

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



EUROPEAN UNION

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MAPPING OF BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

REPORT OF THE EXPERT SEMINAR 30/9-2/10

European Youth Centre, Strasbourg

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Summary

Building on a draft report commissioned by the Partnership and produced by three experts during the summer, the Expert seminar sought to interrogate a range of issues and assumptions concerning 'Barriers to social inclusion for young people in vulnerable situations' – and the needs in terms of policy revision that flow from that analysis. Perhaps the most contentious issue remained the balance to be struck between the structural forces of exclusion and the (lack of) capacity of individuals to overcome them; put another way, the distinction between young people in vulnerable *situations*, and young people as a vulnerable *group*. In reality, of course, the two are inextricably intertwined – reflecting the classical sociological debate between structure and agency – but the expert seminar was emphatic that the focus needed to rest firmly on structural barriers that others, and policy, could and should overcome, albeit in conjunction with more individualised support and intervention. This position derived from a concern that, increasingly, public policy placed too much focus on individual capability and the lack of resourcefulness and resilience of young people, in effect 'blaming the victim', at the expense of recognising the structural and institutional practices and processes that deny access, opportunity and rights to significant segments of, if not all groups of young people. In other words, following C. Wright Mills¹, the expert group were committed to ensuring that seemingly 'private troubles' were turned into 'public issues'. These ranged from initial barriers to inclusion, such as poverty or ethnicity, through more institutional barriers blocking access and achievement in education and employment, often linked both by cause and effect to (poor) health and housing, and carrying on through to non-participation in volunteering, voting and other forms of engagement in civil society. Of particular concern was the interaction between accumulated disadvantage (sometimes known as 'conjoint inequalities'!) on the one hand and how, over time, this is compounded – but could be reversed – by further structural barriers faced over the life course.

The expert group was composed of a diverse dynamic combination of academics, policy makers and practitioners from the youth field and other fields related to social inclusion, with country representation from across the Council of Europe member states. It followed a programme of robust debate, dissecting many 'taken for granted' concepts (not least 'citizenship' and 'culture'), endeavouring to find suitable balances in the relationships between the six topics in focus (education, employment, health, housing, citizenship and culture), and trying to follow the motto of war photographers, 'if you want to get a good picture, you've gotta get close'.

There was no explicit focus on the role of youth work in overcoming some of the identified barriers, though inevitably this was discussed. It will, however, be the primary focus of a major conference in Malta at the end of November 2014, for which this seminar was a preparatory event.

¹ Wright Mills, C. (1959), *The Sociological Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press

In conclusion, as the expert group sought to find some shared positions and perspectives, there appeared to be some general agreement that the challenge was how to ensure and enable *all* young people in Europe to ‘find their place’ in society and full adult citizenship, through both the extension of social rights and the exercise of responsibilities. The removal of significant barriers to social inclusion will support those at risk of exclusion to find a place in learning, assist the pursuit of healthy lifestyles, find relevant training and a job, find a place to live and ultimately find an active place in civic and community life.

The many footnotes, in the time-honoured tradition of the late Geoffrey Pearson’s classic study of hooliganism², are simply designed to shed ‘old light on new problems’!

Introduction

A core element of the current work programme of the Youth Partnership (Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth) is concerned with the barriers to social inclusion that face young people in vulnerable situations. This particular strand of the work programme of the Partnership connects with the concerns of youth policy and practice within the European Commission with regard to ‘young people with fewer opportunities’ and the focus within the Council of Europe on young people’s access to social rights, especially in relation to the Enter! programme that has now been running for a number of years.

The Steering Group for the ‘Barriers’ initiative was alert, from the start, to the complexities of addressing this issue. Young people in vulnerable situations invariably face multiple challenges that affect them in different ways and at different times and in different orders, and even that unpredictable set and sequence of influences is heavily contingent on the capacity of individuals, and those supporting them (families, friends, institutional structures such as schools and youth work, and more), to deal with such pressures positively and purposefully. The ‘social condition’ of vulnerable young people can prospectively achieve virtuous circles (the case of care leavers given appropriate and timely support is one contemporary success story in some parts of Europe³, but, too often, any protective factors are inadequate and insufficient in the face of the multifaceted and intersectional risks that are encountered and experienced.

In order to explore these issues in more depth and detail, the Partnership commissioned a review of the research evidence (a ‘mapping’ exercise), together with an analytical paper more focused on examples of good practice (though later it was decided to amalgamate the two), in order to illustrate ways in which barriers to social inclusion might be overcome. It was this material that was presented and subjected to further reflection, debate and scrutiny by some 30

² Pearson, G. (1983), *Hooligan: a history of respectable fears*, London: Macmillan

³ European Commission (2012), *Social inclusion of youth on the margins of society: Policy review of research results*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

experts and institutional partners at the Expert Seminar. This short paper reports on those deliberations and conclusions.

Getting Started

In her remarks at the closing of the Expert Seminar, the new Head of the Youth Department, Antje Rothemund underlined that the work on the 'Barriers' needed to be firmly linked to other programmes on parallel and related issues: the 'social cohesion' strand within the Council of Europe's 2015/16 work priorities, and a range of work on access to social and human rights (including the Enter! programme) that is of particular interest to the Committee of Ministers. Capacity building and advocacy have always been twin planks of the work of the Youth Department, and the 'Barriers' work needs to be connected not just structurally but also temporally – first to the conference dedicated to the issue, to be held in Malta at the end of November 2014, but then to the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, to be held in Gent in April 2015 under Belgium's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

Antje Rothemund referred to the role of the EU-CoE youth partnership as a 'think tank', as agreed between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Framework Partnership Agreement 2014-2016, stressing its role in the fertilisation of reflection and analysis of key challenges facing young people and contributing to future deliberations on both policy and practice. However much we think we may know, she said, 'there is always room for improvement'. The challenges around the social inclusion of young people were immense: a broad platform of debate was required, together with the possibility of innovative thoughts. It was hoped that this Expert Seminar had made such a contribution, assisting not only in understanding the vulnerabilities of so many young people in contemporary Europe, but also in promoting their visibility and voice.

Karin Lopatta-Loibl, Policy Officer in charge of the EU-CoE youth partnership at the European Commission, set out the broader policy context within which the 'Barriers' project was taking place - what might be called the EU Social Inclusion context. The overarching goals of EUROPE 2020, for a 'smart, sustainable, inclusive' Europe establish the framework which accommodates objectives such as taking 20 million people out of poverty and, in relation to young people, seeks to halve levels of early school leaving (ESL) and raise the levels of attainment in higher (university) education. In the European Union, there is the European platform against poverty and exclusion, and the related annual convention, where young people are a significant priority.

