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Manners in youth policy

Three decades of youth policy in the Netherlands

Summary

The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. This saying is as well-known as it is ambivalent. Neither the societal position of young people nor the public attention they have received since the 16th century have remained constant in the course of time. In this article we will identify some trends in recent Dutch youth policy, with particular emphasis on the last 30 years. The shifts can be summarised by the statement that youth policy developed from a limited policy in the late 1960s with huge aspirations for the future - and oriented towards a very broad target group, namely young people in general - to a highly intensified, inter-sectoral and comprehensive policy, characterised by moderate pretensions and focused on a limited group of youngsters-at-risk, in the mid-nineties. What are the 'manners' to be taught, and how is this being done today? In the first phase: young people have to participate; in the second: young people have to work; in the 1990s: young people have to behave. Our conclusion is that youth policy is highly susceptible to epoch-related fluctuations. Both 'young people' and 'youth policy' are flexible concepts.

Prior to the interpretation of three main planks of governmental youth policy (1969, 1984 and 1994), we will provide some brief historical outlines.

Three 'pre'-youth-policy phases

Local governmental youth policy originates in the arrival of the modern industrial state. Youngsters need to be educated - instead of being rewarded or punished, as used to be the case in the Middle Ages - and protected from insanity and vagrancy. It speaks for itself that there were at least two motives behind this change in attitude. First, children and youngsters need protection because of their future role in society. Young people are important, but they have to be raised and to be taught how to perform in such a way that they can contribute to society's survival. This argument gains momentum in times when the increase in population is threatened or unbalanced. In addition to this 'protection' motive, we identify an insurance or public safety argument. Societies, and the elites in them in particular, cannot allow the more or less

permanent risk of being damaged on the one hand, and the 'free-riding' of those who allow it on the other. This is why we may say that societal survival depends on the shared validity of a kind of 'enforced communality' (De Swaan 1988).

Investments in young people are always determined by these two factors, and by the tensions between them. It may be true that the 18th century, the Age of Enlightenment, is the 'pedagogical' one, but most countries in Europe started their educational policies very deliberately only from the second half of the 19th century on. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the Netherlands (in the last quarter of the 19th century, lagging at least 50 years behind Britain and Germany) we find the Children's Acts, i.e. laws aiming at the *Repression of the Obvious Abuse of Children* (1874), which lie at the very root of youth policy in general. The background of the Acts is the twofold conviction of employers and 'liberal-conservative' MPs that children 'were in the way' in the workplace, and that the 'candle of the labour-force' had to be saved from burning out too early. (That's a long time before the invention of the 'human capital thesis'.)

This kind of initiative marks the beginning of the second phase of the pre-policy on youngsters, which can be labelled as the *prevention of detrimental effects*. In the first quarter of the 20th century, the government took several initiatives of this kind: those related to (compulsory) school education, and to protecting children from 'moral and physical downfall' (the publication of the Children's Acts, the introduction of the juvenile court magistrate and youth custody, etc.).

One decade before the first crisis of the Industrial Revolution, the Economic Crisis of the late 1920s, a slight shift can be observed in governmental attitude, although the above-mentioned ambivalence remained present. No national youth policy was formulated, however, except in the *correction of inherent defects*. In the Netherlands, the struggle for equal rights and funding for schools of various denominations - all societal groups and religions were granted the right to establish schools and to arrange their own educational programmes - was resolved in 1917, which meant that public and private schools (the latter organised along denominational lines) were given equal status in terms of financing, while the schools diversified and rose in quality, be it that they became even more class-related. A cautious start was made with the so-called education-outside-the-school, on ways of guiding youngsters to the labour market, and on initiatives regarding child care facilities such as playgrounds and kindergartens.

