scale and forms of non-formal education in Europe. Some of these questions are discussed in Section Two of this study.

This new integrated and holistic perspective on education in the third millennium discussed here requires changes in the way we think about education in general and learning in particular. The conventional way of seeing the education of youth as a matter of schooling is no longer relevant to anyone. Changing existing ways of behaving, thinking and believing is always difficult. New insights into the way in which we learn are sending out a powerful message that may act as a catalyst for change. This is not just an academic matter. Learning is the core process in all attempts to educate people and therefore lays the foundation for the further development of education in general and non-formal education in particular, for our youth and young adults. The next paragraphs discuss some of the most interesting learning issues in the light of non-formal education for youth.

● 3 BUILDING THE LEARNING SOCIETIES

In this chapter we discuss non-formal education in the light of contemporary conceptions of learning and the emerging idea of the learning society. Our basic argument is that the emerging vision of a learning society requires redefined conceptions of learning among all parties, and new approaches for change and growth. We also discuss the expected impact of non-formal education on people's overall development, growth and learning.

● 3.1 Learning in the third millennium

As we draw near to one of the great milestones of our time, we are growing used to talking about paradigm shifts: replacing one customary way of thinking with another way of thinking that explains important issues in a more powerful way. Copernicus' world order replaced the old Aristotelian view, Newtonian physics supplanted the Copernican paradigm, and Einstein came along and challenged the Newtonian paradigm. Paradigm shifts do not mean that that which has been replaced was completely wrong but rather, they show that certain specific problems were wrongly or incompletely explained and that the new explanation is better¹⁶.

(16) Sarason, S. 1997.
Crossing boundaries:
co-operation, coordination
and the redefinition
of resources.
San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

We are entering into a new era in history with a quite different understanding of how we learn, compared to our thinking just a few decades ago. The paradigm of learning based on the belief in observable behaviour has been so deeply rooted in our minds that it is only gradually disappearing as a result of discoveries in the field of social sciences, and recently, brain research. Here, we can indeed talk about a paradigm shift, since the traditional conceptions of learning are fundamentally in contradiction or incompatible, with the emerging new paradigm of learning. This study does not intend to go into a more detailed analysis of old or new learning theories. However, it may be useful to briefly highlight what is changing in terms of our understanding of learning and how this new understanding should be considered within the context of non-formal education and youth organisations.

Until the middle of the 20th century, mainstream research on learning psychology was based on the idea of pure empirical science. In other words, learning conditions were judged according to observations of the behavioural reactions of organisms (in most cases using animals). It was not generally possible, within this scientific paradigm, to get information on human consciousness, inner thoughts, emotions, intentions, or other mental processes, because they were not measurable using these scientific methods. This tradition of learning is known as *behaviourism*. It had a considerable impact on education in general and schooling in particular. For many years, the dominant learning theories encouraged educational psychologists, teachers and trainers to concentrate on external factors such as reward schedules and transfer gradients. Moreover, the behaviourist movement has probably had the greatest influence on our beliefs. Drawing on our own experiences and those of our children, we tend to believe that teaching is about transferring information from the teachers to the learner, and that learning is simply a matter of receiving that information and storing it in one's memory. The conception of learners playing a passive role of with the emphasis being placed on teaching has been inherited from this tradition. Many of the school practices of today are based on these beliefs, and thus, on old paradigms of learning.

New insights offering alternatives to behaviourist interpretation of human learning started to emerge in the 1960's. Cognitive psychology provided quite a contradictory perspective on the learning patterns and growth of human beings and the human learner model was actually transformed. Learners were imbued with powers of introspection that had previously not been accepted within the old paradigm¹⁷. Our intellectual processes and features of our minds became the focal points of interest in sciences related to learning. Understanding learning as a process in which the learner actively constructs personal meanings from her subjective experiences has become a dominant theme of the new learning paradigm, popularly known as *constructivism*. The underlying assumptions, values, beliefs and methods are so different from those of the traditional approach that it is impossible in most cases, to merge constructivist education approaches with those derived from the behaviourist movement.

The new media of communication and information processing are changing the nature of work; the ways in which we communicate, follow the world, and connect with each other. This change that we sometimes refer to as networking does not only require renewal at the systems levels, but also means that we, as individuals, need to acquire new intellectual abilities and social skills. This is the challenge for the entire education system, whether formal or

(17) Brown, A. 1994. The advancement of learning. *Educational Researcher*, 28(8), 4-12.

non-formal: how well is education able to provide productive learning environments for children, youth, and young adults where they can develop the abilities and skills that they need now, and tomorrow, in order to live a fulfilled life. It is therefore of paramount importance that planned educational activities that aim to teach one particular aspect or another, are based on contemporary conceptions of learning. Formal education systems have a burden to carry as the legitimate educational providers, namely the culture of teaching and learning that still reflects the values, beliefs and practices of the conventional learning paradigm. The opportunity for youth organisations lies in their more flexible way of arranging educational activities which therefore means that they can adopt the beliefs and practices based on modern research findings and the assumptions of respective paradigms in a more natural way.

Lifelong learning has often been put forward as a solution to the challenges of an unpredictable future. However, many scholars and practitioners argue that traditional institutional education is not likely to be able to develop the attitudes and skills needed to learn continuously outside school. The new conceptions of how we learn are backed up by an interesting, small body of research from cognitive anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists who examined cognitive performance in a number of real life settings¹⁸. Based on these studies, four broad categories appear that highlight the differences between the characteristics of mental activities related to school learning and those related to life outside school. The following gives a brief summary of the findings.

The first difference is related to that of *individual cognition in school versus shared cognition outside school*. One of the dominant forms of teaching and learning in schools is an individual one. Students mostly learn alone, they are accountable for their own performance, and they learn and practice by themselves. Similarly, teaching is a lonely profession. By way of contrast, more and more activities taking place outside school are socially shared. Work, recreation and the personal lives of most people take place within social systems. The success of a person therefore depends on the abilities of other people and to what extent they are able to share their expertise.

The second difference states that *whereas school emphasises pure mental agility, real life focuses on tool manipulation*. Throughout the history of modern schooling, the greatest premium has been placed on school activities based on 'pure thought', in other words, the degree of success has been measured in terms of students' ability to manage without books, calculators, notes or other tools during tests, for example. On the other hand, the vast majority of our everyday practices outside school directly use tools, and the related mental activities are shaped by, and dependent upon, the tools that we use.

Thirdly, school emphasises *symbol manipulation of information, whereas contextual reasoning is dominant outside school*. One of young people's most frequent criticism of school is that it is not interesting and that there are missing links between school knowledge and real life situations. School learning is mostly based on symbolic processes of information and the attempts made to connect abstract conceptual entities to the events and objects in our everyday lives can often be misleading. In our lives outside school, most activities are directly linked to concrete events and objects in time and place. Furthermore, it is natural for us to

(18) Resnick, L. 1987. Learning in school and out. Educational Researcher, 16, 13-20.

use these events and objects that we encounter in our reasoning rather than going into symbolic representations.