With regard to specific measures and issues concerning young people, Karin Lopatta-Loibl noted that there is the **Youth Guarantee** that aims indirectly to create jobs, in part through the structural reforms to which the guarantee contributes, and in part through the subventions that are intended to influence the recruitment strategies of employers. Youth work, following the European-

wide study published earlier this year⁴, has an important role to play in the EU's broader cross-sectoral agenda and promotion of quality services for young people. The next **European Youth Report**, to be published in 2015, will contain two chapters on social inclusion, covering statistical information, policy development and implementation and illustrations from practice. The **Structured Dialogue**, during the Trio Presidency concerned with social inclusion as their 'youth' focus (Ireland, Lithuania, Greece), emphasised within the final recommendations the promotion of equal access, the stronger linking of formal and non-formal education and learning, and improved cross-sectoral co-operation. Lithuania's Presidency of the EU was focused specifically on young people who are not in education, employment or training (young people who are 'NEET'), which remains a key priority issue within the youth field for the European Commission. The **EU Work Plan for Youth**⁵ includes the promotion of youth work, and the empowerment and participation of young people. The **Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning**⁶ includes a commitment to strengthening opportunities for volunteering.

Beyond the youth field and the policy aspirations of the European Union, it is important to keep in mind the stark and often grim statistics that inform these initiatives: Twenty-four percent (24%) of Europe's population (120 million people), and 27% of Europe's children, are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Nine per cent (9%) suffer from severe material deprivation. Seven percent(7%) exist on less than 60% of average household income. And, of course, such exclusion is dramatically more pronounced for certain social and ethnic groups in particular parts of Europe. [This is, as I once wrote for a UK Parliamentary Committee, 'not a residual policy problem, but a significant policy challenge'.]

The 'Barriers' project, according to the institutional representative from the European Commission, needed to deepen knowledge of the barriers to social inclusion. The report needed to be precise and succinct. Within the Commission, in the Youth Unit, social inclusion was to be a focus of Erasmus +, and was to reach out to non-EU countries in the Mediterranean, the Eastern Partnership and the North Caucasus.

Building momentum and focus at such events is always a challenge. It is sometimes easier when most participants are reasonably familiar with each other, but some will recall that Einstein's definition of insanity that essentially

⁴ Dunne, A., Ulicna, D., Murphy, I., Golubeva, M. (2014), *Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union*, Brussels: European Commission

⁵ Council of the European Union (2014), *Draft Resolution of the Council on a European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015*, 9006/14 JEUN 63 EDUC 127 SOC 296 CULT 63, Brussels: European Commission

⁶ Council of the European Union (2012) *Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* (2012/C 398/01), Brussels: European Commission

concerned the same people doing the same things over and over again and somehow expecting a different result. For two decades, there have been endless debates about the concept, consequences and policy implications of 'social exclusion', with rather limited impact in tackling the barriers on the ground; there is clearly a need for some new spirit, energy and perspective to be injected into the equation. To that end, the Partnership invited participants from beyond the youth field, with experience and expertise in other aspects of social exclusion (notably poverty, children, minorities, disability and institutionalisation) in a commendable attempt to provide a fresh outlook of some of the issues that have exercised the minds of youth policy makers and practitioners for some time.

There was, therefore, a need to draw together the 'established' and the 'outsiders' in order to produce a new dynamic around the question of the barriers facing young people in vulnerable situations. Even this 'title' demanded some "dissection", as one of the co-chairs of the event suggested in her introduction. Even young people in vulnerable situations (and it was important to describe them in this way, not as vulnerable young people) should be considered as potentially active, with capacity, and as citizens and participants in society: the question was the extent to which, and in which ways, various barriers at different points in the early part of the life course (childhood, youth, young adulthood) impeded and jeopardise that potential. In other words, what kinds of *circumstances* and *mechanisms* produce obstacles to social inclusion at different stages and states of transition in the journey to adulthood? The mapping exercise undertaken by three experts, and presented in draft form to the Expert Seminar, was designed to provide a better understanding of these issues, their dynamics and the interaction between them. It was also the basis for considering how such structural blocks and barriers might be overcome through, for example, youth work and social work practice and, indeed, wider patterns and practices within 'youth policy'.

There was a round of introductions for the 25 experts and a number of institutional partners, conveying a clear mix of those involved in policy, those concerned with research and those more engaged in practice. Yet even in the introductions, terminology was important and contentious, as different individuals spoke of 'marginalised' and 'disadvantaged' youth, and young people with 'fewer opportunities'. There was also an implicit suggestion that these young people were fixed or trapped in their position, provoking one participant to retort that social exclusion "is not a container", but a process, during which young people (and others) can move in and out. There was a risk of labelling young people too forcefully and being too deterministic about their circumstances. On the other hand, it was clear that participants were engaged with groups who had a far greater probability of facing social exclusion: those with disabilities, refugees and asylum-seekers, migrants, unemployed people, and some families and their children. Another participant observed that it was important not to silence their voices and that there was a strong imperative, in the case of young people as an example, for youth-led research, to secure their understanding and perspective on their situation. It could well be different from the analysis advanced by researchers or policy-makers.

The meeting concurred that the issue in question was multi-faceted and complex, demanding the striking of a balance between individual and institutional factors, between 'agency' and 'structure'. Yet there was general consensus that the contemporary trend was to place too much expectation on individual capacity and resilience; it was important to re-establish an understanding that demonstrated the impact of more systemic barriers to social inclusion through blocking access routes and opportunity structures. Put another way, following the classic sociological work of C. Wright Mills, it was important to re-cast many seemingly 'private troubles' and 'public issues'⁷.

It was also noted, from the start, that different voices needed to be heard in dialogue and analysis of 'social exclusion'. The concept is an elusive and slippery one: as one institutional partner noted, "it's hard to put your finger on it". The draft 'Barriers' report had, as the Steering Group had requested, addressed six domains – education, employment, health, housing, culture and citizenship. The authors of the draft 'Barriers' report had drawn on both academic and policy literature in relation to local, national and European levels. But this framework was not exclusive, and could be subject to critique and revision. There was, for example, arguably a need to penetrate more deeply into the role of 'non-formal education' and to identify more specific practices, such as the *No Hate Speech* campaign currently being orchestrated by the Council of Europe in relation to migrants and minorities. There was, perhaps, too much concentration on barriers to political participation at the expense of a broader discussion about obstacles to community or civic engagement. In short, it was important to 'get out of the political bubble' of existing debate and move deeper and closer. As one of the co-chairs commented, "we must try to get closer, to really understand". Or, in the words of a photojournalist and war photographer⁸ after making his name in Vietnam, "if you want to get a good picture, you've gotta get close". Almost literally more concretely, the other co-chair of the seminar argued that there needed to be a better understanding of the *architecture* of exclusion – an immensely valuable image that captures the construction of social exclusion and the edifices that trap ('cement'?) people in that position.

