

transitions. Successful Transitions to Training and Employment

Documentation of an International Peer Learning Project
Insights – Good practices – Conclusions



A multilateral cooperation project involving
Germany, Finland, France and Luxembourg:

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transitions.

Successful Transitions to Training and Employment (2012 – 2014)

A European/international peer learning project

Young people in Europe are struggling to master the transition from school to training or working life. Unemployment affects young people more heavily than the average working population, and those with fewer opportunities are hit worst. Even in countries where youth unemployment is moderate and various support services are in place that focus on disadvantaged young people, a considerable number of young people still experience difficulties in transitioning from formal education to the labour market.

The issue has raised interest internationally. The European Commission has acknowledged the importance of the topic and made it a key issue within the Europe 2020 strategy and the so called European Youth Strategy*. The Council recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee is designed to support young people in transition. In addition, the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe has been working on the topic.

Finland, France, Germany and Luxembourg addressed these challenges with their project “transitions. Successful Transitions to Training and Employment” and invited international experts to participate in a broad dialogue over the course of three years. With the help of this documentation, the insights gained through this multilateral cooperation project and international peer exchange shall be made available to the field of youth policy in the participating countries and beyond.

This international peer exchange on the transition from education to work contributes to the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy at national and European level by generating knowledge and fostering the development of youth work and youth social work. Furthermore, “transitions”, as a multilateral cooperation project between four European countries, is a model for peer learning, itself a key instrument of European youth policy cooperation.



The project focuses on disadvantaged young people who encounter specific difficulties during the transition phase. Various multilateral peer learning seminars/expert meetings were held that produced a European best practice exchange as well as a debate on innovative concepts for managing the transition phase. To ensure that young people’s opinions on the matter would be heard, a youth conference was organised to which young people with fewer opportunities from countries all over Europe were invited.

Objectives

- To gain new impulses for youth work and youth social work
- To promote a European exchange of good practices and innovative concepts
- To improve the individual support offered to disadvantaged young people during the period of transition from school to training and employment
- To contribute towards the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy

* Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) (2009/C 311/01)

Activities and thematic focus

The following priorities were determined as key issues for the project since they reflect the current challenges in the countries in question:

- New forms of cooperation between formal education, non-formal education and the world of work,
- Coordination and cooperation at the local level,
- Full, personalised assistance for young people,
- The role of the economic sector: best practices and new perspectives,
- Peer-to-peer approaches.

The long-term impact of transition-related pilot programmes and initiatives was another major concern of the project.

These topics were dealt with at various peer learning events, including four expert exchange seminars, one in each partner country, and a study visit to the Netherlands. At these events, experts active in various fields of the transition system engaged in a profound learning process in which they discussed and reflected on various issues and approaches in the respective countries against the backdrop of their own practical experience.

According to their respective thematic scope, the peer learning activities brought together stakeholders in the fields in question for example representatives of youth work and youth social work, youth employment, education, local and federal youth policy, as well as youth researchers.

Connecting international peer exchanges with national processes

The involvement of a wider circle of stakeholders and the linkup between international expert exchanges and na-

tional processes helped to bring together and disseminate the results and to increase their visibility.

Germany, which initiated the project, created a link between the international process and the national level by inviting a group of national experts to provide professional expertise in this field. It also ensured that a variety of perspectives were covered by involving representatives from a range of areas such as youth social work, youth work, local authorities, Länder and federal ministries, job centres, the private sector, schools, research and science as well as the Federal Employment Agency. In addition, the project fed into the process of developing an independent government policy for youth in Germany and was linked up with bilateral expert exchange programmes with Turkey and Japan.

In Finland, a loose connection to the working group on the implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee was established, while France connected the project to the youth experimental fund “Fonds d’Expérimentation pour la Jeunesse” led by the Ministry in charge of youth in cooperation with a cross ministerial working group. This fund supports numerous innovative projects for young people.

The transitions department inside the national agency for youth in Luxembourg is part of a broad network. It was thus easy to form an informal working group to disseminate the results among actors in the transition sector.

Scientific guidance and monitoring

A team of researchers headed by Dr Andreas Walther, Professor at the Institute of Social Pedagogy and Adult Education at Goethe University Frankfurt on the Main, carried out a scientific assessment of the project. Their research focused on the process of peer learning and examined how international comparisons and intercultural exchanges contribute to the development of local and national practices and policies in the field of transition. Additionally, the team examined the peer learning process itself.

The Luxembourg expert exchange programme examined the role of employers during transition



“transitions” – an example of peer learning

Just as young people benefit from mobility programmes such as a youth exchange or a volunteer placement abroad, experts, too, benefit from international exchanges in that they gain experience and new skills. There is no doubt that engaging in an expert-level exchange between colleagues from other countries is a highly enriching experience. The multilateral cooperation project “transitions” has also helped to move matters forward in the areas of international youth policy and practice in the participating countries.

The project is one of the peer learning models at the European level. Peer learning, as the term suggests, is an instrument that encourages people to learn from each other. In a child and youth services context, it refers to a systematic, reciprocal learning process between child and youth services experts from various countries, who come together to discuss and exchange political as well as practical concepts, approaches and methods. The aim of this is to gain new impulses and insights that help a given field to evolve and innovate.¹ Peer learning processes can be structured in many different ways and have a variety of formats. Indeed, the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018 mentions peer learning as an important implementation instrument.²

Peer learning, i.e. learning from each other, at the European and international level is not a new phenomenon in the field of international youth work and youth policy. Rather, it builds on the long-standing experience gained in connection with bi- and multilateral expert exchanges – a foundation that “transitions” builds on as well.

The peer learning process within “transitions”

“transitions” was designed with the aim of evolving the participating countries’ existing structures concerning the transition from education to employment or training. It also aimed to contribute towards the debate at the European level and help implement the EU Youth Strategy, which identifies transitions as a thematic focus. Accordingly, this peer learning process was designed as a form of shared learning that would produce new perspectives for policymakers and practitioners and inspire new approaches. To this end, a series of expert programmes and

peer learning seminars lasting several days were organised. Experts and professionals were invited to attend the expert programmes in small groups so they could engage in an intensive dialogue. Participants were also given an opportunity to attend more than one expert exchange programme. These international exchanges were accompanied by national activities, the nature of which varied depending on existing national circumstances.

During the planning period, the priority areas to be worked on were carefully chosen, with transition experts expressly invited to provide input. This required a shared understanding of the financial and structural circumstances as well as of the current challenges facing the transition field – criteria that ultimately determined the selection of priority areas.

Preconditions and success factors

“transitions” has shown that peer learning is an effective instrument for continuing to develop national youth policies and practices, and that it can serve to implement the EU Youth Strategy. The insights gained in connection with the project make it possible to identify a number of preconditions and success factors for effective peer learning.

Genuinely effective peer learning requires a *shared, systematic analysis and reflection process*. Simply exchanging best practices or tried-and-tested approaches is not sufficient, since these can only rarely be transferred directly from one setting to another since the youth policy systems tend to vary from country to country. Proven approaches from one country can only provide valuable input in another country if they are analysed and reflected against the backdrop of these countries’ structures and the logic that led to their development in the first place. This allows for a critical reflection and reinterpretation of familiar approaches and structures in one’s own country, too. A learning process of this kind requires an open, mutually trustful atmosphere between the members of the group.

Cooperation among partner countries is based on reliability, mutuality and partnership. Besides funding, the planning, organization and implementation of peer learning projects requires sufficient human resources. The agreements made by the partner countries should be made in writing, which ensures planning certainty for all parties. This is particularly important when implementing a multi-annual project. In addition to clear common objectives, a detailed, agreed set of topics and target groups for the various activities is key to a successful cooperation. At the

¹ cf. Thimmel, Andreas (2013): *Konzeptionelle Überlegungen zum Peer-Learning im Fachkräfteaustausch der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe* [Conceptual reflections on peer learning in exchanges for child and youth services experts]. Unpublished lecture of 12 June 2013.

² Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) (2009/C 311/01)

Topics and events

International expert meeting in Berlin
27.–28.06.2012

Expert exchange in Germany: New forms of cooperation between formal education, non-formal education and the world of work
10.–13.10.2012

Study Visit to the Netherlands: Individual Support of Young People in Transition – the Dutch Example
16.–17.04.2013

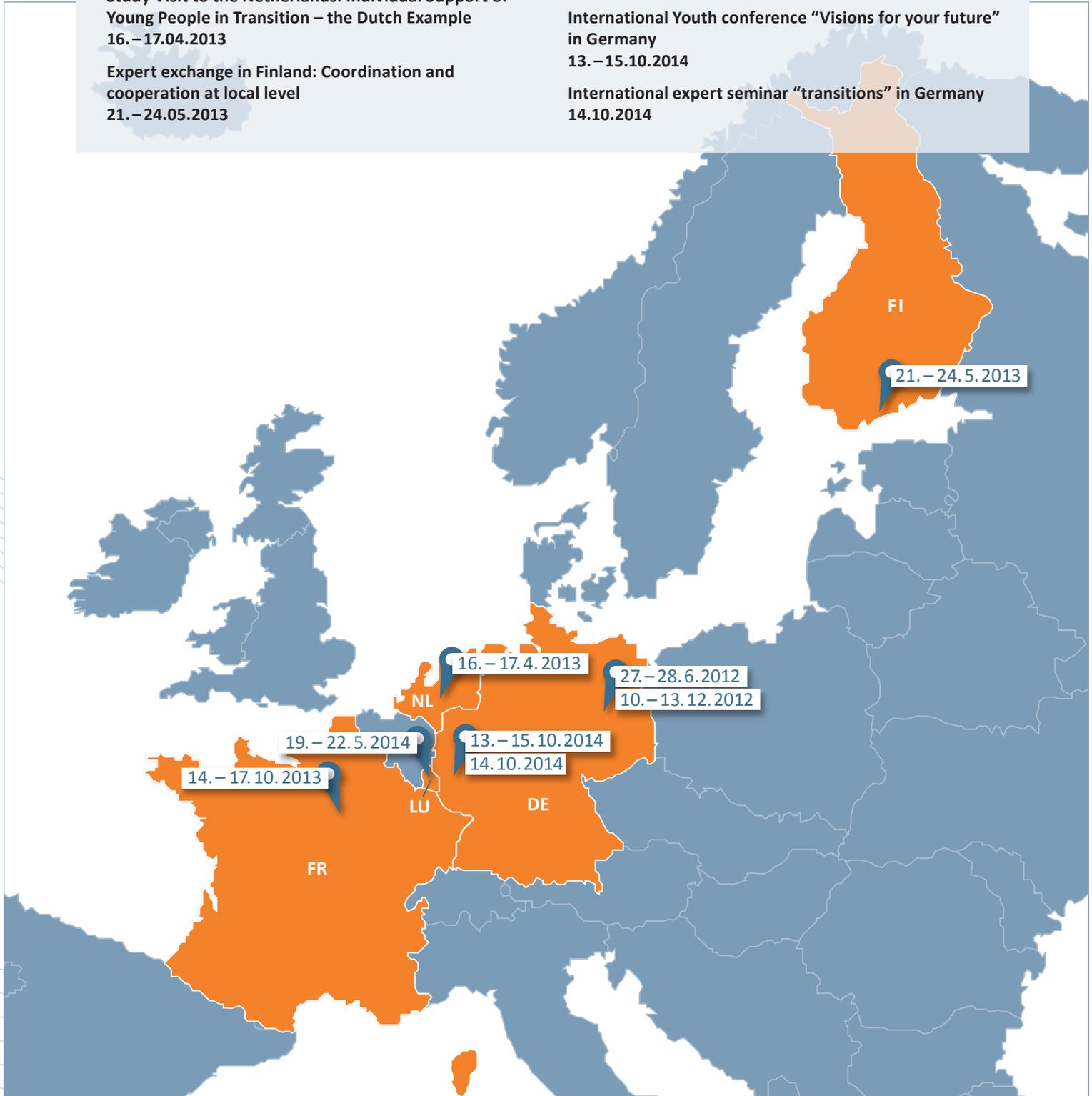
Expert exchange in Finland: Coordination and cooperation at local level
21.–24.05.2013

Expert exchange in France: Phases of transitions: Multi-dimensional and personalised assistance to young people
14.–17.10.2013

Expert exchange in Luxembourg: Successful transitions – the role of the economic sector
19.–22.05.2014

International Youth conference “Visions for your future” in Germany
13.–15.10.2014

International expert seminar “transitions” in Germany
14.10.2014



Good Practice Examples

(YOUTH) WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES IN FINLAND

PROJECT PROFILE

Field of activity:

- New forms of cooperation between formal education, non-formal education and the world of work
- Ways to identify and address young people who cannot be reached by the regular services

Contact:

Valtakunnallinen työpajayhdistys ry (TPY) –
National Workshop Association (NWA)
Mari Ahonen-Walker
mari.ahonen-walker@tpy.fi
www.tpy.fi

Country:

Finland

Organisational structure:

- Association
- NGO



Gardening during a youth workshop

Aims and target groups

The National Workshop Association in Finland (NWA) aims to prevent social exclusion by developing workshop activities and improving the professional skills of those employed in workshops. NWA has 220 member organisations across Finland. NWA is one of the youth work service and development centres of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Local workshop activities were launched in Finland in the 1980s. Nationwide activities commenced in the 1990s, and NWA was established in 1997 to develop these. In the 2000s, the workshop activities became more professional. The coaching provided by the workshops and the methods used were improved, the quality and impact of the activities were enhanced, and cooperation between the workshops and their stakeholders was improved and extended, enabling the organisations to respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse group of young people.

The workshop activities are targeted at young people who are inactive and who need specific support (so called NEETs: Not in Employment, Education or Training). The target group also includes unemployed young people and adults without vocational or professional qualifications or work

experience, career-changers, job-seekers with disabilities or a diminished ability to work, people recovering from substance abuse or with mental health problems, the long-term unemployed, people unable to work full-time, and from the immigrant community who need assistance in entering the Finnish labour market. Workshop participants speak over 60 different languages as their mother tongues.

The number of young people participating in workshop activities increased significantly during the 2000s. In 2013, more than 14,200 young people under 29 participated in workshop activities. In 2013, the number of persons receiving coaching at the workshops was approximately 22,000. The increase in unemployment in 2012, particularly in male-dominated sectors, pushed the share of young males up to 61.3% of all workshop participants. A total of 51.5% of young workshop participants had not completed secondary education. While the share of young participants who had completed basic education was 48.8%, 2% of them did not have a comprehensive school leaving certificate. Youth workshop services are offered by some 260 municipalities, representing 85% of all municipalities in Finland. (Source: Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan Finland)

Partnerships and networks

Workshop activities are typically based on a multi-disciplinary and multi-professional approach across administrative sectors and organisations. In addition to employment and youth policy, the current workshop activities are also firmly focused on education and social policy.

The workshops may be maintained by municipalities, sub-regions or joint municipal authorities, foundations, associations or other actors. At the local level, a municipal workshop may also form part of the municipality's youth, education, social or technical services, or be part of the central administration or employment services.

Almost 20 different organisations refer the young people to the workshops. Most are referred by the labour administration (47%); others are referred by secondary educational institutions, the Social Insurance Institution, social services and youth outreach workers. Around 6 to 7% of the young people taking part in the activities come to the workshops on their own initiative (Häggman: Ministry of Education and Culture's annual survey of workshop activities 2012).

Project progress, project term and main activities

A "workshop" in this context is a community that aims to strengthen the skills and abilities of individuals so they gain access to education, training or employment and to improve their life management skills through work, training and personal coaching.

Youth workshop activities boost young people's life management skills and social independence, provide early support, promote collective growth at the participants' own pace and encourage learning by doing. Workshops provide young people with the opportunity to work under supervision as well as with a tailored pathway to education, help towards completing their education through working together with the education provider, or support in finding employment on the open labour market.

The workshops develop and put into practice many types of models that have been proven effective at the regional and the local level. They provide personal coaching, offering a low-threshold, functional and rehabilitative service that is often not offered by the standard system. The workshops offer a work-oriented and community-based learn-

Digging during a youth workshop



Good Practice Examples

Working with wood during a youth workshop

ing environment that can be adapted to suit individual needs. Examples of the workshops' effective practices include support in finishing basic education, identification of learning needs together with vocational institutions, and assisted apprenticeship training. The workshops also cooperate with local businesses and other employers to offer workshop participants additional perspectives.