Finally, whereas *school aims to teach for general learning purposes, situation-specific competencies* are valued outside school. The major justification for formal education is often its generality and power of transfer. This is why school tends to teach broad theories and general principles that can be applied to various situations. However, it has become obvious from a number of studies that in spite of acquiring theoretical knowledge, very few skills can actually be directly applied to practical situations. We also have some proof from research that less knowledge and skills than expected can actually be transferred from the school environment to out-of-school use.

These lessons should prove interesting for youth organisations that are operating within the non-formal education framework. It is particularly important to recognise that students experience learning in school in quite a different, if not contradictory way, from the learning that they do outside school. Formal learning in schools and higher education institutions seems to promote the idea that the “game of school” is to learn symbolic rules of various kinds and that there is not supposed to be much continuity between what one knows outside school and what one learns in school¹⁹. This claim is supported by recent research on learning. Furthermore, this research also advises us that schooling does not seem to contribute to a considerable extent to the performance of students outside school, and that the knowledge and skills that young people learn out-of-school are not always used to support school learning. Some distinguished scholars argue that formal schooling is becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of our activities.

The main message of the above discussion is that the nature of human learning is quite different from what we had previously expected. Since the world is becoming more and more complex, we have also had to accept that learning can take place in various settings, not just within formally organised arrangements. Instead of teaching we now focus on creating productive learning environments, which may either be situated within the traditional school setting, or elsewhere. The computer technology and communications revolution has brought with it new opportunities for the creation of these learning environments which have never been seen before. The new constructivist learning paradigm emphasises the centrality of the learner and his/her active role in the entire learning process. This new emerging humanist view of learning not only challenges the traditional instructional culture of schools but also has an impact on other educational efforts outside school, including the non-formal education that youth organisations provide to young people. Our understanding of how we learn shapes the ways in which we formulate our intentions. The basic values and assumptions related to education in general, and learning in particular, are so deeply rooted in our minds that it is extremely complicated to replace these core elements of our thought with new ones. Nevertheless, we should accept that learning in the third millennium shall be built on different foundations from those that have dominated this century. Non-formal education and non-formal learning should be looked at from this perspective. Overall aims may remain the same, but the strategies and underlying beliefs should be updated to match contemporary ideas on human development, learning, and social change.

(19) Ibid.

● 3.2 Youth organisations in the learning society

Learning and change seem to be the two essential concepts of development in European society in the short or longer term. Lifelong learning has become a way of expressing our will and commitment to accept the fact that a good and sustainable life requires continuous learning from all of us. Up until very recently, formal education had - due to its legitimate position in our societies - the monopoly on the provision of knowledge and skills that were thought to be necessary in adult life. Now, however, we realise that our complex and unpredictably changing societies call for new kinds of personal and interpersonal abilities. Since the new tools of citizenship are contextual in nature, it is not possible to teach them in any one place or time. Therefore, we need to learn how to learn throughout our lives. At the same time, the old saying that the purpose of schooling is to prepare young people for adult life has been ruled out by the new view. According to this new approach, the main purpose of formal education should be to equip our youth population with the skills and minds to help them cope with present situations in their lives, as well as encouraging their will and skill to learn continuously and simultaneously in different learning environments throughout their lives.

The vision of the *learning society* is an intellectual idea that often goes hand in hand with lifelong learning²⁰. In brief, the learning society means a community where people continually expand their capacity to achieve the results and introduce the features in their lives that they truly desire; a community where new patterns of thinking are nurtured; where collective aspirations are set free, and people learn how to learn together, and from each other, in various learning environments²¹. The conceptual centre of learning society is a learning environment that is a place or community where people can draw upon resources to make sense of things and construct meaningful solutions to problems²². The process of becoming a learning society requires different stakeholders such as education providers and other intellectual agents to develop a sufficient amount of varied learning environments. When the members of the learning society are the key players, they can also choose the learning environments that are likely to best meet their needs and expectations. Therefore, the relevant question for the learner is not who provides education, but rather, does the learning environment offer meaningful circumstances in which he/she can learn.

A proper analysis of the learning society would deserve much more space than is possible within the limits of this study. In order to specify some of the features of the learning society, where youth organisations also operate, we briefly highlight some of the key dimensions that are, and will be, essential in creating communities and societies that can truly learn. The first dimension involves "personal mastery of people". Mastery in this context refers to a specific level of proficiency in understanding citizenship. Our values and beliefs constitute the second dimension. Values and beliefs produce our deeply integrated assumptions, generalisations and images that create our frame of reference for understanding reality and our place in it. The third dimension is co-operative learning, or team learning, which means that a team or a community is able to expand learning beyond the limits of individual learning. The core process of co-operative learning is dialogue among the learners of the community that enhances the society by laying aside assumptions and promoting genuine "thinking together". The fourth dimension is systems thinking, that is, a conceptual

(20) Commission European Communities. 1995. Teaching and learning. Towards the learning society. White Paper on Education and Training. Brussels: EU.

(21) See Senge, P. 1990. The fifth discipline. The art and practice of the learning organisation. New York: Doubleday.

(22) Wilson, B. (Ed.) 1996. Constructivist learning environments: case studies in instructional design. Englewood Cliffs: Educational Technology Publications.

framework to clarify patterns by understanding the inter-relationships between the parts of any given whole. The fifth dimension of a learning society is our shared picture of the future: it is important to approach the learning society as one possible vision of our highly sophisticated and technological world.

It becomes obvious in the light of what was discussed above, that youth organisations need a new paradigm, that is, an integrated model of education, or a paradigm of *crossing boundaries*²³. The main elements of this model are co-ordination, co-operation, and redefinition of resources. Co-ordination means synchronising consecutive phases of learning and parallel forms of education in such a way that enables the learner is able to construct a meaningful and coherent whole out of these subsets²⁴. Co-operation means that it is an advantage for the learner, if the parties arranging educational activities and learning environments communicate, co-operate and modify their operations to meet learners' needs. Finally, redefinition of resources means accepting that resources are always limited and that we can achieve a great deal more by realising the true potential of people as resources. The possibilities of this paradigm for non-formal education and youth organisations are discussed in the next paragraphs.

● 3.3 Possibilities of non-formal education in youth work

The purpose of this study is to promote dialogue on the role and level of involvement of youth organisations in providing opportunities for non-formal education, as one form of lifelong learning. Traditions and current practices vary from one part of Europe to another. In some countries it is quite natural for non-governmental organisations, such as youth organisations, to be actively involved in the overall education of youth and young adults. In some other countries, due to the culture or the way in which the formal education system is arranged, it may seem a strange idea to have several parties involved in offering educational opportunities for people. However, most, if not all, of the countries in Europe share a relatively short history as regards thinking on the combining formal and non-formal education to establish a more holistic education system. Having said this, it is easy to accept that it is nevertheless impossible to develop a common programme for enhancing the role of non-formal education across Europe or larger areas. Therefore, we will round off this first section of the study by presenting three possible areas of future dialogue, and ways in which the role of non-formal education could be strengthened within the work of European youth organisations.