These three stages can be traced within the century-old history of the societal state in general, especially its social legislative initiatives and enactments (Kraemer 1966). Up to the Second World War, social policy in general and youth policy in particular more or less coincided. The step forward with regard to the general law-enforced *reconstruction through structural reforms* (which we can observe in the state's interventions in socio-economic areas) was not made by a simultaneous shift from a 'pre'-youth-policy into a real youth policy - which may clarify our hypothesis on the ambivalence and reluctance in youth policy.

Although the early post-war-period was already characterised by a certain intensification of more or less legislative practices, the general impression is that these had little to do with innovating youth policy and extending its scope. Dutch post-war reconstruction policy was highly inspired by the conviction of repairing pre-war social and political relations - as can be seen from the re-introduction of pre-war compartmentalised political structures (the organisation of public, social, cultural, educational etc. life along religious and socio-political lines -

Roman-Catholic, Protestant, socialist, conservative - which favoured both social discipline and self-discipline among religious and socio-political groups and the public emancipation of all those minorities), the strengthening of the consensus system in labour relations, the Indonesian trauma (1945-1949, the painful decolonisation process of the former Dutch East Indies), the struggle against the (unavoidable) secularisation, etc. National values had to be defended firmly, after the five-year occupation of the country during which, it was assumed, youngsters had lost their morals. Young people were confronted with leisure time and educational initiatives to 'keep them off the streets'.

The first youth policy concept: 1969

But a realistic youth policy did not materialise until the mid-1960s - at least not in the sense of an interconnected system of measures focused on developing a well-defined position of youngsters in society, supporting ways of their finding a place in public life, honouring young people's own initiatives. There were fragmented initiatives, of course, in the field of education, free time, juvenile court and youth care modernisation, social work and family counselling. Moreover, more and more attention was devoted to the position of young people within labour and employment policy, sports and other sectors of social life.

1969 saw the publication of the first governmental programme that actually included 'Youth Policy' in its title. It was written by the Minister of Culture, Recreation and Social Work (CRM) *(Nota Jeugdbeleid,* or Memorandum on Youth Policy, 1969). The memorandum was focused, in (very) general terms, on supporting youth life in the *third tier* (the family being the first tier, school the second) of youngsters of 10 and over. This tier comprised the traditional youth clubs and organisations, but also the (post-war, and for-profit) open youth facilities - which, according to the government's initiative, could rely on financial support. This was the first written policy document on youth policy and aimed at reaching young people in their free time, offering them recreational as well as educational options. Youngsters need to be well-prepared for their future role in society, and the related metaphors are *participation* and *the full employment of their potentials.* Youth policy became part of the cultural optimism of those days, embodied by a belief in the global and local 'makeability' of society, the end of the reign of rationality and the New Babylon (as James Kennedy, 1995, summarised it). Youth policy facilitated the New Society, and was facilitated itself by the related changing perspectives. Undeniably it were the former elites in the Netherlands who supported both social reforms and youth policy in progress, from a well-understood self-interest. Another telling illustration of the ambiguity of youth policy.

The Minister of CRM, Ms Marga Klompé, recognised the very limited range of the youth policy she presented. That is why she pleaded for the *extension of the policy aimed* at all public sectors that fall within the government's responsibility. She wanted to create coherence between all measures and initiatives, offering a basis for the further development of youth policy. Future youth policy needs to be developed from one perspective, the Minister stated: the young generation's well-being and the youngsters' full preparation for the future. This unique perspective was assumed to offer the funding of all efforts and expenses.

A wider youth policy in 1984?

In short, the 1969 Memorandum can be seen as an example of a limited policy with huge aspirations for the future - directed at a very broad target group, the 10-20 category, adolescents in general. Its intentions are socio-cultural in nature, closely connected to leisure time topics. As stated above, vast aspirations were proclaimed by this first governmental programme, since it aimed at a wider policy in the future comprising all fields of life of the young generation, from a clearly formulated perspective.