From the young people's perspective, the workshop activities come at a crucial transitional phase in their lives. Society is changing, making it more difficult for them to integrate in society, the world of work and institutions. The workshop activities offer them a flexible way to reinforce their social skills and integrate in the community. Workshops assist young people in developing their life management skills, strengthen their social independence, help them to grow at their own pace and learn by doing. The workshop activities give them an on-the-job introduction to working life, help them to find their personal strengths and draw up realistic future plans. They also support a young person's personal growth as individuals as well as members of a work community. Here, young people have access to a multi-disciplinary network, where the skills and competences of various sectors merge to form a mutually supportive whole. Most importantly, all young participants are personally involved in preparing their own plans, setting their targets and assessing their results and achievements.

Project results and insights gained

The workshop activities are an example of a service that efficiently supports young people in various transitional phases through guidance and coaching. These activities are often examined from the perspective of services that support employment. It should be noted that the workshop activities also play a significant role in guiding young people in making educational choices, in non-formal learning and in the field of rehabilitative services. As a flexible and individual service that spans sectoral boundaries, they are an effective way to close the gap between sectors and to assist those no longer reachable by the standard system.

After attending a workshop, some 75 % of participants are placed in education or training, find a job or commence some other activity that meets their needs (Häggman:



Ministry of Education and Culture's annual survey of workshop activities 2012).

The workshop activities integrate and implement the objectives and service expectations of various branches of administration. From this viewpoint, the productivity and impact of the activities cannot only be examined using the conventional yardsticks of "finding employment" or "returning to education". Various branches of administration also look at the productivity of the activities from different perspectives. From a youth work perspective, the coaching provided at a workshop reinforces the young people's sense of self and social empowerment and fosters individual growth at their own pace while also supporting work skills, general working life skills and capacity for teamwork. Educational services mainly see the workshop activities as a way to prevent dropping out. From the perspective of social services, young people come to the workshops to solve the problems they encounter in managing their daily lives and to develop general work skills. The labour administration's objective, finally, is to help young people to figure out their future field of work and to learn work skills.

MISSIONS LOCALES

Local coordination centers supporting young people in transition

PROJECT PROFILE

Field of activity:

- New forms of cooperation between formal education, non-formal education and the world of work
- Coordination and cooperation at the local level
- Ways to identify and address young people who cannot be reached by the regular services
- Cooperation with companies/businesses

Contact:

Conseil National des Missions Locales
Karine Brard-Guillet
Les Borromées 2
1, avenue du Stade-de-France
93210 Saint-Denis
www.emploi.gouv.fr/cnml/

Country:

France

Organisational structure:

- Association
- City/Region: missions locales are usually located at local level (city, department) but may also be regional government entity

Aims and target groups

In France, missions locales, which promote the integration of young people into society and working life, are local-level publicly funded structures with a double mission:

- They offer services to young people (16-25) who need assistance in integrating into society and working life, i.e. counselling, help with gaining access to education and training, coaching and communication with employers. This support complements the assistance offered by the Public Employment Services as it also relates to more general and social issues faced by young people, including health, accommodation, mobility, etc.
- They help to strengthen local-level partnerships between stakeholders active in the field of youth integration and support the development and implementation of well-informed youth policies.

Currently, there are about 450 missions locales across the country that assist about 1.3 million young people every year.

CIVIS (Le contrat d'insertion dans la vie sociale), a nationwide scheme launched in April 2005, was implemented by the missions locales to help unemployed young people gain access to long-term employment.

The activities target all adolescents and young adults aged 15 to 25, specifically those without sufficient training or with qualifications that do not correspond to job market needs, but also those who already receive other forms of support in preparing for careers or already have a job.

Partnerships and networks

Missions locales serve as a focal point for local youth integration strategies. As such, they actively cooperate with the following stakeholders at their level:

- Local public authorities (including structures created by associations of municipalities)
- Public administrations in charge of employment and social affairs
- Local offices of public employment services
- Schools
- Counselling centres
- Youth information services
- Services in charge of youth protection
- Social partners
- Associations that liaise with employers (e.g. chambers of commerce)

The missions locales themselves are organised in a network. Each regional association (chaired by a locally elected representative), which is in direct contact with the regional administrations in charge of employment issues (DIRECCTE), fosters cooperation at the regional level and is also represented on the national council of missions locales (CNML).

In 2006 the CNML launched a partnership with large companies in need of young employees under which 45 national agreements were signed with business or professional organisations.



Visiting a mission locale

Project progress, project term and main activities

Activities of the CNML to improve cooperation with companies:

The Council works

- to promote recruitment procedures that meet the needs of businesses and of young people alike, accompanied by the missions locales. Based on a development strategy and regular assistance from business development officers at the regional level, companies and the representatives of the missions locales meet to match their needs and develop regional and local target plans;
- to better inform young people and their counselors about promising economic sectors and companies (companies give counselors an insight into the workplace and present their industries and jobs during joint orientation sessions which take place at the missions locales offices)

The development of sponsorship schemes (mécénat social d'entreprise) to promote employment, especially in the context of the fight against discrimination, constitutes an important pillar of this work. Employees act as mentors to assist young people, especially when it comes to preparing them for interviews and exams, not only in their company or field of work. Employees are released from work for this task. This mécénat social d'entreprise is often undertaken with assistance from corporate foundations; in return, the companies receive a tax credit.

In addition, the Council has created a "Business and Employment" working group to foster the link between the social sector and the employment sector. Companies are given an opportunity to participate in policy-making with the aim of boosting implementation and reducing youth unemployment. It is headed by the president of the 450 missions locales across France and represented in the national council, where it advises the Minister in charge of youth employment. Some members of the group have experience in coordinating cooperation between the private sector and the missions locales.

Finally, the "Jeunes destination entreprises" think-tank founded in May 2012 brings together companies and partners of the missions locales to determine best practices, benchmark existing projects and develop new models of cooperation. Topics dealt with are social inclusion, critical reflection on the positive and negative aspects of the organisations, the use of mixed measures (e.g., training in schools and in the workplace) to integrate young people into the companies. The results are presented to policy makers.

All national agreements with partner companies and organisations are listed on the CNML website.*

* www.emploi.gouv.fr/cnml/entreprises-partenaires;
www.jeunes-destination-entreprises.fr/les_pages/les-entreprises-partenaires.html [accessed November 2014]

Counselling services at a mission locale



Project results and insights gained

In 2013, close to 1.5 million young people across the country were assisted by the missions locales, including almost 172,000 CIVIS beneficiaries (52% of which were young women).

CIVIS results are monitored based on the status of beneficiaries when they leave the scheme. In 2013, 28% of CIVIS beneficiaries transitioned into stable employment, 13% to non-stable employment while 8.5% of beneficiaries were placed in further training. However, it is important to stress that these indicators may not capture significant qualitative benefits associated with CIVIS. Participation in CIVIS and interaction with a counsellor has been found to play an important role in improving the overall situation of young people as well as their motivation and self-esteem. In addition, the main advantage of CIVIS, compared to less structured forms of support (where there is no contract be-

tween the counsellor and the young person) is that it contributes towards stabilising the relationship with the young person, who is required to take an active part in managing his or her own project.

According to the latest data available, the number of CIVIS participants in 2013 increased by 22% compared to 2012. The numbers of participants who were placed in stable employment increased from 24% (in 2012), while the number of those in non-stable employment decreased from 15.7% due to the *Emploi d'Avenir* measure, under which CIVIS beneficiaries can be offered their first long-term contract (average duration: 3 years). Other observable trends that are due to the economic crisis include a higher likelihood of young men requiring reinforced support because they are less qualified and that overall, more CIVIS beneficiaries are likely to request ad-hoc economic support (e.g., reimbursement of travel costs). Finally, there is also general trend towards a higher proportion of young people with an academic qualification: 35% of young people coming into contact with the scheme for the first time (534,000 in 2013) have no qualifications, compared to 43% in 2005.

Espace Emploi

MISSION LOCALE DES ULIS

Jeunes ou entreprises rejoignez notre réseau et agissons durablement **POUR L'EMPLOI**

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Blog
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Social

viadeo
www.viadeo.com
Réseau professionnel
Services à l'entreprise
Contacts et recrutements

Dailymotion
www.dailymotion.com/ulisu
La Mission Locale en vidéos
Un Réseau pour Réussir
On en parle...