Promoting the new culture of learning. One of the particular strengths of non-formal education providers compared to formal education institutions, is their short tradition in the field of organised or semi-organised learning arrangements. This means that unlike schools, youth organisations tend to be free from beliefs, assumptions and ways of doing things that are a heritage from the past that arise out of the educational tradition. Even if the burden of traditional culture has to be carried in some organisations, it should be more straightforward for them to transform these cultures than it is for schools, considering that schools are always part of larger systems. There are two important points to be noted. Firstly, youth organisations should pay close attention to the programmes and activities that aim at producing some level of learning, and thus are non-formal by definition. It is not

(23) Sarason, S. 1997. *Crossing boundaries: co-operation, coordination and the redefinition of resources*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

(24) See Fullan, M. 1999. *Change forces. The sequel*. London: Falmer Press.

enough to merely reshape the methods of work within these programmes, the structures of the programmes and procedures developed for non-formal learning must be tuned to match the features of the new learning paradigm. Furthermore, in order to become a truly contemporary, non-formal education programme or activity, the terminology and language used to describe them should be refined. Education could be replaced by learning, studying by teaching, and educational techniques by learning environments. Secondly, youth organisations have to take the challenge of the new learning paradigm seriously as a result of the recent findings of empirical research. The body of research shows just how contrasting the nature of learning in and out of school can be. The youth organisations should make full use of that knowledge, and try to promote the new culture of learning that is taking too long to enter into the lives of formal schools and other institutions.

Enriching the learning environments for youth. We have argued earlier, as have many scholars in a more powerful way elsewhere, that traditional schools in particular and formal education in general (as it now stands), are not likely to be able to create the settings for learning that respond to the needs of today and tomorrow. In the previous pages we learnt how strongly school learning is based on individual cognition, pure mental agility, symbol manipulation of information, and teaching based on generalisations. These various dimensions implicitly reflect the characteristics of the environments in which this kind of learning takes place. Based on this analysis, we argue that there is great potential for youth organisations to become more recognised as serious partners in educating our young generations, if they enrich the learning environments for youth. However, these cannot be any old kind of learning environments. First, the lessons from the new learning paradigm should be carefully listened to and then the differences between learning in and out of school should be taken into consideration when learning environments are designed and implemented. In particular, the emphasis placed on shared cognition and expertise that is such a typical feature of learning in real life situations, should be given appropriate attention in all programmes.

Introducing the crossing boundaries paradigm. There are always ultimately two ways out of a problematic situation: either by consolidating the existing structures and approaches, or redesigning them and trying something new. In addition, in real life there are always more than two ways of doing things. In this study we propose that youth organisations should try to adopt a solid approach in order to enhance the role of non-formal education and gain recognition of achieved outcomes as part of overall learning. The first step could entail establishing a way of creating a basis for values and ideas on what learning is all about. A second step could include consideration of a strategy based on this shared conception of learning and education within the framework of lifelong learning or the learning society. Finally, a new paradigm of change and improvement based on the ideas of co-ordination, co-operation and redefinition of resources could be discussed and considered. In light of this study and related research, this crossing boundaries paradigm has many advantages, including the fact that we no longer have to defend our territories, interests and the achievements gained. In any case, individuals, communities, corporations, organisations and societies have to adapt to the principles of sharing, communication and identification of common interests.

SECTION 2: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Probably the single most important finding of this study is that we know amazingly little about non-formal education practices in general, and even less about those occurring within the youth organisations. Furthermore, the theory and conceptual foundations are not well enough developed to adequately support appropriate research activity in this field. The lack of statistical data together with the unstable theoretical background may jeopardise the overall development of non-formal education as an essential component of lifelong learning. Indeed, it is difficult to create a reliable and holistic picture of the present situation of non-formal education without basic information and conceptual tools.

In this section we interpret the data that were collected from European youth organisations recently using a postal survey questionnaire. We use the interpretation of these data in conjunction with the conceptual analysis of the first section, to formulate conclusions and recommendations for further discussions and development operations. Before getting down to the discussion proper, it should be noted that the sample that we use as a source of information is rather limited: only 27 out of 130 replied to our postal survey questionnaire. Thus, our conclusions do not necessarily represent the views of the entire population, i.e. all youth organisations in Europe. However, at this point, even this small insight into the core questions of this study seems worthwhile. Another word of caution concerns the terminology used in the answers themselves. It would have been necessary to carry out a structured interview in order to be able to fully interpret all the responses. Such methodology was not possible within the limits of this study, and therefore, this aspect remains as a potential topic for further study.

● 4 VOICES FROM THE FIELD

In the first section of this document, we discussed non-formal education from a theoretical point of view and formulated one commonly accepted definition to be used in further discussions. In this chapter, we try to understand the different meanings of the term non-formal education among youth organisations in Europe. We then discuss the benefits and concerns related to youth activities and programmes in the light of education and lifelong learning. Finally, we present case studies that show what non-formal education could mean in the youth organisation context.

In the paragraphs that follow, all authentic quotations are marked with quotation marks. Out of 27 organisations that responded in the given time 22 were non-governmental organisations, while the others were units operating under or close to the Ministries. The data collected from these youth organisations seemed valuable, since international information about non-formal education does not exist in relation to youth organisations' work in this field. OECD, EUROSTAT and UNESCO statistics concentrate on formal education and non-formal education that leads to recognised certification. The problem is that non-formal education and formal education are treated as one form of education in the statistical structures of these organisations. The general challenge of gaining international statistics on non-formal education is conceptual in nature. As we maintained earlier, the term 'non-formal education' conveys several meanings and is thus incomparable when moved from one system to another.

● 4.1 What do the youth organisations mean by non-formal education?

Youth organisations emphasise the importance of recognising the skills and competencies that young people learn outside formal educational settings. The term 'non-formal education' seems to be a label that has been used in policy documents, some youth programmes, and in dialogue between educators and policy makers. The crucial issue is: what does non-formal education mean for various organisations, and their individual members? This is a crucial question because the misunderstandings and ensuing conflicts that generally arise, are caused most of the time by our varying conceptions of the key terms. According to our data, almost half of the youth organisations reported that they do not have a commonly accepted definition or meaning for non-formal education within their organisation. We were confronted instead with a confusing mixture of self-made descriptions of non-formal education. It is obvious that it is difficult to create and sustain productive dialogue of the matter of non-formal education, without having a coherent view of what is meant by non-formal education.

