IPF
THE INTERNATIONAL POLICY FELLOWSHIPS

Policy Paper on Promotion of Non-formal Education

By Ibrahim Ismayilov

BAKU - 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees. When planning for life, train and educate people." Chinese proverb: Guanzi (c. 645BC)

Challenges for Youth:

The ongoing transition process and development of democracy in the countries of the former Soviet Union (fSU) put an increasing pressure on policymakers in order to actively involve young people in decision-making process. However, the existing problems such as conventional culture of youth participation in society, unemployment, lack of social integration and social inclusion, health and well-being make this tendency extremely difficult. The role of education as the key factor in addressing these problems is particularly important and needs reconsideration and reevaluation, since formal educational systems are in a crisis in all European countries.[i]

At the same time the development and strengthening of democratic institutions in some European and former USSR countries require substantial restructuring and wider integration of all segments of society into decision-making process. *Youth*, with increasing certainty, is accepted as a vital part of these societies, though it "for decades, been the subject of "misery reports" from different authorities. The main focus in these reports is almost entirely on youth as a problem, rarely on youth as a resource for society. Youth has since the 1930s been perceived as "something we ought to do something about," youth problems legitimize professional involvement."[ii] During past three decades there has been a significant shift from this perception towards opposite direction – "to work with the aim of increasing youth participation in the area of young people first and foremost, to aim at the young people being the subject of their on development and to be seen as a resource rather than a problem."[iii] The *participation* in this context should be understood as young people's right to be included, to be allowed and encouraged to assume duties and responsibilities and make one's own decisions.[iv] It is by definition very complicated process, since participation is more than involvement in institutions and decision-making, it is also a pattern of how one lives in a democracy and relevant to work, housing, leisure,

education and social relations. It is not granted, but rather learning process. "In ancient Greek society, participation was thought of as something that had to be learnt, it was considered as an aim of education. Simultaneously, one realized that participation could only be taught by letting young people try to assume responsibility and to really participate in society's development."[v]

This learning process has its particular complications in Azerbaijan, and most probably in other new democracies too, since it is not just youth, but entire society goes through the transition towards democracy and learning of participatory decision-making culture. Despite this fact, youth issues as such became crucial for Azerbaijani society from the very moment of regaining independence after the break up of the USSR in late 1980s and early 1990s. Since then, young people were actively involved in the process of democratization as well as were frequently used as objects of manipulation, not to mention that predominately young people were victims of Armenian-Azerbaijani war over Nagorno-Karabakh. Although ceasefire of 1994 and further stabilization made more evident that there has to be a clear and comprehensive National Youth policy. Apparently, the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, organization of the National Youth Forums - are the examples of the attempts undertaken by the government authorities in this direction. These were demonstrating a shift from the conventional understanding of the role of the young people, developed in socialist system, towards contemporary democratic principles, particularly for Azerbaijan with its 35% of youth population aged between 15 to 35 years old (State Statistics Committee, 2000).

On the other hand, in increasingly globalizing knowledge-based societies, the focus on education as one of the major factors affecting young people becoming more apparent, since there is a clear trend towards lengthening of the period of time spent in formal education. For the purpose of clarity, it should be mentioned that education covers not just formal education, but informal and non-formal education and life-long learning. In this context, the role of civil society organizations, particularly regarding the non-formal education, is growing. Life-long learning is becoming increasingly important in terms of adapting to the changing demands in the employment market and in society and the development of Information and Communication technologies requires the modernization of many aspects of education. The concept of non-formal

5

education here should be understood as "organized educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives (UNESCO)." Non-formal education is above all a process of social learning, non-hierarchical, centered on the learner, through activities taking place outside formal educational systems. It is by definition voluntary (although that holds for post-compulsory formal education as well) and covers a wide variety of learning fields: youth work, youth clubs, sport associations, voluntary service, and many other activities, which organize learning experiences. In addition to taking place "outside school," non-formal education also involves "another way of learning" and therefore may have less clearly framed curricula and much less 'certification power', which gives it a weaker social and financial position.[1] Although non-formal education has less clearly defined curricula and rules for certification compared to formal education, it is however essential to underline that it is a well-structured learning process, but accessible, based on clearly identified educational and learning objectives, with efficient evaluation formats and provided by well-trained educators. The idea of non-formal education was introduced in the late 1960's in order to signal the need for out-of-school responses to the new and differing demands for education.[vi]