Association pour l'insertion des jeunes de 16 à 25 ans

Good Practice Examples

PEDAGOGICAL WORKSHOPS OF NANTERRE

Ateliers pédagogiques de Nanterre

PROJECT PROFILE

Field of activity:

- New forms of cooperation between formal education, non-formal education and the world of work
- Coordination and cooperation at the local level
- Ways to identify and address young people who cannot be reached by the regular services

Contact:

Théophile Roussel Healthcare Center
Doctor Marie Gilloots, child psychiatrist
www.cereq.fr/index.php/publications/Net.Doc/Ateliers-pedagogiques-Nanterre

Country:

France

Organisational structure:

Hospital

Aims and target groups

The project aims to

- prevent young people from dropping out of school by means of “webteaching”, a new method employed in small groups;
- offer young people healthcare and prevent them from falling into isolation by working closely with their families;
- to liaise between healthcare providers and educational institutions.

Target group are young people aged 12 to 18 who are out of school (80% of them boys) and who suffer a lack of confidence, are aggressive and opposed to authority.

Partnerships and networks

This project is piloted by an outpatient centre for child and adolescent psychiatry in the city centre of Nanterre that is affiliated with the Théophile Roussel Healthcare Centre. For several years the centre has maintained a partnership with childhood and adolescence professionals and the local authorities.

The health authorities of the Département, the Healthcare Centre and the Youth Centre were mobilised to identify adolescents in trouble. The association Epheta provided a place to work with young people outside the school and the hospital environment. The schools and Missions Locales were mobilized to provide assistance when the workshops commenced. The Ministry of Youth (FEJ) and local authorities provided financial support to the experiment.

Project progress, project term and main activities

The project aims to address the disorders suffered by school drop-outs using a multidisciplinary methodology, particularly health care and new teaching methods, that always involves a skills assessment, an evaluation of learning achievements, integration in the group of young people attending the workshop and the development of a personal project. The aim is also to identify the causes that led the young people to drop out of school, propose educational support, and offer treatment for the young persons’ psychological troubles.

The project has several stages:

- Stage 1: The young persons in question are identified by teachers, juvenile judicial protection services, child social assistance and pediatricians;
- Stage 2: Realization of a brochure and creation of a webpage;
- Stage 3: 5 weekly sessions of 90 minutes each, supervised by a teacher, a special education teacher and a psychologist.

Project results and insights gained

The trial period lasted 36 months. The idea was to try out a new relationship between the learning processes, with schooling provided in line with the needs and the abilities of each individual. The workshops identified that all participants had behavioural disorders. Their level of educational attainment was very weak. It emerged that

intervention should ideally take place at the end of primary school. The special education teacher created a climate of confidence and self-esteem.

In spite of the challenges, the project enabled 50% of adolescents to return to mainstream education, 7% were referred to Department-run institutions for disabled persons, while 24% are in definitive breakdown.

Summary of an evaluation by CEREQ

The authorities have made substantial efforts to combat school truancy, and within this context the Nanterre Educational Workshops programme is original and innovative. Its social utility lies in its innovative approach to disengagement with education and how to deal with it.

The specific feature of the Educational Workshops programme is that it focuses on the need for therapy when managing disengagement with education, which often manifests itself in the form of a school phobia and often reveals deeper social and family problems.

The evaluation consisted of two sections, the first of which focused on how the young people were monitored. By definition, this programme served a small number of participants, and no counterfactual or quasi-experimental analysis was attempted. Instead, it was decided to carry out semi-structured interviews with young people and their families. The second section concerned the coordination of key players with regards to the involvement of stakeholders and partners in this programme.

The young participants consider the Educational Workshops to be positive. A positive effect could be identified, demonstrated by changes in behaviour, based on the following criteria:

- The feeling of having found a framework and a supervisory structure that encourages the re-learning of rules.
- The perception of an educational atmosphere that is more flexible than the rigid school system.
- The feeling of being listened to and receiving tailored assistance with learning and managing personal problems.
- The real possibility of restoring self-esteem due to the fact that stigmatisation by adults and peers is countered by the individual nature of the project for each participant.

The interviews also showed that for the parents, their feeling of estrangement from the institution had been greatly reduced; some expressed their trust in and involvement with the programme, with the more experienced users passing on their knowledge to recent arrivals.

The social utility of the Educational Workshops is generally accepted by the key players from the national education authority: they all agree that they do not have the means to offer personalised support to pupils who have major educational difficulties or behavioural issues. Institutionalising this cooperation with the Ministry of Education appears to be a potential way to ensure the longevity of the programme and broaden its reach.



Good Practice Examples

ASIG | VOCATIONAL COLLEGE

ASIG | Berufsfachschule

PROJECT PROFILE

Field of activity:

New forms of cooperation between formal and non-formal educational institutions and employers

Contact:

ASIG Stiftung e.V.
Meierottostraße 8-9
10719 Berlin, Germany
www.asig-berlin.de

Country:

Germany

Organisational structure:

Association

Aims and target groups

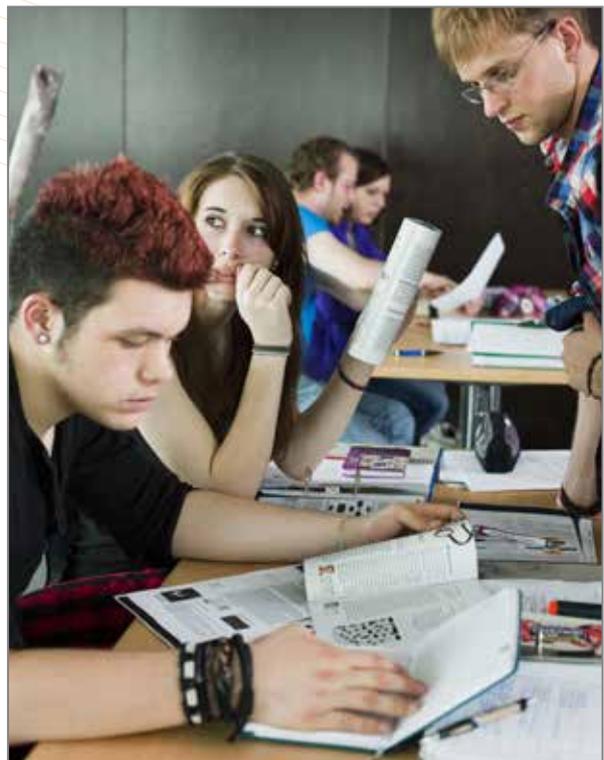
We aim to offer young people with fewer opportunities early career advice while they are still in mainstream secondary school, and to restructure existing vocational integration measures in a way that eases their access to vocational training. In this regard, our priorities are:

- To prevent an interruption of young people's educational careers and/or other difficulties by developing an integrated outline concept for the transition from school to working life and avoiding periods spent "on hold".
- To lift the burden of disadvantage from young people by offering them an opportunity to gain a mainstream qualification and in turn, equal chances on the labour market as well as an opportunity to choose the career they want.
- To raise awareness among private sector employers – especially small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) – of the problems and needs of this target group and to significantly increase their willingness to offer training and apprenticeships.

- To prepare young people for working life and offer them training in realistic professions in order to give them long-term perspectives and development options.
- To provide graduates with the personal, social and communication skills they need to live an independent life and participate in society.

Our work is determined by the specific situations faced by young people with fewer opportunities and the requirements they have. Our target group consists of young people whose schooling is severely impaired by their social background (lack of language skills, lower than average level of education in the family, poverty). Their lives are heavily characterised by the realities and values of their respective environments. The vast majority of them live in socially segregated districts with high unemployment (Hellersdorf, Hohenschönhausen, Reinickendorf, etc.).

Students of ASIG vocational college



*Student-led firm supported by
the ASIG Foundation*



Partnerships and networks

Our aim is to help young people transition smoothly from school to employment. Mainstream schools, their last station before working life, are important partners for us in this endeavour. Besides information events offering career guidance and practical help with getting started, we also offer support and information concerning training and apprenticeship opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities. In addition, we offer career choice counselling for students from grade 8 upwards. Finally, we are one of the active (founding) members of the working group on entrepreneurship in schools, an initiative of the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Technology. In this capacity, we offer entry-level vocational training at schools throughout the city in the shape of assistance to student-led startup businesses.