The first finding of our analysis of the conceptions of non-formal education *per se* is that it appears to be very loosely defined by respondents. We found that the conceptions of non-formal education could be divided into four different categories. The first category is defined according to the **educational methodology** that characterises these activities or programmes. Non-formal education is often defined through typical methods of learning, such as learning-by-doing, group work, active participation, and outdoor activities. These and

other similar methods of learning are emphasised in the definitions of non-formal education because they are seen as essential approaches for developing democratic attitudes and skills, promoting active participation in life, and fostering personal growth and the social integration of young people. In some cases, these educational methods are seen as weak or missing components of formal schooling, and are thus important for non-formal education activities and programmes. However, there are also obvious problems with definitions that are based on methodological criteria. For example, some advanced formal schools that pursue progressive teaching and learning methods would be considered as providers of non-formal education according to this educational methodology. Furthermore, methodological criteria is only useful to a very limited extent, in so far as it raises the matter of the distinction between formal and non-formal education.

The second main category for defining non-formal education is **forms of organisation**. This is probably the most common way of explaining what non-formal education is. The descriptions of non-formal education in this category vary from an open statement such as: “everything outside formal education” or “education that is not organised by school” to more specific definitions, such as, “organised educational activity outside the established formal education system”. The latter statement is close to what we presented earlier in this study as a widely accepted definition of non-formal education. It consists of two dimensions, namely the ‘organisation’ and ‘relationship to the school system’. It is paramount to note at this point that if all educational activities outside school are recognised as non-formal education, there is a danger of confusion arising in many countries. There are study programmes that are provided by, and delivered in, organisations other than schools, which are still viewed as part of formal education. For example, activity-based study visits to industry, study units during which students learn in museums and science centres, and voluntary programmes as part of community service have sometimes been developed as part of formal school study programmes.

Non-formal education is sometimes defined in terms of its **aims and purposes** and this is our third category from the data. Statements such as “promotion of personal and social development” and “active participation in the society” are often linked in the conceptions of non-formal education given in this category. In addition, many seem to think that non-formal education is an educational arrangement that is able to complement formal education by providing “new knowledge, skills and information that cannot be offered by formal schooling”, and “opportunities for inter-cultural learning and conflict management”. Once again, if non-formal education is only defined by statements related to its aims and purposes, then we are ignoring the fact that there are arrangements other than non-formal education possibilities that may lead to the same outcomes. It is arguable that traditional schooling is able to promote the personal and social development of young people, and enhance their abilities to become active citizens in their communities and societies, at least to some extent. Based on the analysis of the data, we argue, that over and above these conceptions built upon the aims and purposes of non-formal education, there is an assumption that formal schooling is unable to properly fulfil the aims and purposes referred to in these definitions. This may be partly true, but when trying to grasp the essence of what non-formal education is, and understand what youth organisations could do to promote lifelong learning and appropriate attitudes, this assumption does not go far enough.

Finally, our fourth category includes the descriptions that emphasise the **voluntary nature** of non-formal education and the consequences that follow on from the principles of free will. Criteria such as 'flexibility', 'responding to needs', and a 'more relaxed atmosphere' are regularly used to describe non-formal education. Some respondents say that non-formal education activities are organised by voluntary organisations. Furthermore, the voluntary nature of participation also seems to convey an assumption that there should be no certification or formal evaluation, on completion of non-formal education programmes. If this principle of evaluation-free education programmes is taken as one criterion for establishing education as non-formal then, we believe, this will have serious consequences for the further recognition of these non-formal education programmes, as part of young people's overall credits.

We conclude that the concept of non-formal education does not seem to have any shared meaning across the youth organisations in Europe. A few organisations, all coming from Central and Eastern Europe, maintained that the concept of non-formal education is not yet well developed in these countries. By the same token, some of the representatives of national youth organisations reported that due to some traditional peculiarities of adult education, non-formal education is not a widely used term in these countries. Instead, the youth organisations in these countries have introduced the term 'civic learning' that refers to non-formal learning that takes place in recreational and voluntary activities.

The lack of a common conceptual understanding of non-formal education is clearly a shortcoming. It has been, and it will continue to be difficult to promote in-depth, analytical and constructive dialogue, without having common meanings for key terminology. The development of a common language among the European youth organisations is both an important theoretical and practical issue. It is a theoretical issue because there is a need to draw a conceptual line between the terms 'education' and 'learning' in the context of lifelong learning. This is to say, should youth organisations support more of the same or something else instead, that is, learning that may happen at any time or place in young people's lives. The issue is also a practical one because it is so closely linked to these organisations' daily work. In terms of practice, it is essential to clarify whether all the activities and programmes organised by the youth organisations should aim at learning and some pre-determined achievement. If the conclusion of this discussion is that it is reasonable to indicate which activities and programmes are actually organised around educational learning objectives, then this would imply that the entire issue of non-formal education and learning also becomes less complicated.

● 4.2 Benefits and concerns

Little is known about the contribution and value of non-formal education to the development and growth of young people in Europe. In this study we found that we know too little about which young people participate in non-formal education, we know even less about the nature of the processes or results of such participation, and we know next to nothing about the quality of such activity in general. However, there are a number of studies and policy papers available in which the authors explore the possible strengths of non-formal education and learning compared to formal education. Some of the advocates of out-of-school education and other alternative education arrangements argue that when young people are provided with learning opportunities other than those offered by the formal education system, they not only learn more relevant knowledge and skills but they also do so more willingly and with greater enthusiasm. In some instances, non-formal education is used to promote ethnic solidarity, while in other cases, it is intended to provide skills for socio-economic mobility. In some programmes of youth organisations, the aim is simply to provide leisure time activities for adolescents, while other programmes the aim is to provide political socialisation for those who seek to improve society²⁵. One of the most commonly held beliefs is that non-formal education is able to enhance the development of a young person as a participant in democratic society.

We asked the representatives of the European youth organisations to write about the role of non-formal education and its impact on the personal and social development of young people. We offered eleven potential choices which respondents could give as reasons for participation in non-formal activities or programmes: non-formal education facilitates participation of youth, promotes lifelong learning, employability and values related to civil society and democracy, and supplements or complements formal education. Furthermore we suggested that non-formal education enhances motivation and responsibility to learn, increases socialisation and the development of skills and competencies in general, and decreases gender disparity in educational opportunities, and socio-economic disparity in education in general. These possible areas where non-formal education may or may not have an impact, were given a score from one (very weak actual benefit to education) to five (very strong benefit to education). The simple statistical analysis in Figure 1 indicates that three areas seem to be important: development of skills and competencies (mean=4,52; standard deviation=0,70), enhancement of socialisation (M=4,33; SD=0,83), and increased participation of young people in their respective societies (M=4,33; SD=0,92). Interestingly, the youth organisations do not seem to think that non-formal education could have an influence in decreasing socio-economic or gender disparities in education.

FIGURE 1. The role of non-formal education in personal and social growth of youth as seen by the European youth organisations (N=27).