For that reason, the Minister established an Interdepartmental Steering Group on Youth Policy, and several working parties were installed in order to develop the proclaimed broad youth policy perspective. After several investigations, draft reports etc., it became clear, however, that within the present constellation such a comprehensive policy could not be realised: the policies of the various departments to be 'interconnected' differed too much to serve as a realistic operational frame for the Minister's ideals.

Nevertheless, a second governmental programme was published, fifteen years later. At first sight, the 1984 Youth Policy Memorandum (*Nota Jeugdbeleid*) intention showed a wider perspective at first sight, as it had been signed by the Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Culture (WVC, the new name for the former CRM department) and his colleague, the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment (SoZaWe). On the other hand, the ideas put forward make it clear that a far-reaching change of perspectives had taken place in between. The government's convictions clearly turned out to roll on the waves of quite another era - its central concepts were *no nonsense* and *individual responsibility*. The central government's role of offering all youngsters whatever type of socio-cultural product or service they require (the *head-waiters* metaphor), the Ministers explained, had failed. In their view, the national government's priority had to be replaced by an emphasis on social, i.e. family and educational, networks in which youngsters participate, or from which they tend to drop out. In short, these basic social ties and connections were to be held responsible for education and the development of young people's potential.

The subsequent series of cost-saving measures revealed, even more convincingly than the 1984 Memorandum itself, what the contents of the proposed youth programme were. The cuts in socio-cultural facilities for youngsters and youth care institutes highlighted the consequences of the orientation towards 'primary ties'. Furthermore, a widening of practice was assumed to be unrealistic because the government had increased its focus on a small category of youngsters whose primary configurations fail in their educational task to make them find 'roots' in society. (Youngsters from ethnic minorities offer painful examples of people without any social roots.)

In order to prevent these youngsters-at-risk from drifting into forms of anti-social behaviour and marginalisation, special governmental efforts were required, according to the two Ministers (Brinkman and De Koning, respectively). These extra requirements formed both society's and the political parties' justification for an interdepartmental approach, which was supposed to lead to a strong coherence between socio-cultural approaches, efforts in the field of education, school, youth care and employment policy.

1993: What future do young people deserve?

At the end of 1993, a third attempt to formulate a broad and comprehensive youth policy was ventured. In a colourful and well-edited programme *Jeugd verdient de toekomst / Youth deserves a Future* (1993/1994) (with three addenda on 'educational youth participation', 'family support' and 'homeless youngsters'), the WVC-Minister, Mrs Hedy d'Ancona, explained that the young generation was doing well. Most of them were growing up into self-conscious and active adults. This makes it clear, the Minister said, that no special governmental efforts are necessary.

Quite the reverse applied to the small portion of young people who suffer from problems and/or cause these. These estimated 15% of youngsters and young adults run the risk of straying from the right path. They have no school or family contacts nor any connections with the labour market. The Memorandum expressed the view that these kinds of disjunctions are harmful both for the youngsters themselves and for society in general (which is suffering the severe consequences of family and school drop-out and faces rising social security costs). Here the minister used the *capital* metaphor: young people belong to society's capital, and investing in them means investing in society's stability and progress.

In formulating youth policy for the next years, the Minister nearly exclusively addressed the typical 15% of youngsters between 0 and 21 years of age. In retrospect, it may be clear that the 1984 Memorandum paved the way for thoughts about youth policy which were to find their expression in *Youth deserves a Future:* Youth Policy means Youth *Care* Policy, focused on youngsters at risk. Both the original target group and the broad range of the former policy were increasingly narrowly specified. The Ministry of Justice's former marginal target group of youth care youngsters in 1969 was promoted, twenty-five years later, to the central category of the WVC Department.