As regards the qualifications offered at our vocational college, the project is primarily based on an existing network of firms in Berlin where the young people undergo the practical part of their training. In other words, they have a regular place of work, which is an important concern for us as well as a major factor when it comes to giving the young apprentices confidence in their own abilities. This sense of continuity and opportunity to experience working life allows them to feel as part of a team, establish a rapport with fellow apprentices, and opt for more advanced training or employment if they so wish. The young people become aware that they are important members of their company's workforce and have a part to play in the firm's day-to-day business. As team members, they contribute to their company's success.

To offer all apprentices this kind of practical experience, companies had to be found that were willing to help solve the undisputedly greater problems faced by these young people and give them the attention they require. In this regard, the insights gained in connection with the partner schools of Netzwerk Berliner Schülerfirmen (NEBS), a network of firms founded by school students in Berlin, were a helpful support. Today, close to 30 partner companies (including major hotel and retail chains and top restaurants) have subscribed to our vocational training philosophy. We also liaise with the local chambers of commerce and trade (IHK and HWK) as well as with the Berlin Senate for Education.

The college's educational approach is the subject of a research project conducted by Humboldt University in Berlin and the University of Potsdam.

Project progress, project term and main activities

The starting point of ASIG's engagement in education was the development and implementation of the Schülerfirma learning initiative in Berlin. In 2007 we also began offering perspectives to young people with fewer opportunities who had just left school, and have since been running special vocational training programmes in a variety of occupations for this target group. The dual nature of these programmes – with time evenly split between vocational college and hands-on work in our Berlin-based partner firms – is a vital part of this approach. When we founded ASIG | Berufsfachschule, we were able to make good use of the positive effects of an involvement in a student-managed business in the context of subsequent vocational training.

Students at our college are currently able to train as specialists in the hospitality industry, social work assistants and childcare workers. Since 2007 the number of apprentices has risen from 27 to 90, with numbers anticipated to rise. We give young people an opportunity to gain a fully recognised vocational qualification (and be examined by the relevant chambers or other public sector institutions), giving them a realistic chance on the labour market. Our philosophy can hence be summarised as follows: Common destinations, but individual pathways!

Once they finish their training, these young people are expected to be able to pass the same examinations as apprentices with an intermediate school leaving certificate or a university entrance qualification, which poses a special challenge when it comes to designing our training concept. Under our training initiative, we decided to offer the option to extend the regular two-year apprenticeship

Good Practice Examples



Students of ASIG vocational college

Besides purely vocational skills, our colleges also offer activities in other fields, such as regular adventure camps and workshops with environment or nature themes.

disengagement project

Project results and insights gained

ASIG | Berufsfachschule was founded in recognition of three aspects that are instrumental when it comes to successfully offering vocational training to young people with fewer opportunities:

1. Reorganisation and flexibilisation of apprenticeships while maintaining the dual character of vocational training, including practical training for the full duration of the programme
2. Acquisition of partner companies and businesses and raising awareness among them of the importance of offering practical training to this target group in “mainstream” settings
3. Offer of continuous support to young people in developing social and communication skills, which helps them to live an independent life

Our success rate so far has been 100%; in other words, all of our graduates have successfully passed their exams. Each year, around 30% of our students also succeed in gaining an intermediate school leaving qualification. Our follow-up statistics suggest that over 70% of our graduates are either offered employment or go on to complete a more advanced course of training upon graduation.

Our approach is based on a fully integrated vocational training concept for young people with fewer opportunities that recognises the multiple challenges faced by this target group at the juncture between school and working life. We provide professional support and advisory services to SMEs to raise their willingness to offer training to these young people. Our example demonstrates that this is an approach that is capable of significantly increasing this target group's chances of succeeding on the labour market.

period by an extra year, giving students enough space to catch up on any deficits and learn at their own pace. In addition, our college offers all-day tuition, with theoretical subjects (maths, economics, social sciences etc.) taught in the morning and practical projects completed in the afternoon. The afternoon sessions are also an opportunity for students to revise and practice anything that they may not have had time for while on work placement. The college offers labs and workshop rooms, including our own practice kitchen, for this purpose.

To determine what skills and abilities our students have when they come to us, we start by testing their potential and determining what type of learner they are, an exercise that is repeated in the later stages of their apprenticeship. The apprentices learn in small groups of 12-15 students, allowing the instructors to pay sufficient attention to their different learning strategies. Exam candidates also attend “exam preparation camps” during which they prepare for the theoretical and practical challenges of an exam situation, learn to manage exam anxiety, and practice strategies for remaining focused and activating the knowledge they will need during the exam. These events also involve group leisure activities that develop participants' social and communication skills.

TRUANCY – A SECOND CHANCE

Schulverweigerung – Die 2. Chance

PROJECT PROFILE

Field of activity:

Ways to identify and address young people who cannot be reached by the regular services

Contact:

Caritasverband für das Erzbistum Berlin e.V.
Malchower Weg 48
13053 Berlin, Germany
www.dicvberlin.caritas.de

Country:

Germany

Organisational structure:

Association

Aims and target groups

The project (whose name translates to “Truancy – A second chance”) aims to assist young people in reintegrating into school, and to liaise between schools and child and youth services providers.

The target group consists of adolescents aged 13 to 16 who actively or passively disengage with school.

Partnerships and networks

The primary partners are the partner school, the school’s management, form teachers and coordinators. With them, we discuss how to proceed concerning the individual adolescents and their families, set objectives, draw up development plans and conduct regular progress checks.

Other partners include the youth office, school psychologists, child and youth health services and other healthcare providers. We also work with the parents or guardians and other persons who maintain a relationship with the young

people in question. We maintain close ties with open youth work organisations, youth vocational counselling services, projects for disadvantaged young people and others.

Project progress, project term and main activities

This project received funding for a term of five years under the European Social Fund and was implemented in the Lichtenberg district of Berlin with us in a coordinating role. We rolled out the project at two partner schools in Lichtenberg and also ran a district-wide school disengagement service (“Clearingstelle Schuldistanz”) that offered advice and support services to young people, parents and experts working at the schools and in child and youth services.

Our main methods were case management and networking. Case management is a highly intense, personalised form of support that is provided in close coordination with parents and schools. In this regard, maintaining a connection to other social services providers and actors is vital. Over the years the project and the partner school established a trustful relationship that allowed both sides to recognise any signs of truancy and intervene early on, which increased the probability of successfully reintegrating the adolescents into school.



Workshop as part of a school disengagement project
("Die 2. Chance")

Good Practice Examples

Other methods included after-school tutoring, lessons in German as a foreign language, experiential education, careers advice, help with finding internships abroad, and creative activities.

Contact between the adolescents and the project was established by the school, in most cases by the form teachers or social workers. In the beginning assistance was only provided to young people who had dropped out of school quite some time before and had a long history of truancy. As the project progressed, teachers and other experts working in the district developed a greater awareness of the problem and henceforth began to intervene at an earlier stage once they noticed any signs of school disengagement or absenteeism. The better known the project became, the more adolescents were introduced to the project via the youth office, other child and youth services providers, as well as parents and grandparents. Today, we are even contacted by the young people themselves.

In the beginning, cooperation with the school was fraught with difficulties. However, this improved over time as the school and the child and youth services providers developed a better understanding of each other's functions, methods, approaches and positions and began to respect each other's roles and learned from and appreciated one another. The more progress was made in this regard, the better the cooperation became and the sooner an intervention could take place.

Cooperation with the parents was generally positive since they had to give their approval before we could start working with the adolescents. Parents tend to feel helpless when faced with this problem and need assistance so that they can first face up to the situation and the resulting pressure, and then start to think about effective remedies. Some families suffer from problems that are the root cause of truancy. In some cases the adolescents had to leave the family home. Drawing a clear line between parental counselling and the case management services provided to the adolescents proved effective. Overall, we can conclude that it is crucial to work with the parents and understand what goes on in the family home when providing effective help to young people in this situation.

Project results and insights gained

The most important insight gained is that truancy is a problem that can only be addressed effectively if there is close cooperation between schools, child and youth services providers, healthcare providers and parents. The issue is too complex and the resulting problems too numerous for one actor to deal with by itself.