In their open ended descriptions of the value of non-formal education for the individual, or from the point of view of the national education system, four categories of views emerged: personality development, social development of a person, an alternative to formal learning, and a supplement to a person's overall educational process. Those who emphasised personality development as a main outcome value of non-formal education thought that non-formal education helps to develop healthy self-esteem, sustains motivation for self-

(25) La Belle, T.J. 1982. Formal, nonformal and informal education: A holistic perspective on lifelong learning. *International Review of Education*, 28(2), 159-175.

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

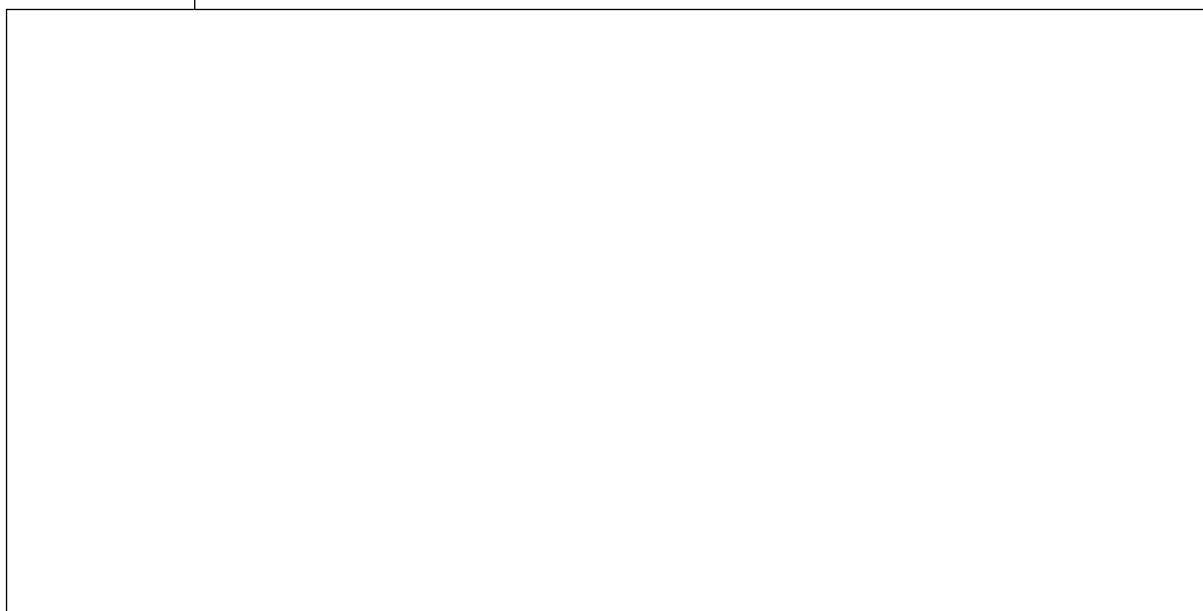


Figure 1: The role of non-formal education in personal and social growth of youth as seen by the European youth organisations (N=27).

development, builds civil awareness, promotes active citizenship and supports the construction of democratic values. In the social development category, people noted that non-formal education helps young people to get involved in their communities and societies, get to know more new people, develops communication and interpersonal skills, improves leadership skills, and increases tolerance and respect for other people. In the third category non-formal education was seen as a forum for alternative active learning methods, as well as providing opportunities to develop skills and competencies not included in school curricula, “repairing the damage that formal education has done to some young people”. Finally, there is a view that non-formal education is able to provide support to the formal schooling of youth by improving the basic skills needed for learning; helping teachers in schools, and creating learning environments in which new knowledge and skills can be put into practice. The four categories are summarised in *Figure 2*.

Personality development	Social development	Alternatives to formal education	Supplement to formal education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-esteem • gaining interest • good values • responsibility • creativity • active citizenship • self-awareness • critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active participation • social skills • communication • group skills • tolerance & respect • leadership skills • feeling of belonging • building relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities to choose • cost-effectiveness • skills and competencies not learnt in school • fixing the system • active learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applying knowledge in real life situations • helping teachers in schools • basic skills needed in schools • improving entire education system

Figure 2: The role of non-formal education in the growth of young people according to youth organisations.

A common way of thinking among the youth organisations is that non-formal education may play an important role in the development and growth of young people. However, we are able to identify two broad, rather opposing points of view here. On the one hand, there are those who think that present formal education is not able to do what it is suppose to do, and therefore non-formal education is “fixing the holes”. The following statement by one of the respondent amply illustrates this: “They provide young people with opportunities, skills and values that the formal education system does not provide at the moment, and which are of great importance for the integral development of the individual as a person and as a social actor.” On the other hand, there is a group that sees youth organisations’ role as a partner to other education providers. A good example of this kind of thinking is found in a quote from one youth organisation: “Sometimes people are encouraged to return to the formal system after years away from it through a positive experience in a non-formal setting”. In addition, there is a view that non-formal education that takes place within youth organisations is able to respond to some of the actual problems in schools by playing a supportive role: “Young persons running the risk of dropping out of education get the chance to learn how to learn. Through non-formal education, they may be given support to strengthen their self-assurance and identify themselves as empowered citizens who can influence the decisions taken, relative to their lives. They learn communication skills, social skills, team work skills, problem-solving skills and the value systems of organisations and society as a whole.”

It is necessary to take note here of a comment made by one of the youth organisations. At this point, we do not know exactly to what extent these youth organisations see themselves as educational agencies in the first place. The entire issue of non-formal education and the opportunities and concerns related to it, may appear to be irrelevant to those who have a mission that does not primarily focus on education and learning. We would argue that it is useful for the youth organisation movement to discover the role of education in these organisations, and examine what kind of beliefs and assumptions of learning their missions are actually based on.

We argued earlier that we do not know precisely what young people learn when they participate in the programmes and activities that are labelled as non-formal education. Another issue of interest is: to what extent is this learning recognised as part of a certification process, diploma or degree that the person is working towards? In this study, we asked about the kind of programmes or activities that youth organisations offer that are partly or fully recognised by the education authorities. As a result, we found out that the situation at the moment varies a lot from one country to another. While some countries state that virtually none of the youth organisations’ activities are recognised as valuable educational experiences in terms of achievement credits, other countries have a number of examples of programmes that may be included in individual study programmes or even in school curricula. Programmes that focus on leadership training, management training for youth work, voluntary community work, and some health training are the most common. Some of these examples are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

There are several reasons why the recognition of non-formal education is not common in Europe. Many seem to think that the public do not know enough about the work of the

youth organisations. We received arguments stating that this lack of awareness is quite common among formal education personnel. This is partly understandable, because non-formal education programmes normally do not have a curriculum or specific learning objectives that are normal parts of formal schooling. The fact that the school curriculum is a rigid body of knowledge that young people have to master is also seen as an obstacle to closer co-operation between schools and youth organisations in terms of student learning. Furthermore, several respondents claimed that since it is very difficult to assess the quality of the non-formal education process in general, and the actual learning outcomes in particular, the quality of overall programmes cannot be guaranteed.