The origins of the 'Barriers' project were outlined. The purpose of the initiative is to identify processes that can facilitate and strengthen access to inclusion for those considered to be 'disengaged', particularly through the provision of opportunities for engagement. The objectives of the project have been:

- To deepen knowledge and understanding of the barriers to social inclusion
- To develop understanding of the dynamics, mechanisms and interaction of these barriers in exacerbating social exclusion
- To explore examples of practice that convey promising evidence of effectiveness in overcoming those barriers and processes

⁷ Wright Mills, C. (1959), *The Sociological Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press

⁸ Don McCullin – though he hated this description of him: "Whatever I do, I have this name as a war photographer. I reject the term. It's reductive. I can't be written off just as a war photographer" (The Observer, 7th February 2010)

Once more, it was emphasised that the focus of the project is on the situations experienced by young people, and not directly on them as individuals or groups – though some overlap between the two is absolutely inevitable. The ‘grid’ that framed the guidance for those commissioned to write the ‘Barriers’ report was concerned essentially with, on the one hand, circumstances that produced no, low or limited *access to* key domains of social inclusion (learning, employment, health, housing, culture and citizenship) and, on the other hand, high exposure to risks of *exclusion from* these domains. Once more, of course, this is often a conceptual distinction which, in practice and daily life, is considerably blurred.

The expected outcomes of the project⁹ are a plausible and pioneering framework of understanding supported by a comprehensive report, an outline of the implications for public policy in general and youth work in particular, and a series of policy briefs focusing on particular barriers to social inclusion and how these might be overcome.

Some initial responses to the draft ‘Barriers’ report were invited from the participants. Predictably, it was noted that context was always all important, given the huge variations in the circumstances of young people in different European countries (but, equally, one might point to similarly significant variations in the circumstances of young people even in apparently quite comparable disadvantaged neighbourhoods). The view was expressed that the additional value of this ‘Barriers’ report would be to draw out the *common challenges* relating to structural exclusion that young people typically face in particular situations almost irrespective of their geographical location in Europe. It is always easy, particularly from perspectives of research and indeed practice, to retreat into what Freud called the ‘narcissism of minor differences’ (though such minor differences can in fact be all-important), but however much it is important to acknowledge such calibrations, it is equally important – from a policy perspective at the European level – to establish where there is *common ground* on which the machinery of policy-making can develop a measured response.

Presentations

The first afternoon started with a sequence of presentations from participants, starting with some research perspectives, followed by the views of some of those more directly involved in practice with young people and other groups in vulnerable situations.

⁹ For further information on the project including timeline please see <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/mapping-on-barriers-to-social-inclusion>

Research perspectives

Key messages from research-based contributors were, firstly, to recognise that the barriers to social inclusion are first and foremost related to the problem of social inequality but, irrespective of the starting point, there is a need to abandon problem-oriented conceptualisations and to adopt more positive thinking in relation to the capacities and perspectives of even 'disadvantaged' young people, including involving them as researchers through a 'youth-led' model of research (Theo Gavrielides, Independent Academic Research Studies). A similar philosophical position was advanced by Anna Ludwinek (Eurofound), who emphasised the importance of discovering how young people feel¹⁰ as well as recognising that, whatever the prima facie case for co-ordinated policy responses in the face of multi-faceted barriers to inclusion was, structures were often impeded in pursuing such an approach because of different budgets and different departmental or organisational objectives. Returning to young people facing barriers to inclusion, it was noted that it is easy to talk about 'empowerment' and 'motivation' but that young people in these situations have often faced "too many knock-backs" and, as a result, any trust they may have had in the 'system' has evaporated. New information technologies may be one instrument to reach out to them again, but typically prospects for social mobility have been denied¹¹. In terms of what may work to overcome barriers to social inclusion, Anna Ludwinek reported on a Eurofound 11-country study that raised some important policy questions, dilemmas and problematics:

- How to balance relationships and resources
- How to balance prevention and compensatory interventions
- The relative merits of conditionality or targeting
- Ensuring reach and relevance in the use of resources
- Scaling-up and transferability of promising projects and programmes

From a very different, ethnographic perspective, Daniel Briggs (Universidad Europea de Madrid) discussed the increasing precariousness of 'lots and lots' of young people. In particular, he drew attention to the *spatial exclusion* of young people, as public (and increasingly private consumer) space came to be regulated by Closed Circuit Television (CCTV). The paradox here is that it is indeed consumption that appears to continue to govern the lives of even more excluded young people, not complaint about their worsening circumstances and diminishing hope for the future. A schema of political disengagement was proposed:

¹⁰ Following this observation, I thought of some of the most 'successful' young people I know and, despite their many educational achievements, their sense of exclusion and, indeed, betrayal; and I contrasted that with some of the lifetime offenders I know, who have never worked legitimately, who would feel firmly attached to their local communities and cultures, and not 'excluded' at all.

¹¹ This reminded me of an old criminological study around 'blocked opportunity structures' where young people responded in diverse ways: through criminal subcultures (to achieve in other ways!), and retreatist and radical subcultures (that rejected dominant societal goals). See Cloward, R. and Ohlin, L. (1960), *Delinquency and Opportunity*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Most vulnerable	-	politically disenfranchised
Borderline vulnerable	-	politically disorientated
Middle bracket	-	politically blinded

The economic troubles facing young people had been very successfully individualised, indeed depoliticised and policy focus was directed at equipping young people for employment and seeking to cultivate resilience, not resistance.

Perspectives from work with young people and other groups in vulnerable situations

From the perspectives of those working with various groups experiencing social exclusion, there was a series of similar messages. In the context of disability, the social, rather than the medical model is instructive: a denial of full participation is less a product of the disability per se, and much more a consequence of the social, cultural, physical and attitudinal barriers that those with disabilities routinely face. The pre-requisites for greater participation are, therefore, according to Karina Chupina (Independent Expert): access, competence, information, motivation and resources. There were still many weaknesses in strategies and structures that were seeking to overcome barriers to the inclusion of people with disabilities; what was needed was a dual approach with both disability-specific and more inclusive programmes. Echoing a comment heard recurrently from youth organisations, there should be ‘nothing about us, without us’.