At the same time, the phrase 'inter-departmental', a key concept in the 1969 and the 1984 policy's philosophy, was replaced by 'inter-sectoral'. Despite bureaucratic failures and struggles among officials, the necessity of developing a genuinely inter-departmental approach did not disappear completely, as everyday social problems refused to stick to departmental boundaries. Instead of adopting or enforcing an inter-departmental approach of co-operation, a choice was made in favour of developing numerous projects for easily recognisable problems and focusing on specific target groups. With regard to an alleged project-problem-relation, various policy sectors are proposed to be connected to specific youth institutions and methods. While respect is paid to autonomy and (professional) responsibilities, a certain project-oriented coherence is assumed to be guaranteed. That is why *Youth deserves a Future* ends with an enumeration of more than 40 projects. Whoever wants to become familiar with actual 'youth policy' should study these 40 initiatives - and he has to start with some 'inductive reasoning', i.e. he can re-construct the youth policy's intentions from the departmentally approved projects.

Thinking about help ...

In order to understand today's generally inter-sectoral youth policy, two constraints have to be clarified in advance: recent changes in *thinking about youth policy* and the *decentralisation* of the responsibility for the policy.

As stated above, Dutch youth policy in the 1990s has proved to become a youth-at-risk *care* policy. At the same time some attempts have been made to change some familiar starting points of youth care. In the recent past, youth care mostly intended (and indeed, in many cases still intends) to offer a care facility 'in store', i.e. professional and institutionalised systems, created to compensate for the things that went wrong and that caused problems in the young person's life and his environment. As a consequence, the problems tended to be formulated within the terms of the care facilities available. One of the central points of 'renewed' youth care is that the demand for help for youngsters and their families needs to be taken more seriously and *specifically* - and the provisions to be applied have to be more carefully geared towards a careful diagnosis of the call for help. This implies a flexibilisation of the help supplies. A twofold shift was intended. First: from a general youth policy to a specific youth care policy; second: from a facilities-centred to a client-centred approach.

At the same time, it became clear that compensating for the things that went wrong cannot be the primary task of youth care professionals. Instead, the conviction has grown that people asking for help ought to be activated in their own search for the solution to their problems. It will take a bit of time before the youth care system has familiarised itself with this new attitude. Newly formulated projects seriously try to work according to these principles.

... and decentralisation

Since the 1980s, *decentralisation processes* have been realised in several policy fields. The central government's role has become restricted to establishing the policy outlines and determinants, to stimulating renewals, and to distributing funds among local authorities. The policy itself has been increasingly determined by the twelve provinces, metropolitan areas and the cities. The ratio behind the decentralisation of policy responsibility lies in the hypothesis that lower governmental levels are more capable of gearing the policy towards regional and local problems, and that these are more effective in utilising the available local options and possibilities.

There are some problems connected with decentralisation. If inter-sectoral projects are to be set up in a specific region, it is necessary to get the various governmental levels in tune with each other and to challenge them into multi-level-governmental co-operation. This makes the policy to be developed sometimes very complicated as it impedes the realisation of an adequate approach. Moreover, much energy is spent on arguing about the right distribution key for the budgets made available by central government. The outcome of this arguing tends to be determined by political factors rather than by real needs in the various regions. And, finally, to illustrate the present complexity: the roles of regional and local authorities differ with respect to the various policy areas. For example, the provinces are in charge of all aspects relating to

youth care, while education policy is the domain of local government and the Department, although there are differences between public and private schools.

It may be true that local initiatives need to be largely planned, developed and evaluated locally. Here the anomaly starts, since decentralisation, at the same time, entails the (post-)modern paradigm of a 'general withdrawal of the state'. Both central and local government are retracting from the public fields for which they felt responsible in previous eras. A larger part of youth care problems is said to be dealt with more appropriately outside the 'public' youth care and prevention system, i.e. in the market, and, as things go wrong, under the shared responsibility of the executive and judicial authorities.

Due to the political shortness of breath, or even political indifference, the *aspiration* of an integral, broad, comprehensive youth policy was in danger of coming to a frayed end. This tendency was confirmed by the silent cancellation, in 1995, of the Youth Policy Board - a board which, among other things, had the right to advise the central government, on its own initiative or on request, about youth problems and related policies.