The issue of recognition is not a straightforward one, according to the data that we collected from the European youth organisations. On the one hand, many believe that the recognition of skills and competencies obtained by young people through participation in non-formal education programmes and activities of youth organisations could have a positive impact on the quality of education, the development of our societies, and the well-being of our youth in both the short and the long term. This study clearly underlines the strengths and opportunities for youth organisations as semi-educational agencies. However, there is another voice, a critical one, which has to be taken into account as well, when examining this issue. The reasoning runs as follows: if the activities and programmes of youth organisations are recognised as part of the formal education of students then there will need to be at least some degree of quantification of these educational entities. In most cases, this will lead to the development of a system to try and measure the quality as compared to the quantity of the given out-of-school programme. One scenario is that all the educational activities of youth organisations would be graded according to the credit that they bring to students. Moreover, recognition also requires some indication of a curriculum for the activity to follow and methods for assessing the student outcomes. At this point in the argument, many then seem to stop and wonder whether the initial non-formal education activity is actually turning into a formal education study programme. This sounds like quite a valid and logical argument. That is to say, the recognition process entails some serious threats.

Here are a few examples of the concerns that youth organisations themselves have as regards the recognition of non-formal education. "The danger is that non-formal education is becoming too 'formalised', both in terms of the process and the system. There is also a concern that the focus of youth work is becoming skewed by other considerations." This view expresses the possibility that youth work will probably have to give up some of its typical features as an open, flexible and non-evaluative pursuit, serving the needs of young people. Another person says that "a negative consequence of further recognition might be that there will be less attention paid to the guidance and learning processes which are necessary for non-formal education. We think that students involved should be perfectly aware of what they are learning, and why, and be able to explain this. When it is recognised too easily, one may wonder if this really happens at all." One more word of concern: "If non-formal education was officially recognised there would be a danger that this would involve additional work loads due to evaluation methods, and there might be a lack of identity and the bureaucracy could detract from the ethos of non-formal education." Finally, a brief statement notes that "non-formal education can become formal and bureaucratic". These critical statements do not suggest that recognition should not be considered or discussed;

on the contrary. They simply voice concern about what may happen if the procedures are not clear and all aspects are not taken into account, both at the policy and the operational level respectively.

● 4.3 Good practices of non-formal education within youth organisations

There are thousands of agencies, organisations and groups of various kinds in Europe that have designed programmes and activities to enable young people to find rich environments - not only to enjoy whatever they do but also to learn a certain amount of knowledge, skills and habits of mind. From the data collected, we realised that awareness of the educational characteristics of these programmes and activities is not always clear enough among either the organisers or the participants. Therefore, it is quite understandable that some youth organisations do not see themselves primarily as educators, but rather as youth promoters who provide young people with opportunities to fulfil their needs and spend their free time in a meaningful way, rather than being on the streets or simply doing nothing.

It is extremely important to collect good examples of youth organisations' activities and programmes, in order to learn more about effective arrangements. There are at least two aspects that should be given particular attention when analysing any given youth activity or programme that aims at being non-formal education, thus promoting learning. First, it is necessary to focus one's analysis on the kinds of learning that the activity or programme is about to create. At this point we have to go beyond the verbal rhetoric of pedagogy - learning democratic values, team skills, and decision making - and look at how these intended outcomes are to be achieved. In addition, we have to ask: "How do we know what the participants actually learned during the programme?" It is only possible to judge the ultimate value of such programmes by obtaining some kind of feedback from the participants. Secondly, the analysis should focus on the extent to which the activity or programme follows the principles and methods of the crossing boundaries paradigm. In other words, to what extent is the activity or programme co-ordinated with the key stakeholders, i.e. education authorities, other agencies, communities and so on; how much actual co-operation is there between these parties, and have all potential resources been identified and investigated in the community.

Good practices cover examples or case studies of youth activities and programmes that appear to be successful in their specific environments for some reason. We suggest that we should move from good practices to wise practices. Wise practices are those good practices that also meet the two analytical criteria mentioned in the previous paragraph. Hence, we have extracted a few such examples from our data, that lie somewhere between good and wise practices. It is important to understand that there are numerous other examples that we do not unfortunately know about. However, these examples do highlight some aspects of youth work that tackle the issue of promoting non-formal education among European youth organisations. There are many other examples of good and wise practices written about in recent literature²⁶.

(26) See Bentley, T. 1998. Learning beyond the classroom. Education for the changing world. London: Routledge.

EXAMPLE I. RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY STUDY BOOK²⁷

This activity is organised by the Youth Academy and is targeted at all young people over 13 years of age. This is a national programme and there are apparently over 35 000 students involved from all parts of the country (in September 1999). The programme is jointly financed by the national Government and private companies.

Young people are often willing to participate in voluntary activities. They attend projects, hold positions of trust and responsibility, take courses etc. Through these activities, young people learn the valuable skills that they need in their lives: co-operation and team work skills, communication skills, problem solving, creativity, awareness of environmental issues, ability to adjust, enterprising spirit, and so forth. Voluntary activities offer many good opportunities to learn these skills.

People do not learn these skills from books: they are learnt by doing them in real situations and shouldering one's responsibilities. This kind of non-formal learning, in conjunction with learning in school, is becoming more and more recognised in this country. One of the biggest efforts made to promote this goal was the establishment of the Youth Academy and the *Recreational Activity Study Book* in 1994. The Youth Academy is a joint effort of 12 major national youth and sports organisations both for the recognition of non-formal learning and for creating new opportunities for various activities for young people. In the study book, one can easily document and gather together all the participation and learning in situations outside the formal education system.

At the moment, there are over 200 educational institutions which take into account the credits in the students' *Recreational Activity Study Book*. The Youth Academy and the collaborating educational institutions have a written agreement which sets out how the educational institutions will recognise the study book credits. A great deal of experience in recreational activities and voluntary work can be of help either when applying to these educational institutions or when participating in the studies themselves.

The Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education have recently included the notion of the importance of learning in various environments in several policy statements. Professional skills, for example, are increasingly a combination of formal and non-formal education and a result of a mixture of learning environments. The emphasis is on social and interactive skills rather than on "traditional" professional skills. The Youth Academy is very much involved in processes carried out by the authorities in order to promote the recognition of non-formal learning taking place within recreational activities and voluntary work.

In co-operation with the national employers' organisations, the Youth Academy has also been creating ways of recognising the skills and knowledge acquired in non-formal learning, when recruiting young people for summer or permanent jobs. The *Recreational Activity Study Book* is also a good way of verifying non-formal learning also when recruiting employees.

(27) The Youth Academy,
olympiastadion,
Etelakaarre, 00250
Helsinki, Finland.