The starting point for the next presentation was the barriers to housing, with all the ‘knock on’ effects on (exclusion from) education, (poor) health, (lack of) employment and (rejection or refusal) of participation. Numerous creative measures (from support with timekeeping to cheap tickets for the theatre¹²) were used to support pathways towards (re-)inclusion. L’ÉTAGE in Strasbourg, according to Véronique Bertholle (Youth Express Network) had, over time, developed a range of strategies to overcome discrimination in the field of housing but, in the process, had established a set of principles for practice (an holistic approach, peer education, youth voice, and group work) that addressed wider barriers to inclusion. Indeed, following a research contention about the need for a more positive orientation in the debate, the point was made that although homeless people as a group are constantly “pushed back and pushed out”, a group can also “lift you up and lift you out”¹³.

Leo Kaserer (Arbeiterkammer Tirol) talked about his fishing and boatbuilding links with Cornwall in the UK and his development of the Rückenwind (Tailwind) project, using the resources of the European Voluntary Service (EVS)

¹² George Orwell observed in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Harper Collins 1937), about the plight of the poor in north-west England, that even the very poorest people (living on state handouts based on the calories they required to keep them alive) starved themselves in order to go to the cinema and have an ice cream on Friday nights. It was the way they preserved their humanity and attachment to the human race.

¹³ See also: Williamson, H. (2011), ‘The safety nets and trampolines of youth work’, *Youth Work Now / Children and Young People Now*, January, p.28

programme. He made the point that he worked with the ‘ordinary kids’¹⁴ and was committed to ensuring ‘equity’: responding to the different challenges presented by young people according to their distinctive biographies. Supporting a research perspective around the loss of trust amongst those facing barriers to inclusion, there was a need to produce and promote something that was “cool, strange and different”. Hence Rückenwind, a mobility (EVS¹⁵) project as a (re-)start of involvement. It is something “innovative and different”, in which young people *create* something that is “feasible and visible”, in a certain time, in a certain place, for the *community*. Invoking the old cliché, though nevertheless a reality of practice, about the need to ‘start where people are at’, the project offers individual and tailor-made support for a long-term perspective towards inclusion, involving professional youth workers and social workers as well as dedicated craftsmen (*sic*) to teach young people the practical skills. To date, the project has forged 1,200 contacts with young people that have produced 120 quality mobilities, of which 80% have returned to education and employment (though this is a subordinate aim, below the strengthening of young people self-perception and self-esteem¹⁶).

Discrimination against an oppressed minority ethnic group, the Roma, has a particularly pronounced effect on health¹⁷ – notably life expectancy and infant mortality – and of course outcomes in other aspects of life (educational participation and achievement, employment). Roma people, as Bernadett Maria Varga (Roma Health Fund) explained, are routinely excluded from public health care, through non-registration, and are consequently denied vaccinations and prescriptions drugs, thus compounding existing health deficiencies. There is little non-formal education that might address issues such as early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Bridging the health divide between Roma and more mainstream populations is a critical imperative if broader positive outcomes are to be achieved.

Collaborative social work practice, supporting the mobility and education of service users, is another mechanism for overcoming barriers to social inclusion, according to Hans Steimle (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Evangelische Jugendsozialarbeit), though the capacity to work together is itself often impeded

¹⁴ Once defined as those whose names were neither on the honours board nor scratched into the desks at their schools. See Brown, P. (1987), *Schooling Ordinary Kids: Inequality, Unemployment and the New Vocationalism*, London: Tavistock

¹⁵ This is *exactly* what EVS was originally designed to do. It was one of two measures (the other being ‘second chance schools’), within the third objective of the EU Teaching and Learning White Paper (1995), established to ‘Combat Exclusion’. Though it has many merits in its own right, EVS has rarely lived up to that promise and tends to serve the needs and aspirations of young people who are rather less excluded. See European Commission (1995), *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*, White Paper on Education and Training, COM (95) 590, Brussels: European Commission

¹⁶ ‘Self-esteem’ is something of a weasel word and probably best avoided: see Emler, N. (2001), *Self-esteem: The costs and causes of low self-worth*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

¹⁷ It is not only Roma people, though their context may be more extreme, but all those growing up poor. See Linda Tirado’s new book, following a blog that went viral, about living on the breadline in the USA: Tirado, L. (2014), *Hand to Mouth*, London: Virago

by institutional barriers¹⁸. An evaluation carried out in Bavaria has demonstrated the impact of such measures when effective collaboration is achieved. Schools can also be places where barriers to social inclusion can be reversed. The case study was presented of one German production school providing residential care for young women between 12 and 25 with little confidence and very limited communication skills. With such a 'restricted code', they often found it hard to articulate their aspirations, their prejudices and their fears. The school, according to Michael Schröpfer (Hardstiftung) engenders the social skills that permits the combating of racism, violence and 'bad thinking' amongst the students who attend. The message from these two final presentations from practice was the importance of working together in order to bridge youth work, social work, education and employment. Such networking helps to 'plug the gaps' for those with multiple and complex problems. Working together to overcome more structural barriers to inclusion means involving the young people themselves, and the cultivation of trusting relationships requires time and resources.

Some reflection – points worth underlining

There was strong support for the ideas of 'nothing about us, without us' and the need to develop frameworks to enable and ensure that young people could represent themselves, with a more concentrated focus and stronger frameworks for those young people from minority groups. At a more structural level, more recognition and support was needed for small NGOs that were often closely attuned to the specific issues facing particular groups. They were the first 'port of call', too, for a more grounded, youth-led evidence base. Yet, as the rapporteur noted in his 'end of day' summing up, the trend was to privatise public services to large companies that often then exploited (rather than strengthened) small NGOs after creaming off significant management fees.