Youth non-governmental organizations, representing the various aspects of civil sector are active supporters and promoters of the non-formal education. There are thousands of agencies, organizations and groups of various kinds in that have designed programs and activities to enable young people to find rich environments – not only to enjoy whatever they do but also to learn a certain amount of knowledge, which increases their self-esteem, self-confidence and self-reliance.[vii]

Changing Youth:
The sociological, economic and cultural aspects of youth have changed significantly as a result of demographic changes and changes in the social environment, individual and collective behavior, family relationships and labor market conditions.[viii]

---

[1] Non-formal education should also be differentiated from informal education which could be described as a learning process stemming from social experience, without any conscious educational intention (taking place within the family, peer groups, etc.) and whereby the social actors who provide this education have not received training to become educators.

First, youth is lasting longer. Demographers have observed that, under pressure from economic factors (employability, unemployment, etc.) and socio-cultural factors, young people are, on average, older when they reach the various stages of life: end of formal education, start of employment, starting a family, etc.

Second point concerns non-linear paths through life. Today "our various life-roles are becoming confused": it is possible simultaneously to be a student, have family responsibilities, have a job, be seeking a job and be living with one's parents, and young people now move increasingly often between these different roles. Paths through life are becoming less linear as societies no longer offer the same guarantees (job security, social security benefits, etc.).[ix]

Third, the traditional collective models are losing ground as personal pathways are becoming increasingly individualized. "The organization of individuals' family, marriage and career plans is no longer standardized."[x] This is also impacting strongly on public authorities' policies.

Youth in Public Life:

As a rule, young people are keen to foster democracy and more especially to play their part in it. But mistrust has set in with regards to the institutional structures. Young people are now less committed than in the past to the traditional structures for political and social action (e.g. parties, trade unions), and they have a low level of involvement in democratic consultation. Youth organizations are also feeling the pinch and perceive the need to reinvent themselves.

This by no means implies that young people are not interested in public life. Most show a clear will to participate and to influence the choices made by society, but they wish to do so on a more individual and more one-off basis, outside of the old participatory structures and mechanisms.

It is up to the public authorities to bridge the gap between young people's eagerness to express their opinions and the methods and structures which society offers. Failure to do so might fuel the 'citizenship' deficit, or even encourage protest.

Demand to Participate:

The strongest message given by young people is their will to play an active part in the society in which they live. If they are excluded, democracy is not being allowed to function properly. Young people regard the view that they are disinterested or uncommitted as groundless and unjust. They feel that they are given neither the resources nor the information and training that would enable them to play a more active role. Youth organizations also believe the right to participate is fundamental and must apply to all without discrimination. Many of them strive to help young people to put it into practice. At the same time, one should be cautious about existing extremist movements, which are trying to recruit young people to meet their latent interests.

In European average, the percentage of people under the age of 25 who participate in local or national or elections is generally quite low. However, there are plenty of indications that they take a keen interest in public life. Researchers view this gap between expectations and practice as explaining the wish and the need for greater participation. This demand is not surprising, nor is it new, but the way it is expressed has changed. Levels of involvement also vary greatly from one individual to another.

Young people want the right to give their opinion on all aspects of their daily lives, such as family, school, work, group activities, their local area, etc. However, in doing so, they are also involved in broader economic, social and political issues. Their interest is not limited to local issues; it also concerns their region, country, and the world. In other words, the right to participate should not be limited and they must be allowed to do so without restriction. So when they take action to enable young people, whether disadvantaged or marginalized, ethnic minorities or illegal immigrants, to participate more, their action is part of a wider campaign for universal participation without discrimination.

The approach taken by civil society organizations is similar, although they are required, in practice, to put the emphasis on more targeted objectives or groups (young people in their local environment, in rural areas, more vulnerable groups, young women, etc.). They advocate a more integrated and long-term approach, which means that they encourage all forms of participation and all activities based on young people's individual commitment and voluntary service.

Learning to Participate: Agenda for Non-formal Education

Participation requires young people to acquire skills or improve existing skills. It involves a gradual learning process. The first stage, generally in their own environment (school, local district, town, youth centre, association, etc.), is crucial. It gives them the opportunity to gain the self-confidence and experience needed to reach the subsequent stages. Moreover, in the local community in particular, participation can bring about changes which are tangible, visible and verifiable. At this level young people also have the chance not only to give their opinion but also to be immediately involved in decision-making processes.

In the second phase, young people become aware that a whole series of decisions affecting the local area are taken at higher levels of decision-making: action therefore needs to be taken to move from one to the other by creating links and networks.