The national authorities, in co-operation with the major Finnish employers' organisation, have put the emphasis on learning that takes place in recreational activities and voluntary work. Various non-governmental organisations, such as the Scouts and Guides, 4H, sports organisations, church, the Red Cross and youth organisations, can offer valuable opportunities to learn leadership and organisational skills and other competencies in practice. The difficulty thus far has been to see participation in the activities of these organisations from the viewpoint of learning. The Youth Academy has been an active facilitator in promoting this type of non-formal learning in society.

EXAMPLE 2. TRAINING COURSE FOR YOUTH LEADERS – LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT²⁸

The target group of this initiative were the leaders of the national youth organisations, with a group of 30. The course was financed by the Institute of Social and Physical Health that is a state agency.

The training course was divided into six parts, each of which could be attended separately. Each part had a different leadership-related theme: project management, team building and group management, the different faces of a leader, organisational development, keeping up inspiration and creativity as a leader, and working on positive development as a leader.

The training course had a participatory approach and the content was adjusted to meet each participant's personal needs. The participants contributed to the course and they were the ones who created the actual content.

One person was appointed to be a reporter; he made a written summary of the meeting that was distributed to the participants. There was also a person called the "gold nugget finder" (someone who is supposed to find the precious pieces) who had to collect all the good ideas and experiences in a separate report.

EXAMPLE 3. SUMMER UNIVERSITY ON AGRICULTURE²⁹

This activity is organised by MRCJ – Mouvement de la Jeunesse Agricole Chrétienne. The target group is young people living in rural areas and working in local and rural development and agriculture. There are about 150 participants and this activity is financed by the Leonardo Programme.

The Summer University takes place biannually. It gathers young people from different countries that are interested in, or working on, agriculture within the framework of rural development. The topic of the Summer University in 1998 was "Agriculture, installation and territory", that is, the possibilities that young people have to remain in rural areas and work in agriculture. The seminar was also aimed at giving participants the necessary tools to help them make their own choices regarding agriculture, and exchange their thoughts on the situation and problems that they face with a view to finding elements that the organisation could use to develop actions and continue its reflections on this topic.

(28) National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations, Kungsgatan 74, 11122 Stockholm, Sweden.

(29) Mijrac-Europe, Palma 24, 08720 Vilafrance del Penedès, Barcelona.

The following methods were used during the four-day seminar: experts' presentations on different topics, study visits, discussions, workshops, and round-table discussions. As the movement dedicates a great deal of time and effort to working on agriculture, the Summer University offers them the opportunity to gather people from all the different regions in Europe to gain a wider perspective on the work being done at national level. The event invites politicians to hear and discuss the positions of young people on agriculture and rural development.

EXAMPLE 4. DEBATE PROGRAMME³⁰

The organiser of this programme is the Debating Club of the University of Maribor. It is meant for the general secondary school and university students. There are apparently approximately 10 to 20 students per club, and they are financed by the Soros Foundation as well as the respective schools and universities.

Debating clubs are run by students for students, in order to activate formal discussions on social issues. The activities may be incorporated into subjects such as sociology or English language for secondary school students. It is recognised as an independent course for the university students.

EXAMPLE 5. LISTEN! - HØR HER!³¹

This programme was organised by a national School Student Organisation. The target group were school students in Upper Secondary Education (general education and vocational education), and about 30 school students participated in the course leader training at a national level. These people visited between 150 and 200 upper secondary schools and spent one day with the school student council in each school.

Two persons from each class participated in this course, in total circa 7000 persons. These persons went to each of their classes again and acted as course leaders for one half day of school. In total, an estimated 65 000 school students participated in the course. The programme was funded by various sponsors, but the major funding came from the largest employers organisation and the trade unions.

The aim of the campaign was to improve the active participation of young people in school in particular, and in society in general. Normally only 3-4 school students out of a class of 30 would actively participate, asking questions, and discussing or presenting an opinion. Someone may discuss powerfully and fight for one's opinion or be very relaxed and amusing when talking with others in the schoolyard, whatever the issue may be. However, as soon as the same person enters the classroom, he feels uncomfortable when raising an issue, finds it stressful to give a presentation and, in general, prefers to remain silent. The message given through the campaign was that in class, as in life, one has to make oneself heard, to speak out and give one's opinion and make others sit up and listen.

During one whole school day, the national course leaders worked with the school student council that exists in every school, made up of two persons from every class. They started off with icebreakers and energisers, and then discussed how to give a presentation and how important voice, movements and eyes are, when giving a presentation. After this short

(30) ESIB, The National Unions of Students in Europe, Liechtensteinstr. 13a, 1090 Vienna, Austria.

(31) The Norwegian School Student Organisation (NEO), PO BOX 9157 Grønland, 0134 Oslo.

theoretical part, the rest of the day was practical and interactive, involving everybody present. The course was based on role-plays, including, for example, silly theatrical scenes with a princess and two knights fighting over her, where the participants could exaggerate as much as they wanted, strike romantic poses and even writhe around the floor in death throes in order to mark the tragic endings. This scene was repeated several times, until everyone was loosened up and then they went on to try out other scenes – oral examinations, job interviews, group pressure, trying to persuade your parent to let you go to some festival alone. Silly and serious elements were mixed together and the purpose of the exercise and the way in which it could be related to real life situations were always discussed with participants.

After going through the course, the participants were given the task of trying to act as course leaders for each other. The two people from each class would give the same course to their own class in the days following the course.

As a final part to the day, the school student council was given information about school students' rights, tips and suggestions for improving the functioning of the council and developing its activities.

In total, 30 persons participated in the course leader training at the beginning of summer 95. These leaders had the task of travelling the country to visit the participating schools. For some, this meant up to two weeks of travelling, with school visits every day.

The campaign turned out to be a success. Positive feedback from participating school students as well as their teachers and head teachers told that the level of active participation had experienced a jump in the schools. Especially those school students who had the responsibility of being course leader in their own class felt much more self assured when speaking, but there was also a general improvement in feeling more relaxed about raising one's voice in class. The campaign was also successful for the organisation itself. Several of the school student councils that had participated not only became more active in their own school, but also in the activities of the organisation. Council members that had been course leaders got involved in the organisation at a regional level. More than 60 school students volunteered to be course leaders at a national level for the campaign (the "Society Game") that was set up for the start of the following school year.

● 5 CONCLUSIONS

● 5.1 Main findings

The purpose of this study is to promote dialogue on the role and level of involvement of youth organisations in providing opportunities for non-formal education as one aspect of lifelong learning. In light of this purpose, the main findings of this study are as follows:

1. REDEFINITION OF THE TERM 'NON-FORMAL EDUCATION'

Youth organisations seem to have various kinds of beliefs about non-formal education. Non-formal education within the youth work is often conceptualised through the actual working methods that are used. Another frequently used way of defining non-formal education is through the aims and intended outcomes. Conceptions of non-formal education that are constructed in this way are for most part, confusing, misleading and not very helpful for the further development of youth policies into action. Hence, we suggest that youth organisations should redefine the concept of non-formal education so that they can then use this definition in a consistent way across the board. Furthermore, we propose that non-formal education should be defined as *organised and semi-organised educational activities operating outside the structure and routines of the formal education system*.