Concern was expressed about what might be called 'legislative impotence' – the constant passing of legislation, resolutions and recommendations, yet with little or limited action on the ground. It was argued that mechanisms needed to be found to 'reinforce local political responsibility': there was already considerable policy commitment to migrants, minorities and Roma, to supporting mobility, to refugees and asylum-seekers, to youth work and youth rights, yet rarely was this enacted. This was one of the issues identified by the rapporteur in his efforts to draw together the major themes of the day:

- Policy 'translation' and implementation 'leakage'
- A commitment to listening to the perspectives of those in vulnerable situations – *from their point of view*

¹⁸ In England, Children England have coordinated a decision by major children's and social work charities (NGOs) not to engage in competition with each other for public (governmental) resources but to collaborate in order to maximize the resources that reach the ground: see The Declaration of Interdependence: <http://www.childrenengland.org.uk/declaration-of-interdependence/>

- An ethic of acceptance¹⁹ ('starting where people are at')
- The need for trust, time and territory (the space to develop relationships and relevant action)
- A focus on the practical to engender competence and confidence
- The importance of human relationships providing support and guidance in order to better navigate the complexities of structural barriers
- The need to weaken the barriers by building 'bridges' and 'stepping stones'
- The criticality of the local: it is all very well having European principles but their delivery at the local level will be the test of their effectiveness

It was acknowledged that, predictably perhaps, the debate had shifted somewhat back to the individual and social groups and away from more structural questions and contexts, situations and circumstances. Yet equipping young people (and others) in vulnerable situations with 'navigational capacities'²⁰ is part of the challenge: if identified barriers are not demolished through revised and active policy, then young people's resources need to be strengthened so that they can find a way through them or fight to overcome them. This is a very different position from one that pathologises the individual and individualises blame. But, as one participant noted at the very end of the day, it remained essential to consider how barriers are built, were built in the past, and how to prevent them being built in the future.

The 'Barriers' Report

The middle day of the Expert Seminar was dedicated to discussing the ideas and conclusions of the draft 'Barriers' report. Participants were also encouraged to consider the kinds of 'stories' that could sit behind (and in front of) the statistics, providing human accounts not of 'good practice' necessarily, but of processes that produced exclusion and, indeed, processes that tackled the barriers to inclusion. The authors were seeking elaboration and calibration of the current content of the draft 'Barriers' report. They sought from the participants their perspectives on the relevance of the existing data, support for or dissent from the arguments presented, and suggestions for additional material or material that should be removed. It was hoped, they said, that the resultant policy briefs would lead to changes in policy and practice, though the institutional representative from the European Commission emphasised that the Youth Partnership was not in fact a policy-making platform and more a 'think tank'

¹⁹ As enshrined in the core principles of social work. See Biestek, F. (1963), *The Casework Relationship*, London: Allen & Unwin

²⁰ This is a new concept being developed by Sharlene Swartz and Adam Cooper in South Africa, though it is not dissimilar to Helena Helve and John Bynner's 'life management' or Howard Sercombe's 'facilitating agency' – Helve, H. and Bynner, J. (eds) (1996), *Youth and Life Management*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press; Sercombe, H. (2010), *Youth Work Ethics*, London: Sage; Swartz, S. and Cooper, A. (2014), 'Navigational Capacities for Youth Success in Adversity: A Sociology of Southern Youth', paper presented at the XVIII World Congress of Sociology, Yokohama, Japan

with a responsibility for knowledge production. Nevertheless, a policy dimension to the 'Barriers' project is certainly within the work plan of the Partnership.

However, this did raise questions within the Seminar about the purpose of the 'Barriers' project and its primary audience. One participant noted that the 'elephant in the room' was the absence of young people²¹ but the point was made that the 'Barriers' project was primarily targeted at politicians, senior policy makers within the European institutions and experienced social workers, though part of the process would still be consultation with young people, through youth organisations²².

There were also, immediately, numerous suggestions for additional 'domains' that needed to be covered, or the splitting of existing domains. For example, it was suggested that ill-health and disability needed to be much more carefully separated: they were very different, with quite different implications for a 'barriers' debate. Institutional barriers that were, literally, to do with institutionalisation needed to be addressed: the de-institutionalisation of various groups in vulnerable situations remained a pressing policy issue. Hate crime needed to be covered. Social security and social protection was only conspicuous by its absence (though it could be amalgamated with a discussion of the right to some 'basic income' on pathways of learning and training towards the labour market²³).

The point was repeated that the mapping exercise that informed the draft 'Barriers' report was part of a process towards a better understanding of the complexities of the issues²⁴, but that not every conceivable domain could be covered, which was why the six existing ones had been the focus. These were not, however, cast in stone, and could be amended and revised.

(i) Discussion of the evidence and the arguments

After deliberations that consumed the whole of the second day, in small, moving and flexible groups on the six a priori 'domains'²⁵, some conclusions were reached.

²¹ Not completely: at least one participant was under 30, indeed under 25

²² For one slightly different illustration of this kind of process, see Barry, M. (ed.) (2005), *Youth Policy and Social Inclusion: critical debates with young people*, London: Routledge

²³ A point made firmly by the recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) on *The Condition of Britain: strategies for social renewal* (London: IPPR 2014), which argues that separate social security and youth training policy is counter-productive and that there needs to be one single 'youth allowance' up to the age of 25

²⁴ The first event convened by the Research, Policy and Practice Forum on Young People, in the UK, in 1996 was focused on precisely this issue. The topic was 'Social Exclusion' and contributors included government ministers, senior academics and youth practitioners, followed by intensive round table discussions. There is a report on the event, though it may be hard to find.

²⁵ I sat in on only two of these groups – citizenship and culture. With 'citizenship', there was a view that it is something of a 'catch-all' term [it has been invested with so much meaning that it has become meaningless: Heater, D. (1999), *What is Citizenship?* New York: Wiley], that it should be detached from elision with the term 'participation' (they can be very different things), and that it is better to consider ideas such as 'not being cut off from society', 'not being excluded from

Housing

Housing issues needed to be firmly located within a right-based framework – of human and *social* rights. The ‘Barriers’ report needed emphasise the geographical diversity of housing transitions and provision (owner occupation, public housing, private rented) across Europe but, equally, to assert the three key needs of availability, accessibility and affordability. These had all been jeopardised in recent years by the financial crisis, economic circumstances, political decisions and the structures of financial services, with young people taking a disproportionate hit. The quality and adequacy of housing provision for young people has deteriorated. Attention needs to be given, in particular, to questions of energy costs, suitability for habitation (issues such as damp), the size of prospective accommodation, the numbers of occupants, and the prevalence of overcrowding. All have implications for, and can be inter-dependent with, employment and health. Youth homelessness does, of course, require specific attention²⁶, but the more pervasive challenge is how to address and remove the barriers that prevent young people from leaving home until a later and later age²⁷.