Moreover, participation allows young people to acquire skills which they must try to substantiate in various fields (economic, social, cultural, political, etc.) and various institutional contexts. The division between formal and non-formal education is perceived as counter-productive. So while school remains an excellent forum for learning and for participatory practices, it still has the disadvantage, in young people's opinion, of not taking them into account as active citizens.

Role of Youth NGOs in Promoting the Participation:

Young people regard existing participation mechanisms as unsatisfactory. They are wary of some forms of representative democracy but do not have the same reservations when it comes to involvement at local level, which is more direct and immediate. Opinions on youth organizations are divided, as some regard them as the

most appropriate structures for participation, while others fail to see their attraction and prefer more or less formal groups which are active at local level, youth clubs or associations, youth parliaments, etc. Very few believe that the low percentage of young people involved in public life is due to straightforward rejection of it or a deliberate strategy on the part of society.

By fostering direct participation of young people, organizations see themselves as a useful counterbalance to the institutions. Some believe that belonging to an organization is one of the conditions of participation. Others feel that existing organizations no longer fulfill the expectations of some young people and call for innovative approaches to make them more accessible. Like young people, the organizations in the field want an increase in public funds for NGOs, in keeping with their social function.

Some researchers underlined the need to revitalize organizations, which were seen as moving further and further away from young people's aspirations, given their social basis and their practices. In addition to their traditional members, they have to find ways of involving young people who do not want to belong to an organization. New opportunities exist thanks to new communication technologies, in particular the Internet: these promote access to information and seem better suited to demand for participation that is gradually moving away from collective participation and towards more individual forms.

Ways to Do It: Promoting Non-formal Education

Having said above, there is a clear need for actions by the government, international and national stakeholders to undertake the necessary steps in order to incorporate the positive impetus of non-formal education for increasing the democratic participation of young people in society.

1   Non-formal education should be recognition, just as formal education

With decline of formal educational systems, especially in the countries of the fSU, it is becoming obvious that schools (and universities) cannot convey all the knowledge

and all the capacities, which young learners need to succeed in contemporary societies. Much of that knowledge, and many of those capacities, can be conveyed through non-formal education.

It is therefore necessary to upgrade non-formal education and to make credits awarded for non-formal education to a certain extent interchangeable with formal credits. This would imply a much closer and more committed cooperation of the two systems – formal and non-formal education – than has been the case in the past. This would also imply cooperation between the two systems concerning curriculum development and teacher/non-formal educator training. At present, however, the relationship between formal and non-formal education is rather one of appeasement or disengagement. Having stated this, we shall not forget though about need to develop certain quality indicators for non-formal education methods applied.

2   In knowledge-based societies and economies non-formal education constitutes a powerful form of learning

It could be argued that formal education is the strongest of all learning forms because it gains the most of social and institutional recognition, including the labor market. It might equally be argued that non-formal education is the most powerful form of learning today because it blends the three basic learning modes - formal, non-formal, and informal – more convincingly than any of the others: it is structured learning, yet without coercion; it gives room for *participation* by the learner, which formal education hardly does, and it is more open to experimentation and informal learning than formal education because of a less rigid organization and government control.

There are, therefore, many indications that non-formal education could play a substantial role in reforming learning arrangements. The national and local bodies should stimulate the potential of non-formal education as an element to take into consideration when reforming formal education.

3   Non-formal education incorporates better methods to propagate and instill core social values in young people than formal education

Because of its voluntary and open character, young people feel that they have more say in the learning experiences offered by non-formal as opposed to formal education, although one must not brush away the negative effects of the tendency observable in youth work to gear it too strongly or even exclusively to labor market needs. Inasmuch as that happens, non-formal education suffers from the same evils as formal education: de-motivated learners and illusory participation.

Core values of non-formal education are essentially oriented towards individual and social development, *participation*, human rights and the fight against all kinds of discrimination and social exclusion.

Core values are by definition broad; they transgress specific subjects, which make up school curricula. That is why formal education has great difficulties to incorporate core values in its curriculum. In 'normal schools,' which have to work under severe time pressure and other restrictions, there is little room for students to discuss and – more importantly – experience the reality (or absence) of core values.

Non-formal education/learning should be regarded by policy-makers and practitioners as 'watchdog' for propagating and instilling core values in the generation of young people.