Our doubts about localism and decentralisation do not mean that any central and (inter)-departmental initiative is better, further reaching etc. than any locally organised, inter-sectoral ambition. But we do regret that public discussions about young people (and societal) problems and prospects, political responsibilities and innovative policies are no longer a main priority on the public political agenda. This may give way to an unforeseeable mix of political 'incidentalism', innovative projects, moral panics, more or less strategic alliances or misalliances (police, social work, labour exchange office, probation) which do not get the serious attention they deserve, backslides into a lack of professionalism, voluntarism, and sinewy talks - at every political and governmental level.

In the meantime, the real problems of youngsters and those in the public domain will persist - and the debate on how to enlarge young people's 'social participation' and the 'full employment of their potentials' has now completely petered out. In 1995, the Amsterdam sociologist Schuyt was asked (by no fewer than four departments) to study the situation of youngsters-at-risk. He labelled them in his report as *vulnerable* youngsters, among other things because of the unintended risk of their sliding from 'helping and facilitating facilities' into 'controlling and punishing systems' (Schuyt, 1995).

It is true that there are etymological and historical ties between *policy* and *police*. But there are good reasons to separate youth and educational policies from legal and law-and-order policies as long as possible. For example, the policy which ensures that young near offenders or former offenders from ethnic minority groups can only get *assistant-to-the-police-like* tasks is questionable. These people are well-uniformed, show off on the streets, on the lookout for shoplifters and other kinds of violators of the law (who, incidentally, may well be their mates after working hours). However, when an emergency presents itself they do not have any licence to arrest people when necessary, and can only phone the police station. At the same time, an enormous number of profit and non-profit jobs have been cancelled. What these vulnerable youngsters with poor perspectives are being offered instead is no more than a kind of work or public *ethic* (Notten, 1995).

Towards a comprehensive youth policy

How can well-guided experiments be evaluated and successful effects be generalised, how can youth policy be (re-)constructed, how can local initiatives be uplifted and broadened in the direction of a realistic and comprehensive youth policy, or even an *urban* youth policy for the four largest cities of the country?

These are more than merely rhetorical questions. The developments of the past year (1997) show that a lot of policy-makers and civil servants, either at governmental level or within municipalities, have asked these questions and tended to find starting-points for solutions.

Thanks in part to the above-mentioned Schuyt report, the necessity to create comprehensive policy efforts in different fields at the same time, is now generally recognised and underlined. A reshuffling in the mutual relations between autonomous youth institutions and social services will be the result. At the same time, however, the government, the provinces and the municipalities still tend to co-operate reluctantly and are even inclined to develop contradictory policies.

As a part of the general efforts in the socio-political field, the Government policy stance entitled 'A framework for youth care' (*Regie in de Jeugdzorg*, 1994) is of major importance in the search for a more comprehensive youth policy. This memorandum promotes a split in youth care.
• Firstly, all organisations that play a role in providing access to far-reaching care and treatment programmes have to be accommodated in a single institute: the Youth Care Office (*Bureau Jeugdzorg*). Youth Care Offices have to be established in all regions and large cities.
• Secondly, all organisations that play a role in the domain of far-reaching care and treatment are obliged to co-operate and, by that co-operation, to create transparent care and treatment programmes in response to the demand by the clients they work for.

It is easy to understand that in the area of youth care, financed and steered by the provincial authorities, the Ministry of Justice and the semi-public insurance system, the Government policy stance gives cause for enormous organisational and functional innovation of the youth care system. The innovation not only involves the institutions and provisions for youth care, but also the various financing and steering authorities.

As the Youth Care Offices are significant for the development of a wider youth policy, linking general youth services and the more specialised youth care programmes, we will confine ourselves to a brief discussion of their development.