2. THE ROLE OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AS EDUCATORS IS NOT CONSISTENT THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY

According to a survey³², youth organisations see themselves more than anything else, as one of the partners of education providers in our societies. However, the issue takes on another aspect when we specifically focus on non-formal education. In this study, we conclude that despite education being an integral element of the activities and programmes that are arranged and offered by youth organisations to young people, the pedagogic nature of these initiatives is not consistent throughout the community of youth work. In other words, some organisations seem to think that they are not providers of non-formal education but rather they offer young people opportunities to get support and responses to their true needs. It seems as if most of the youth organisations are convinced that their activities and programmes are of value, in terms of learning in general. However, the extent to which these activities and programmes are geared towards achieving certain predetermined learning results varies from one body to another.

Another important conclusion of this study is that there seems to be a mixed array of feelings towards the process of recognition of non-formal education arranged by youth organisations. Evidently, the majority of the youth work community would like young people to be able to use the achievements they attain through their participation in youth activities and programmes. However, there seems also to be those who envisage threats and dangers along the road to recognition, such as school-like assessment procedures, over-bureaucratisation and losing the spirit of freedom to choose. We believe that the developments in the recognition of non-formal education programmes as part of authorised certificates, diplomas or degrees very much depends on the context, within the European region. In some education systems, dialogue between the education authorities, youth

(32) Youth Forum 1997.
Lifelong learning: a youth perspective. Youth Forum and Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

organisations and other stakeholders has resulted in concrete arrangements, whereas, in other education systems, dialogue hardly exists or is at a very initial stage in its development.

**3. NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IS A POWERFUL VEHICLE
IN PROMOTING THE LEARNING OF SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES,
ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND SOCIALISATION OF YOUTH**

The advantage that non-formal education enjoys over regular schools or higher education comes out quite clearly among youth organisations. The non-formal education that the youth organisations offer to young people can enhance the development and learning of individuals in three ways. Firstly, it can help to develop the learning skills and competencies that are necessary in work, studies, hobbies or in life. Secondly, it promotes socialisation and the acquiring of appropriate social skills. Thirdly, it increases the level of active participation in communities. Quite interestingly, there seems to be a division in the way of thinking about these advantages. On the one hand, there are those who see the educational provision of youth organisations as added value, taking place in co-operation with formal education in order to ensure the overall education of young people. On the other hand, there are those who see non-formal education as a solution to the deficits of formal schooling. The latter position is likely to lead to confrontation between the representatives of non-formal and formal education territories. Territorial safeguarding is a very unwise strategy in the development of societies in general, and education in particular. That is why dialogue should play a key role in developing non-formal education as part of the education sphere in Europe.

As we concluded in the previous chapter, we have very little reliable knowledge about the contribution of non-formal education to the overall learning and growth of European youth. We do not only have an insufficient understanding of the actual learning process; we are not aware of which young people participate; what their motives are; how many young people attend non-formal education programmes, and last but not least, what are the effects of such programmes on social change in our communities in general, and the personal development of young people in particular. Therefore, a lot of research and specific international data is needed on these topics in future, in order to construct a reliable picture of the role and opportunities of non-formal education within the world of youth work.

● **5.2 Recommendations**

In order to provide new points of departures for dialogue both in national youth work communities and in international policy forums, we have drawn up a list of six recommendations at the end of this monograph that we believe are useful in choosing the direction to be taken next. The items of this list have emerged during the process of this study. They do not necessarily represent any general opinion of youth organisations. Nevertheless, this list is a product of an intellectual journey that has formed the backbone of this study.

**1. WORKING TOWARDS A SHARED VIEW
OF LEARNING WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS**

Learning is the key concept of education. It must not be omitted when non-formal education is considered and discussed. Since our knowledge and understanding of what learning is has

dramatically changed over the past few decades of the 20th century, there is a challenge to construct a new conception of learning within the European youth organisations. Indeed, all action aimed at learning should be based on common ideas of learning. Working towards a shared view of learning is therefore not a technical issue, but rather it is a process for establishing a platform of basic values upon which constructive dialogue on the nature of human beings and their behaviour can take place.

2. START TO PREPARE A QUALITY CONTROL AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Quality is one of the buzzwords of our era and it will continue to be so in the next millennium. Assessment always depends on available resources and the high quality of youth work is naturally a priority. Furthermore, recognition of non-formal education will, at some stage, necessarily raise the question of how to judge the quality of that kind of education.

3. SHIFT THE FOCUS FROM NON-FORMAL EDUCATION TO LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The educational discourse has moved from focusing on education to placing emphasis on learning. This has also put the learner in the spotlight, rather than the teacher or trainer. The conceptual framework of non-formal education is very complex and difficult to establish due to the fact that it depends very much on the context. Hence, we recommend that at both the policy and the operational level, the focus should shift from non-formal education to the creation of productive and meaningful learning environments. There is a danger that too much intellectual capacity is being wasted on the conceptual manipulation of terms that will not lead to any better solutions at the end of the day.

4. ESTABLISH A BASIC DATABASE FOR INFORMATION ON NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN EUROPE

A serious problem with any further development of non-formal education within youth organisations is the lack of statistical data. It simply does not exist. Therefore, we highly recommend that the necessary steps are taken to investigate the possibilities of integrating some basic items on non-formal education into the existing educational indicator systems of international organisations, such as OECD, EUROSTAT or UNESCO. It is also paramount that the development of statistical databases starts at a national level.

5. RECONSIDER THE STRATEGY FOR EXTENDED RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING

In general, the recognition of non-formal education as part of the formal education of young people is widely supported. However, it is important to listen to the voices of concern; when planning the strategic development of recognition, all aspects must be borne in mind. We recommend that some of the previous recommendations should be applied, or at least discussed, before implementation of the recognition strategies. It is important to ensure that the youth organisations do not see recognition as a threat, but rather as an opportunity to develop their initiatives and actions.

**6. PROPOSE DIALOGUE ON CREATING AN INTEGRATED
MODEL OF EDUCATION – TOWARDS A CROSSING BOUNDARIES PARADIGM**

Probably the single most important principle in improving education in the third millennium is to establish co-operation. This also applies to the development of non-formal education as one aspect of a citizen's learning experiences. We recommend that youth organisations focus on an integrated model of education in which co-ordination, co-operation and identification of new resources are the core processes. This could also act as an invitation to all other parties to participate in the dialogue on the new Crossing Boundaries Paradigm, that aims to create better education for all.