4   Non-formal education serves different needs and has different functions in post-communist countries than in other European countries

At the beginning of this new century, wider Europe is involved in a huge transformation process, which also affects education and learning arrangements and traditions. Non-formal education – in the guise of communist youth organizations – played a prominent and dominant role in post-communist countries. After 1989/1990 those organizations lost their leading role and young people turned away from any form of organized activity.[xi] Non-formal organizations must earn the trust of the young. This process is still ongoing in most of the post-communist societies, as well as in Azerbaijan.

**5   Non-formal education/learning must become an integral part of a
       National and European youth policies.**

"A coherent ... policy as regards young people is still missing and the main objective of the White Paper should be to develop an integrated approach to tackle the concerns of young people."[xii] In this regard the intention of the European Union White Paper should indeed to lay the ground for a coherent youth policy. A centerpiece of such a policy is non-formal education/learning in that it embraces the most important and valuable elements of a coherent youth policy: learning in non-coercive ways, experiencing new contexts and meeting new challenges, developing new prospects for a life in knowledge societies, learning to participate in relevant areas of society, such as school, workplace, community, and getting qualifications which prevent social exclusion or at least mitigate its devastating effects.

Therefore European youth policymakers should try to envisage future youth policy measures to the concept of non-formal education and closely integrate youth organizations into the consultancy processes.

6   Support youth research for informative decision-making

Benefiting from the experience of other European states, national government should promote and support the continuous youth research and assessment of existing youth policies. This would enable policymakers to adequately reflect upon various youth policy issues and identify the necessary policy instruments in order to tackle the pressing needs and concerns on short and long terms.

Recommendations on Promotion and Recognition of Non-formal Education

Referencing above findings, there is a need for National policymakers and practitioners in youth field to consider implementing the following proposals:

- to recognize that non-formal education nowadays constitutes a fundamental dimension of the lifelong learning process, and to introduce effective standards and formats of official recognition of non-formal education as part of the general education system, and this with regard to:

- the qualification of professional and voluntary education and training staff in charge of non-formal education offers,

- the quality of the education offer itself,

- assessing learning progress made by participants within non-formal education programs, both individually and as part of a larger group;

- to create conditions for non-formal education to fully explore and develop its potential with regard to reducing social inequality and social exclusion, through measures for young workers, young people in remote areas, school drop-outs and socially disadvantaged young persons, to enable them to have access to education and training in a non-formal setting;

- to actively encourage non-formal education as an innovative and experimental learning process, by supporting the development of appropriate training programs for trainers and the production and dissemination of relevant documentation about non-formal educational methods;

- to support non-formal education with a view to encouraging solidarity and social justice, through instilling social values in young people, promoting inter-generational dialogue, creating awareness for social responsibility and dealing with the reality of multicultural societies;

- to actively use the potential of non-formal learning with a view to the creation of a political, economic and social common space and an increasingly globalizing world, to overcome strictly national and potentially closed learning and education traditions and to develop intercultural curiosity and capacity;

- to call on actors in the non-formal education field when dealing with problems of systemic change in education in transition countries, and to make non-formal education an important reference in debates on educational reform;

- to promote multidisciplinary national and European-level research into learning habits of young people with regard to informal, non-formal and formal education and to create non-formal education boards and authorities both at national and European level;

- to establish quality standards for non-formal education at European level and to develop curricular advice and guidance for further professionalisation of this sector in view of constantly growing demands for competent education and training offers;

- to link existing efforts of mainstreaming European youth policy and moving towards an integrated approach on European youth policy to non-formal education, thus making it a key element of national and European youth policy.

Endnotes:

[i] See White Paper (2001), p. 30; Symposium on non-formal education (2001); p. 15 ff; du Bois-Reymond 2000
[ii] See The participation of young people. Council of Europe (1997)
[iii] ibid.
[iv] Also see the Council of Europe's 1990 report Participation as a means of integrating young people into society
[v] See The participation of young people. Council of Europe (1997)
[vi] La Belle (1998). Formal, non-formal and informal education : A holistic perspective of lifelong learning. International Review of Education.
[vii] Sathlberg, P., Building Bridges for Learning. The recognition and value of non-formal education in youth activity. (1999).
[viii] Cf. report presented by researchers at the Umeå seminar in March 2001 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth/ywp/umeareport.html)
[ix] "Jeunesse, le devoir d'avenir", Commissariat Général du Plan, Report from the committee chaired by Dominique Charvet, March 2001, p.33.
[x] ibid, p. 35
[xi] Wallace and Kovatcheva 1998
[xii] Quote in White Paper 2001, p. 72, of the Economic and Social Committee.