Youth Care Offices are being developed as easily accessible institutions where children and their parents, as well as youngsters and young adults, can be informed and can obtain advice about questions of everyday life which they cannot resolve themselves. In addition, the offices also provide help for children and their parents, and young people in general, with more complicated problems that require more intensive interventions. In those cases, the Youth Care Offices function as the entry to the care and treatment programmes, and an indication is required. If necessary, the indication for far-reaching help or treatment might be given by the professionals at the Youth Care Offices.

Youth Care Offices are not only institutions open to those who are looking for information, advice and help. The intention is that they also serve as intermediaries between general youth institutions, such as child care, socio-cultural centres, schools and other educational facilities, health care, the police and institutions that facilitate the transition to the labour market on the one hand, and specialised youth care institutions on the other. With respect to this intended close relationship, the Youth Care Offices will create opportunities for consultancy to the professionals of the related institutions mentioned above; co-operation among all these institutions will be encouraged wherever possible.

In the meantime many municipalities, especially the more important ones, are developing their own local youth policies. In the 1970s, the large cities had already developed a kind of youth policy, but in the eighties, resulting from financial cuts in the socio-cultural and educational sectors, many of those local youth policies were largely dismantled. According to the central government's guidelines and the ongoing recommendations by a chorus of official and unofficial advisors, the new local youth policy that is in the making now, should be preventive in nature. 'Preventive' refers to those activities that prevent the development of arrears, of non-participation in societal networks, of criminal behaviour and other kinds of nuisance. From this point of view it is easy to understand that co-operation between Youth Care and the other youth institutions is included as a central aim. The Youth Care that is steered by the provincial authorities has to be given an local application. Not only should the variety of institutions and organisations be encouraged to engage in intensive co-operation, but the various authorities should also find ways to develop a complementary policy which, in the Dutch administrative culture, is indeed a very difficult task. This way of developing a local youth policy can be seen as an unconscious attempt to realise the broad comprehensive youth policy that could not be built up in the eighties because of the struggle for competence among the various governmental ministries.

Today, the decentralisation of youth policy in the Netherlands offers a favourable opportunity for the development of that comprehensive youth policy at the local level. However, decentralisation is not the only factor of interest. Surely, also the fact that society has been alarmed by the 'increasing lawlessness of youngsters', the increasing lack of values and the widespread use of alcohol and specific drugs are factors of importance. For the average policy-maker a comprehensive policy impetus is the only answer 'in order to prevent a social disaster'.

As part of this modern local youth policy, the lack of the family as the important agency of socialisation has recently been increasingly underlined. The Ministry of Justice in particular has launched an effective campaign in that area. In many respects this is in keeping with tendencies abroad to hold the parents responsible for the failed socialisation of their children. Generally speaking, the most important aim of the modern efforts in youth policy development is the prevention of what is experienced as a nuisance. The government and the local authorities hardly seem to have considered efforts to increase the quality of life of young people. That is the lasting difference from the sixties and seventies.

Conclusion: Inductive reasoning and inductive practices?

Above we stated that the answer to the question 'What Future do Young People Deserve?' requires the application of some inductive reasoning. We believe that another induction is required in the re-construction of the youth policy of the late 1990s: *inductive practising*. It is impossible to exclude a priori that current efforts by the municipalities will lead to an integral, comprehensive and inter-departmental youth policy - as attempted during the 1970s and 1980s - but these efforts cannot be said to be organised from a Grand Design (derived from a well-considered plan) as happened 25 years ago. At that time, coherence in youth policy was aimed for in a somewhat theoretical way; nowadays, some comprehensiveness comes into being in local practices.

It is better not to jump to naive predictions about a future youth policy, dressed up with nice adjectives. Nevertheless, the fact that the National Year Programme for Youth Care 1996 was not only signed by the first responsible State-Secretaries of the Ministries of Justice and of Public Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS, another new name for the same Department), but also by a State-Secretary of Education, Culture and Science (OC&W), might be considered a hopeful sign. Within a few years the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment might well be one of the co-signers.

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