Education

Much of the discussion had focused on schooling and the institutional barriers and rejection that often prevailed for some young people, but it was asserted that education/learning is much broader than school. Learning needed to be attached to the wider community, and non-formal education through sport, music and arts needed more attention and recognition. The financial costs of university education also inhibited participation by some young people. With

meaningful engagement’ or ‘being denied a sense of belonging’. The group on culture also struggled with the concept, recognizing there was both ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ culture (trapping people in exclusion, though giving them a sense of belonging (!), or connecting them with wider opportunities and experience), and that there is both ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, the latter often created through the initiative and creativity of young people [see Willis, P. et al. (1990), *Common Culture: Symbolic work at play in the everyday cultures of the young*, Milton Keynes; Open University Press; and also De Wachter, B. and Christiansen, S. (1993), *Training for enterprise - Promoting initiative and creativity in young people*, Brussels: Commission of the European Communities]. This debate raised important questions about the ‘boundaries’ of culture that simultaneously include and exclude, and how to construct spaces for creativity that provide pathways to inclusion. What was not in dispute was that cultural activity is a doorway to inclusion (belonging, attachment, engagement – see Cohen, P. (1990), *Really Useful Knowledge: Photography and Cultural Studies in the Transition from School*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books) and that it should be supported across a range of policy domains and across a range of EU programmes. [The discussion was, after all, taking place on International Music Day!]

²⁶ A particularly useful study is Hutson, S. and Liddiard, M. (1994), *Youth Homelessness: The construction of a social issue*, London: Macmillan

²⁷ Ainley, P. (1991), *Young people leaving home*, London: Cassell. Based on a sub-set of respondents from the ESRC 16-19 Initiative, Ainley discovered that leaving home was a hit and miss affair, with many young people returning home after trying to leave, but that successful departure was invariably contingent upon hidden support from family, relatives and friends. And those most in need of support (those young people in the most vulnerable situations!) had both little access to it, nor often any home to return to (having been thrown out, or left because of friction, disputes and abuse) – thus compounding the likelihood of unsuccessful and unhappy housing transitions.

the increasing privatisation of formal education, and the competitive context that was being encouraged politically, the barriers to learning were, if anything, likely to increase, as league tables meant that educational institutions were inclined to 'wash their hands' of young people who were going to put their competitiveness and reputation at risk. In short, current trajectories in education need revision and reversing, in order to foment stronger links and co-operation between families, schools and their communities²⁸.

Employment

According to one participant, contemporary policy had to address "the liquidation of the (youth) labour market" and reconsider the treatment and experience of unemployment as the realm of lazy, stupid people. Whatever the wider contextual predicament facing many young people in the labour market, there are broader factors that almost present barriers to the possibility of young people maximising their employment prospects, not least a culture of 'celebratisation' (cult of celebrity) that appears to valorise effortless achievement (in fact, there has to be a great deal of hard work behind the scenes, whether you become a music star or a footballer, but it often remains invisible to the youthful gaze).

Permanent jobs have disappeared and the young are vulnerable to zero hours contracts, temporary and casual work or expected to take on 'free' work and voluntary work in order to enhance their job possibilities. [One participant questioned this position as the defining situation: there are massive labour shortages in some sectors of the economy, and demographics provide hope for the young, though working conditions need intervention by trade unions if pay and other benefits are to be improved.]

Given all the rhetoric about the need for versatility and the value of a range of competencies and skills, the focus of breaking down barriers to the labour market should be on the recognition and validation of new skills, however these have been acquired²⁹. The focus should be on building talent and engendering confidence, 'inverting and reverting the trend' that recognises only formal, academic qualifications.

Citizenship and Culture

These two domains were slowly eliding and colliding. Within the debates around citizenship, there was increasing reluctance to use the concept. Furthermore, it was felt that it should be detached from discussions of 'participation' and more attached to ideas of 'belonging' and 'community'.

Access to 'citizenship' was considered to be a slippery, rhetorical device, whereas access to 'culture' and cultural activities was seen as a relevant step towards social inclusion and the formation of identity. Conversely, the denial of access to culture and cultural activities was a significant barrier to social inclusion.

²⁸ See a Joseph Rowntree Foundation review of the literature on this question: Ball, M. (1998), *School inclusion: The school, the family and the community*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

²⁹ I once argued that, in processes concerning the accreditation of prior learning, the car mechanic skills learned informally by motor vehicle thieves should be recognized in order to give them the possibility of engaging with the legitimate labour market – see Istance, D., Rees, G. and Williamson (1994), *Young people not in education, training or employment in South Glamorgan*, Cardiff: South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council

Financial, linguistic and indeed cultural issues often impeded that access, though it was important to recall that while some cultural activities might be blocked from young people, young people were also the creators of their own 'moving culture'³⁰. These sometimes further restricted social inclusion in any conventional sense (think about the role of hip hop and its relation to gang and deviant subcultures) but they also held some promise of strengthening routes into mainstream society. Both ways, they represented being part of something, a form of inclusion one way or another.

Health

The fundamental, pervasive issue is the lack of relevant and timely services or, more precisely, the lack of access to them. Services neither reach young people, particularly those with disabilities or those in institutions, nor do young people have the awareness or the capacity to call on them. Cuts in public (health) services in many countries have made this situation even worse. Where there are costs attached to health care, minor ailments often go untreated for those who are poor, often leading to worsening health, where a vicious downward spiral is compounded by the pressures of family life and the demands of precarious employment. The consequences are manifold: teenage pregnancy, substance misuse and other forms of addiction, as well as obesity and other more mainstream forms of ill-health. All contribute to under-achievement and drop-out from both education and employment, inactivity in social and community life and a general lack of capacity and volition to 'engage', producing a negative pathway of exclusion.

(ii) What needs to be done?

Some ideas were already expressed as a result of the earlier deliberations that had moved seamlessly from identifying the barriers to social inclusion to considering how these might be overcome. There may therefore be some repetition of those thoughts below.

Education

A huge checklist of prospective measures to overcome barriers to educational exclusion was proposed. Here just those that seemed most prominent are recorded. Though it deviated once again from attention to structural circumstances that impeded routes to inclusion, it was perhaps predictable that considerable focus was placed on strengthening the support for individuals to secure greater retention and achievement in learning.

Continuous counselling and support were needed, through both mentoring³¹ and peer learning, and including partnerships with youth workers and other community-based services.