When it comes to working with the young people, a trustful, strong relationship is vital. Case management – an intense, personalised, mutually trustful form of cooperation with the adolescents in question – is one of the most important success factors in this regard. Another is close cooperation between the school (especially its management) and the project.

The project provided support to around 100 young people, two thirds of them boys. Around 30% belonged to the immigrant community. The reintegration rate was between 80 and 90%, although the adolescents in question did not all return to their original schools. In some cases other schools or other form of care were found, or the young people were placed in a more advanced educational institution. This five-year project resulted in the setup of a permanent post within a partner school with funding from the federal state.



JOB-INFODAY

A careers fair for adolescents and parents

PROJECT PROFILE

Field of activity:

- New forms of cooperation between formal and non-formal educational institutions and employers
- Coordination and cooperation at the local level
- Cooperation with companies/businesses

Contact:

Kayl youth committee and youth centre
 “Schungfabrik” cultural centre
 12 rue Pierre Schiltz
 L-3786 Tetingen
 www.levelup.lu

Country:

Luxembourg

Organisational structure:

- Association
- City/local authority

Aims and target groups

The Job-Infoday was designed to support young people as they approach the labour market, give them easier access to vocational training, and provide them with an opportunity to discuss these concerns and gather information together with their parents in a non-formal setting. The event would also be attended by potential employers, representatives of various professions, career guidance counsellors, school representatives, and local and regional project partners such as youth centres and youth information points.

Specifically, the project aims

- to give young people and their parents a realistic impression of the demands of certain careers and entrance requirements, with input from representatives of various professions and businesses. Participants also learn about formal and non-formal training courses and projects as well as various ways to “become active”;
- to support young people in making the right career choices, writing their CVs, and preparing for job interviews;



- to raise awareness among parents of their key role in assisting their children in their career choices and to support them in fulfilling that role;
- to establish closer contact and improve cooperation at the regional level between career support and advisory services, youth work organisations, schools and businesses.

Target groups:

- Adolescents and young adults
- Parents
- Staff of career counselling/career search services
- Social pedagogues, schoolteachers, youth centre staff.

Partnerships and networks

The Kayl youth committee and youth centre (the implementing organisation) and outreach youth work organisations took the initiative for this careers fair. They founded a network of partners (Netzwerkarbeitsgruppe Süden) including the job centre (Arbeitsamt, or ADEM), local youth action offices (ALJ), the southern regional chapter of the national youth service (Jugenddienst Süden, or SNJ), and representatives of local secondary schools and youth centres. The youth committee compiled a list of objectives and coordinated the assignment of jobs within the network, which was done over the course of three preparatory meetings. Kayl local authorities provided logistical support and handled the project’s PR at the local level (placement of an article in the community newsletter, flyers distributed to all households, broadcast of a report by a local TV station, etc.).

The youth centres in Kayl/Tetingen, the outreach youth work organisations and the Rümelingen youth centre were involved in the PR activities as well as in setting up and running a drinks counter. Young people produced short video clips¹ on what NOT to do during job interviews and publicised the event itself. Finally, the youth centres set up information booths on open youth work activities and on the training and day-to-day work of teachers and social pedagogues.

¹ www.dropbox.com/s/af2c8kxvx6bf34g/NO%20GO%20HAUPTFILM.avi (accessed November 2014)

Good Practice Examples

As the southern regional chapter of the SNJ was involved, the project gained a much wider reach, which made it possible to invite national partners – such as the web portal anelo and various SNJ volunteer services – to participate in the Job-Infoday as well.

Project progress, project term and main activities

In October 2013 network representatives met to discuss the schedule and produce some early ideas for the Job-Infoday in Kayl/Tetingen. Over the course of the winter, further activities took place in cooperation between the youth committee, the youth centre and the SNJ's southern regional chapter, following which preparations for the actual event began and local businesses were contacted. The Job-Infoday took place on 5 March 2014 from 4 to 9 pm.²

As visitors came in, they would walk up to a welcome counter where staff explained to them what was on offer and what type of workshops would be offered when, and answered any questions visitors had. So-called Info Peers were on hand to approach visitors as they walked around and to help them find what they needed.

Various zones were set up:

- Yellow zone: Situational analysis and guidance (career counselling and support provided by ALJ, ADEM, anelo representatives, CPOS, schools; workshops on identifying one's interests and preparing a job application pack; interview simulator);
- Red zone: Looking for jobs (vacancy and apprenticeship exchange, advice provided by ADEM, information on the youth work programme);
- Green zone: Getting to know various professions (presentation of certain occupations, activities and training opportunities by companies from a variety of sectors: boutiques, wholesalers, telecommunications companies, an architecture and engineering agency, a roofing business, a beautician, a hairdresser, etc.; and practical workshops, e.g., a photoshoot, opportunities to talk to current apprentices, demonstration of tools and specialist work clothes);

- Blue zone: Becoming active and involved (the youth information point (PIJ), youth information centre (CIJ), national youth service (SNJ), youth centres in Kayl/Tetingen and Rümelingen provided information on volunteering projects and jobs for students).

After the Job-Infoday, network partners and representatives from the Kayl youth centre attended debriefing meetings to evaluate the event.

Project results and insights gained

As many as approx. 160 visitors came to the Job-Infoday, which speaks to the success of the fair. Most visitors came from the southern part of Luxembourg (Kayl/Tetingen, Rümelingen, Bettemburg, Esch) and were young people, adolescents, adults, parents and social pedagogues. The exhibitors included 21 representatives from various professions and 12 representatives of associations and other organisations.

Visitors showed particularly strong interest in health, education and social professions, the info booths of the police and the army, jobs for students, volunteering opportunities, and the “test your interests” workshop.

The Job-Infoday has shown that this type of careers fair – a highly diverse, open and decidedly local event – is capable of generating a lot of public interest. This setup, with the involvement of local stakeholders and a cooperation between various youth committee stakeholders and parents, young adults, the local authorities, youth centres and other partners, created quite a momentum and raised awareness of the challenges and concerns faced by young jobseekers.

The involvement of young members of the youth centre in planning and producing the videos on what not to do during a job interview was an unmitigated success.

The participating businesses provided much positive feedback. They reported having received some interesting job applications, and indicated that for the next event in 2015 they would try to provide more practical demonstrations of their work and the career opportunities they had to offer. The next Job-Infoday will take place for sure.

² A videoclip about the Job-Infoday is available at <http://player.vimeo.com/video/89704500> (accessed November 2014)

VOLUNTARY GUIDANCE SERVICE

Service volontaire d'orientation (SVO)

PROJECT PROFILE

Field of activity:

Cooperation with companies/businesses

Contact:

Service National de la Jeunesse (SNJ)
Martine Lentz, project coordinator
138 boulevard de la Pétrusse
L-2330 Luxembourg
www.snj.lu

Country:

Luxembourg

Organisational structure:

Public administration placed under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth

Aims and target groups

SVO (voluntary guidance service) is a project of the SNJ (National Youth Service) that enables adolescents to take part in a non-profit project in Luxembourg and gain some initial work experience. SVO supports disadvantaged young people in the transition period from school to work, by

- developing a realistic future /career plan together with the adolescents in question (e.g., commencing an apprenticeship, returning to school, etc.) ,
- motivating, supporting and challenging the adolescents,
- accompanying the adolescents in their individual learning process,
- giving the adolescents the opportunity to recognize and develop their own competences and interests in non-formal settings,
- giving the adolescents an opportunity to have a motivating learning experience and
- stabilizing the adolescents and giving them self-confidence.

The adolescents volunteer for non-profit organisations, which allows them to gain an initial insight into the working world.

The voluntary service SVO targets adolescents and young people between 16 and 30 who are no longer of school age. Most of them have few to no perspectives at school or on the labour market. Generally speaking, the target group consists of adolescents who

- need orientation and support as they move onto the labour market,
- are not ready to enter the labour market,
- have suffered several setbacks and need to be motivated,
- wish to do charity work and feel useful.