³⁰ See Willis, P. (1990), *Moving Culture: An enquiry into the cultural activities of young people*, London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

³¹ Though if outcome expectations are drawn too tightly and specifically, according to Helen Colley, there is a risk of 'snatching defeat from the jaws of victory' as other achievements secured through support and mentoring are not 'counted', ignored or dismissed. See Colley, H. (2003),

It was acknowledged that there are many policies already in place, at least on paper, and even those projects that have been established often fall short in really reaching and engaging with those young people most at risk of exclusion³². The dual imperative was, first, to join up, constructively, individual, family, community and institutional provision in a productive partnership, and secondly, to strengthen the reality of policy aspirations³³ to reach out and extend support for the ‘most disadvantaged’.

Employment

The first suggestion was that young people themselves need to be involved in determining how (and what) skills and talents should be developed, recognised and accredited.

Links to the labour market need to be cultivated during the years of schooling through education-business partnerships and enterprise education in schools³⁴, though at the same time young people need to be appraised of their rights in the workplace and there needs to be more regulation of employers to combat discrimination and poor working conditions.

There should be more robust transition support between education and the labour market, in order to help young people to establish a stable and autonomous life. Where young people aspire to entrepreneurship, there needs to be more systematic advice and support for business planning, start-up and during the early days³⁵. Working life should be compatible with other (family and community) responsibilities over the life course. There needs to be ongoing information, advice and guidance to assist young people in making informed and relevant choices, coupled with open days and taster sessions to familiarise them with different sectors of the economy.

Vocational training could be governed through youth competency centres that, in parallel with reform of employment services, would be responsible for youth training, guidance and employment up to the age of at least 25.

Questions were raised as to why the new EU-initiated youth guarantee should ‘kick in’ after four months, and not before – though in fact this is a logical point for intervention, for it represents the break point between cyclical and structural

Mentoring for Social Inclusion: a critical approach to nurturing a mentoring relationship, London: RoutledgeFalmer

³² Once somewhat facetiously described by the Chief Executive of the drugs charity Turning Point, Lord Victor Adebawale, as “hitting the target, but missing the point”!

³³ The concepts of ‘implementation leakage’ or ‘policy translation’ are relatively new, though Karen Evans wrote about the need to consider the different steps at which policy is ‘espoused, enacted and experienced’ in *Shaping Futures: Learning for Competence and Citizenship*, Aldershot: Ashgate 1998. A recent unpublished study of policy translation in the youth field is: Thompson, L. (2012), *Translations between policy and practice: The case of providing positive activities for young people*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, Open University Business School

³⁴ This need not be just about education for entrepreneurship. There can be education for, through and about enterprise – see Jamieson, I. and Miller, A. (1988), *Mirrors of Work: work simulations in schools*, London: Falmer

³⁵ One of the few in-depth studies of youth entrepreneurship suggests that the early enthusiasm for business and self-employment rapidly dissipates as young people come to realize the ebbs and flows and hard work involved. This process was characterized as running, plodding, falling – as, eventually, many individuals gave up. See Macdonald, R. and Coffield, F. (1991), *Risky Business? Youth and the Enterprise Culture*, London: Falmer

unemployment and pre-empts the dreadful 'scarring effects' that can blight the lifetimes of those young people who remain unemployed for any protracted period³⁶.

In challenging the barriers to inclusion in the labour market, it will be important that for both the voices of young people, through youth organisations, and the voices of young people, through academic research, are marshalled to advocate for decent salaries and working conditions from a shared platform.

It is jobs, or rather the lack of them, that most significantly blights the capacity for young people to become socially included. The economic and financial crisis has disproportionately negatively affected the young, and there is a moral as well as political responsibility to rectify this imbalance, as the older (golden) generation in Europe appears to have taken it all³⁷.

Health

The most critical issue was the need to redesign health services for young people, to ensure reach and relevance. There should be youth engagement from planning to implementation. Within schools, universal sex and relationships education should provide information and enable young people to make informed choices. [Inevitably this is a contentious proposal and it should, perhaps, be enshrined within a broader commitment to the provision of social, personal and health education.]

Access to a range of health services is a critical issue. It demands a stronger partnership approach – as one participant said, 'one door', not a revolving door! Young people need to be made aware of access routes, to be aware of their rights to health care and to know the mechanisms for redress when these rights are not fulfilled.

Local health services need to be embedded in wider youth provision, sustainable and accessible, and tailored to the diversity of the population served, thereby enabling positive health behaviours by all sections of the community and avoiding the barriers that arise through discrimination, labelling, stigma and exclusion.

Housing

Young people do not choose³⁸ to become homeless or to live in precarious housing conditions. But young people in vulnerable situation are at significant risk of homelessness or poor housing destinations. Analysis must move beyond

³⁶ Bell, D. and Blanchflower, D. (2010), *Youth Unemployment: Déjà Vu?* IZA DP No. 4705; Bell, D. and Blanchflower, D. (2011), *Young People and the Great Recession*, IZA discussion paper 5674; Blanchflower, D. and Freeman, R. (eds) (2000), *Youth Unemployment and Joblessness in Advanced Countries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. See also Dietrich, H. (2012), *Youth Unemployment in Europe: Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Findings*, Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

³⁷ Willetts, D. (2010), *The pinch: How the baby boomers took their children's future – and why they should give it back*, London: Atlantic Books

³⁸ Precisely part of the title of a report by a National Inquiry into the Prevention of Youth Homelessness in the UK that was conducted in the 1990s: Evans, A. (1996), *We Don't Choose to be Homeless: Report of the National Inquiry into Preventing Youth Homelessness*, London: Homeless Link

'renters and students' to more diverse groups of young people and more diverse housing situations. Consideration needs to be given to the provision of social housing, the way empty properties can be marshalled in the interests of the young, the stronger regulation of the housing sector to limit extortionate rents and the exploitation of tenants, and more responsible provision of finance to support the aspirations of young people around independent living.

Those young people in vulnerable situations need additional support to prepare them for independent living, including perhaps forms of 'floating support' once they are living independently. For young people who succumb to contemporary barriers in the housing market and end up homeless, current arrangements in hostel provision (segregated shelters, limited stays, no pets) should be reviewed in order to consider how more effective housing provision may offer a springboard to further (re-)inclusion³⁹.

A further suggestion was that housing vouchers should be made available to young people who needed accommodation, in order to promote choice.

Culture

Culture, it was argued, was a key instrument for social inclusion. There were, however, significant institutional barriers (finance, language, dress codes, behaviour expectations) that blocked access for young people in vulnerable situations to mainstream 'high' cultural activities. But culture was not just about opening up access and opportunity for cultural *experience* but also about providing space and recognition for young people's own cultural *expression*.