Partnerships and networks

The guidance the adolescents receive under SVO is provided by a network of various education and career guidance institutions. As a complement to the SNJ's youth monitoring activities, SVO closely cooperates with

- ALJ (local support for young people), which advises adolescents who have dropped out of school before graduating and provides them with personal guidance so they can be placed in a social or professional project
- ADEM-OP (public employment service job counselling), which offers individual counselling interviews as well as group information events for adolescents and adults in search of a suitable profession. ADEM-OP is also responsible for drawing up apprenticeship contracts
- CPOS (Centre of Psychology and Educational Orientation), which provides information on secondary schools in Luxembourg and abroad, as well as educational and/or professional guidance and support. CPOS also offers pedagogical, psychological and psychotherapy counselling for adolescents and their families.

The host organisations and their tutors play an important role. It is their responsibility to introduce the volunteers to their work and their team, to recognize and evaluate their progress and to accompany them together with a social pedagogue from the SNJ during their transition from education to career.

Good Practice Examples

Project progress, project term and main activities

The placements last between 3 and 12 months, with the adolescents working in various activities in public and private non-profit institutions.

Possible fields of activity include charitable work, child and youth work, health care, culture and tourism, sports or the environment.

The adolescents undergo the following stages before they start volunteering in their chosen field:

- Expression of interest in volunteering by filling out an application form;
- Participation in an information seminar;
- Face-to-face interview with a social education expert from the SNJ;
- Participation in a 4-day preparation seminar;

- Trial period of up to 2 weeks in an organisation;
- Signature of an agreement between the volunteer, the organisation and SNJ;
- Recognition of the status of a volunteer;

The volunteers work 35 hours a week in the organisation. Their activities depend on the field in question and are very diverse, ranging from assistance and entertainment for the residents of a senior care home, assisting the teachers in a children's day-care centre and gardening to kitchen services and transportation and assistance for hospital patients, etc.

Besides working in the organisations, the volunteers also participate in various activities and advanced training events that are organised by the SNJ.



Voluntary guidance service

Voluntary guidance service

The adolescents agree to follow the plan they drew up together with the social pedagogues, to participate in training events offered by other organisations and/or to find information centres.

Regular meetings are arranged in close cooperation with the host organisations' tutors to discuss the adolescents' (further) development and their personal and professional goals, which are renegotiated and adjusted where appropriate. Once the assignment ends, the adolescents may request a certificate to confirm the skills they gained in their specific field.

Project results and insights gained

Since SVO began in October 2007 there has been a significant increase in the level of interest from adolescents. The limit of 1000 registrations was passed in 2013. Although staffing levels were increased in 2011, the 10 social pedagogues (working in 5 regions) are currently only able to accommodate a maximum of 250-300 adolescents under SVO each year.

Lack of time and low staffing levels mean that no guidance can be provided after SVO placements end, so the SNJ has very little information about the long-term impact of the project. Upon completing their assignment 70% of participants "graduate positively", meaning they return to school, begin an apprenticeship or find a job.



There is a 15-year age range among the group, with a balanced number of female and male participants.

It has also emerged that the adolescents are confronted with various problems (social, financial and psychological) that cannot be solved by SVO.

The adolescents are often referred to other organisations so their more urgent problems (e.g. living arrangements) can be resolved before they are able and ready to focus on their careers. To maintain this momentum the SNJ will continue networking with other organisations and extending this network.

A survey was conducted in 2010 to determine whether participants were satisfied with the project. 90% of respondents indicated they were either satisfied or very satisfied. Only 10% were disappointed since they were actually looking for employment and volunteer work did not meet their expectations in terms of earnings and permanency.

National results and insights

Finland



Finland's contribution is based on the reflections of Mr Tapio Kuure, PhD, Fellow in Political Science at the University of Tampere School of Management, Finland. Mr Kuure took part as a Finnish representative in two seminars of the "transitions" project: "Developing links between formal education, non formal education and work", Berlin, 10-14 December 2012, and "Successful transitions – the role of the economic sector", Luxembourg, 19-21 May 2014.

The seminars in both Berlin and Luxembourg succeeded in showcasing practices relevant to their respective themes. Visits had been carefully planned by the hosts and were excellent backup to the presentations. The organisers clearly wished to provide a versatile introduction to their practices and experiences. The most positive outcome of both seminars was that co-operation was fostered among all countries taking part in the "transitions" project.

Both seminars revealed that there are similarities in the European mentality regarding education and employment policy. European countries obviously share the same values: They want to look after their young people and regard them not only as the future labour force. The approach in all countries is holistic and based on a humanist view. When working with young people who are facing difficulties, a key role is played by comprehensive support, flexible solutions, individual work forms and types of group work that support the young people's social skills, as well as functional work forms and developing the relationship between work and education. Pinpointing differences in the values, attitudes or even working methods between various countries is difficult. Regarding these common cultural concepts and values, any work form found to be effective in one country could be transferred to another.

There is one difference, however. The most obvious difference in values and attitudes is associated with social partnership in the labour market. In Germany and Luxembourg, social responsibility seems to play a considerably stronger role than in Finland, and this is reflected both in the companies' practices and in the language they use. In Finland, companies see young people who are entering the labour market as a burden, and vocational institutions are expected to provide targeted training for them. In Germany and Luxembourg, there is no such expectation, and the basic assumption is that young people who are not able to manage a full-time job for whatever reason must also be looked after and that they can contribute to society with whatever work they are able to perform. All in all, it seems that there is a well-functioning relationship between vocational education and training on one hand and employers on the other in Germany and Luxembourg, and that the labour market policy debate is somehow more open than in Finland. In part,

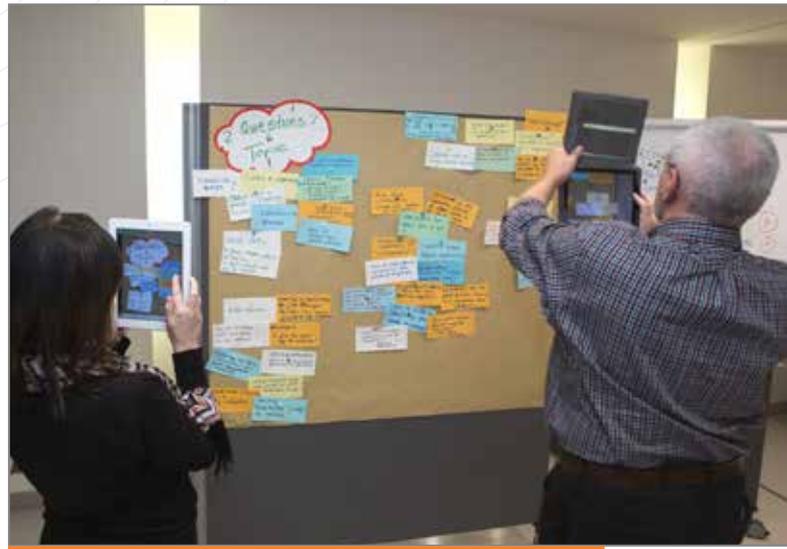


this may be due to labour market-related differences or, in other words, the fact that the labour market in Germany and Luxembourg is more absorbent than in Finland.

Making comparisons, even between EU countries, is difficult. For example, the basic structure of the German social security system is in a certain sense opposite to that in the Nordic countries. In the Nordic countries, we have a state-run social security system, which the third and the private sector may supplement in areas where the system may have gaps. For historical reasons, Germany avoided creating a strong state-run mechanism, and the social security system was thus mainly channelled through NGOs and the church. Any areas that were otherwise not covered were managed by the state. For this reason, social policy and social work actors are very different in terms of their organisation. However, mixed welfare, a system in which the public and the private sector complement each other and which was also introduced in Finland in the 1990s, has resulted in a more complex landscape.

Another important structural factor is the education system. Germany has a parallel school system, which Finland abandoned in the early 1970s. In Germany, a comprehensive school for all children has been a topic of debate for some time, but so far this system has only been introduced partially. In this respect, the situation does not appear to be about to change. Due to the different structures of the educational systems, a comparison of drop-out or early school leaver numbers etc. is rather unreliable as, for a start, drop-outs face different situations in terms of school attendance and transition to the labour market.

Employment statistics including unemployment, NEET and employment rates are open to interpretation, even when not tendentious, at the national level in Finland alone, and still more difficult to decipher in comparisons between EU countries. This became very obvious in discussions I had with a German colleague. These problems are well known, and for example Eurostat, the OECD and publications such as the annual Education at a Glance are working on this issue, and we can thus look forward to more accurate reference data in the future.