Synopsis

There really were just two overall core messages arising from all this deliberation, reflection and suggestion. The first concerns a slightly contrived alliteration (but this makes it easier to recall):

- Awareness – information to support informed choices
- Access – routes to engagement and participation
- Action – support & advocacy, service provision, experience & opportunity
- Accreditation – recognition, validation and certification
- Advancement – progression, next steps

But this applies in an overarching way to many of the observations and comments made by participants across all the domains of discussion. These were initially six, but there seemed to be broad agreement that citizenship and culture should meld into one. Indeed, the other broad conclusion from the seminar was that the theme of the project was perhaps less about Barriers to social inclusion and more about understanding how young people can 'find a

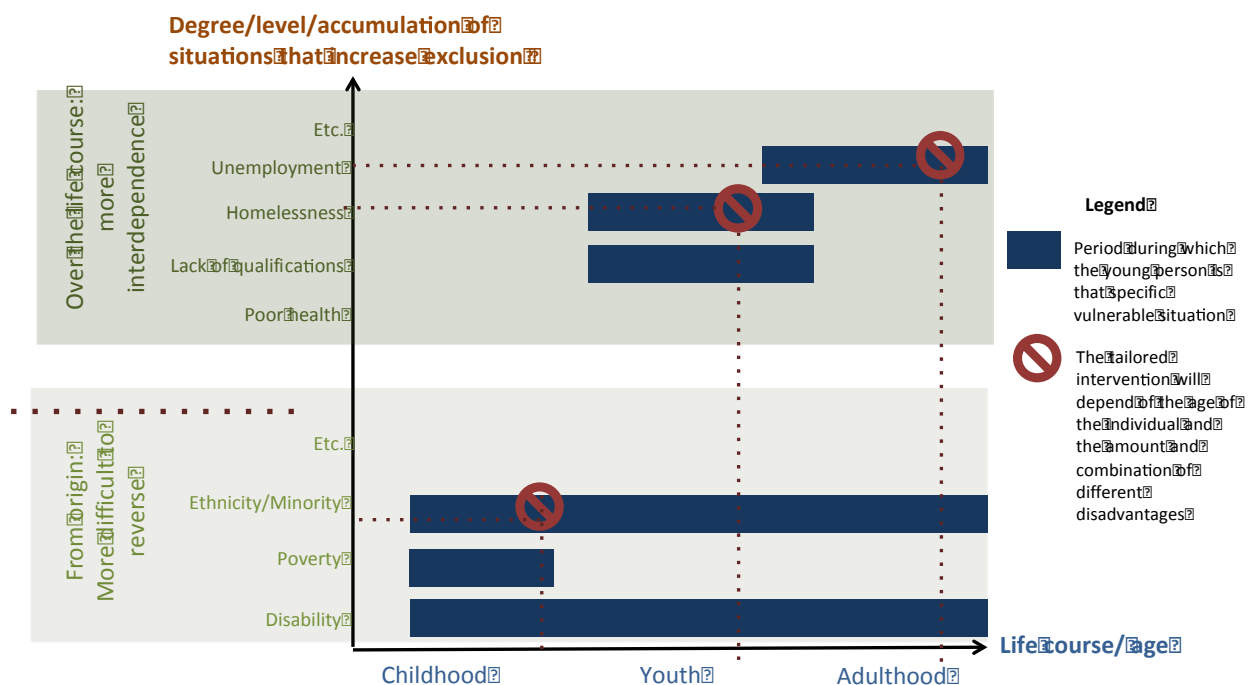
³⁹ This was exactly the vision of the Foyer movement, which sought to combine the provision of housing with training and employment. There is some skepticism about the way the movement may tend to cherry pick 'good' tenants, but the vision remains a strong one. See Ward, C. (1997), *Havens and Springboards: The Foyer Movement in Context*, London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

place' in the modern Europe – in learning, employment, health, housing and community. In other words, the project is concerned with:

- Finding a learning pathway
- Finding a job
- Finding a healthy lifestyle
- Finding a place to live
- Finding an active place in civic and community life

The dichotomy between the structural and the individual, between 'situations' and 'groups', is a false one, though philosophically the project wished to counter the wider political tendency to individualise the problems and the challenges and to invest young people with the responsibility for dealing with them. These are, the project contends, social challenges and social responsibilities, though individuals, whatever their social rights, clearly still have their part to play.

A visual schema that sought to illustrate the dynamic between the *accumulation* of obstacles to social inclusion and their impact *over time* was provided, after the seminar, by one of the research expert members of the Steering Group⁴⁰. There will always be critical moments when exclusion is compounded but, equally, when prospects for improved inclusion can be seriously addressed:



⁴⁰ Magda Nico, from the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR)

Conclusion

Conclusions and final words were provided by the the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the European Youth Forum and the Youth partnership team. Preceding them, the CDEJ member for Malta, Miriam Teuma, provided some contextual and logistical information on the forthcoming conference in Malta, raising the inevitable question about what kind of youth work was needed for addressing barriers to social inclusion. Malta has a unique youth work history and a unique geo-political position in modern Europe, and so its story will be of particular interest to participants at the end of November.

Even at the 'bitter end' the European Youth Forum (through Giorgio Zecca) injected some final important observations. First, researchers and youth organisations should be 'filling the gap' and working together to advocate for young people on the basis of experiential and academic evidence. Secondly, though it is important to be really listening to young people, what are the implications of what they say for information dissemination and campaigns? Third, there needs to be a serious debate about how best to balance individual rights and collective rights, for both organised and non-organised youth. And fourth, the internal challenge within 'youth communities' must be acknowledged – the growing youth divide, and the increasing isolation and exclusion of a growing number of young people: how should youth organisations respond in order to bridge this gap?

There is little doubt that young people somewhere in the 'middle' are steadily being propelled more to the edge, into vulnerable situations that hitherto they would have been unlikely to have experienced. Those who may feel protected today could easily be 'at risk' tomorrow. Some might even argue that the old social exclusion (when it applied to perhaps some 20% of young people) is the new inclusion (now that it applied to the majority of young people in some countries). With this predicament has emerged a new narrative of inevitability and individualisation which, for the European Youth Forum and all other stakeholders in the youth field, must be vocally and vociferously rebutted. The human rights, social rights and social cohesion approach by the European institutions has to extend more broadly and deeply, within and across multiple policy domains that affect young people's lives. The rationale for the 'Barriers' project, to which the Expert Seminar has made its contribution, is to inform how that may be done.

Howard Williamson

9th October, 2014 / 22nd November, 2014/19th December, 2014/8th January 2015