Expert exchange programme in Germany

Conclusions

Comparisons between EU countries are challenging because of differences between the national systems that exist for historical reasons, the varying perspectives on policies, and different central government structures. However, this does not pre-empt comparisons between various projects and work practices. There are two reasons for this: EU youth, education and labour market policies contribute to harmonising many practices; and European values, views of humanity, attitudes and theoretical frameworks used to model work among and with young people are similar.

It is impossible to analyse everything at once and within one project. Up to a limit, historical and administrative evolution and trends at work in the background should be examined even at individual seminars, but a shared value base enables us to focus on individual projects, organisations, methods and achievements.

National results and insights

France



The French ministry in charge of youth mainly participated in the European project “transitions” because it wanted to join the approach of multilateral cooperation and peer learning encouraged by the European Union and to cooperate with Germany, Finland and Luxembourg.

Two units inside the Department of Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisations of the Ministry were involved in the process: the European and International Cooperation Unit and the Youth Experimental Fund Unit (Fonds d’Expérimentation pour la Jeunesse, FEJ). Their role was to facilitate this multilateral cooperation in order to foster exchanges between organisations with a project, the FEJ experiment assessors and transition stakeholders in the partner countries.

The FEJ experimental projects aim at finding solutions to the difficulties encountered by young people during the course of their life, at school and afterwards: access to mobility, healthcare, housing, and employment. Each project benefits from an external evaluation that delivers insights in the project’s impact on young people and its results. This helps public authorities to specify the best projects with the aim of benefitting all youngsters across France within the framework of a new public youth policy.



Malika Kacimi, head of the Youth Fund of the French Ministry responsible for Youth

One of the main goals of the projects promoted by the FEJ is the social and professional integration of young people under 25. To meet this objective, numerous experiments are conducted in order to test new ways of accompanying youngsters when they leave school and/or college and university and enter the job market. The objectives of these experiments are fully in line with the concerns of the multilateral project “transitions”, and France as a participant aimed also at promoting the experimental approach developed in youth policies.

A group of experts was put together in every country to produce ideas and analyses and receive feedback. The French transitions committee brought together representatives of the ministry’s partner administrations in charge of education, employment and professional integration, the National Council of the Missions Locales, the Centre for Strategic Analysis and national youth associations. Thanks to the variety of participating actors, this committee was able to prepare the French contributions for each seminar in a way that highlighted the whole panorama of issues in France concerning the specific topic. Concrete examples of experimental projects supported by the FEJ were provided to illustrate the topic at hand.

Each participating country organised a seminar. The national delegations consisted of groups of five or six qualified participants (experts and practitioners). The aim of these seminars was to share relevant information and to discuss innovative practices, their results and lessons learnt. The French delegation considered of representatives from the administrations as well as organisers of experimental projects.

The first seminar in Berlin (December 2012) focused on the links between formal education, non-formal education and employment. These links are very important when it comes to developing youth policies in France. The aim is to gain acceptance for the recognition of skills acquired in informal settings to ensure that they are also taken into account when assessing the competences of young job seekers.

During the seminar in Helsinki (May 2013), we focused on the coordination and cooperation between the various youth policy actors on the national and regional level. The territorial organisation of each partner country is different, and thus it was interesting to compare the ways the various levels are involved in youth policies. The French project Missions Locales, which works at the local level, seemed to be of particular interest to the other participating countries because of their great expertise in dealing with young people's transition phases, and this was identified as a good practice example in this publication.

The seminar in Paris (October 2013) dealt with global and personalised support for young people in the phase of transition. It permitted France to share its holistic concept and design of the assistance given to young people in the transition phase. The aim of this assistance, which is also reflected in the structure of the Youth Experimental Fund, is to offer a solution to each problem that young people encounter, including material and psychological issues. The Pedagogical Workshops of Nanterre, which are also presented as a good practice in this publication, deal particularly with the psychological aspects of transition.

During the seminar in Luxembourg (May 2014), we dealt with the role played by companies during the transition phase. Companies are potentially major actors during this phase, but some difficulties were identified such as lack of attractiveness of programmes offered to young people, keeping the young people in the proposed programmes, lack of cooperation between the actors (schools, social workers, companies), lack of human and financial resources, as well as the economic crisis which is affecting companies and preventing them from becoming more involved in the support of youngsters.

The expert exchange programme in France focused on personalised support for young people during the transition phase

The final seminar in Bonn (October 2014) extended the perspective to countries such as Japan and Turkey. Work also began on the final results of the evaluation of the peer learning process in which we had been involved for almost three years. The youth conference held at the same time involved an exchange between the young participants and the partner countries' representatives. This dialogue and the inclusion of input from the young people themselves in public policymaking are particularly important aspects of France's approach to youth policy development.

The European perspective on the transition issues that are common to all "transitions" partner countries permitted an exchange of good practices between all participating countries which enriched the process of reflection on the development of innovative youth policies in France.

There is as yet no indication that ideas or practices newly implemented as a consequence of this multilateral project have been incorporated in national policies, but some French policies could influence the emergence of new projects in other countries, such as the EPIDE project that involves the military in reducing the school dropout rates and is currently being trialled in Northern Germany.

These peer exchanges of good practices were an integral part of the approach towards reflecting and capitalising upon the outcomes of the experiments under the Youth Experimental Fund.

It would be very interesting to renew this experience in the future, improving it thanks to the common principles we identified in the process as crucial to a multilateral cooperation project. In general, national public policies should be inspired by what is being done in other countries in Europe. A project of this kind is perfect for encouraging closer and deeper cooperation on youth policy.



National results and insights

Germany

The link to the national level played an important role when implementing the project in Germany. After all, the insights and ideas gained through the international expert exchange should not just benefit the participants in the expert exchange programmes and their day-to-day work, but also be scaled up at the national level. It was hence important to us to involve experts working in the transitions field who would be able to communicate these insights and ideas within their own working environments and continue to work on them there. At the same time, Germany's structures in the transitions field are comparatively complex: There are a variety of different support systems that operate based on various pieces of legislation. This explains the diversity of organisations and institutions that exist in this area. Although "transitions" was primarily designed as a child and youth services policy project, we felt it was important to approach the project from a whole range of perspectives and give it a strong framework by integrating expert supervision.

A national expert group was set up already during the planning phase that then accompanied the project from beginning to end. This group consisted of representatives of child and youth services providers (primarily youth social workers and youth association representatives), local authorities, federal and state ministries, job centres, the Federal Employment Agency, the private sector, schools, and science and research. The project was also linked up to major youth policy processes that also focus on transitions as a priority topic: the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy in Germany, and the development of a subject-orientated and cross-sectoral youth policy. This enabled the project to cover all possible facets of transitions while incorporating a large wealth of expert knowledge on the subject. This multifaceted, cross-sectoral approach was exceptionally enriching for the project itself, and contributed valuable input to the national debate on transitions. It has proven useful to look beyond one's own horizons and explore the structures in other countries, an approach known from international exchanges.

National recommendations: Offering target group-specific services and ensuring greater involvement of young people in the transitions process

The expert group met regularly at the national level to discuss and evaluate the insights gained during the international expert exchange. A conference took place in early July 2014 to document these insights and draw up a first set of recommendations.¹ This debate, however, is far from over. On the contrary: Interested experts, organisations and institutions are now called upon to start working with the outcomes of "transitions".

The insights gained in the conference were then discussed and evaluated against the backdrop of current challenges in the transitions field in Germany. Some of the highlights of the German debate are briefly described in the following. One major concern is closer cooperation with the private sector. A structured, reliable partnership with companies and businesses should be incorporated into an integrated overall concept for local-level cooperation. Particular attention should be given to the creation of a reliable, long-term framework for this. First, the stakeholders should meet to discuss their interests, needs and any fund-



¹ The results achieved in Germany are documented on www.ijab.de/transitions.

ing issues. The partners need to be made aware of the specific requirements of the target group, namely disadvantaged young people. At the same time, activities and measures provided by or in cooperation with companies have to be tailored carefully to the young people's needs so that the end result is that they gain flexible access to training or become re-employed, for instance. One of the partner businesses has already come up with a practical idea: a reception for representatives of businesses and child and youth services organisations where both sides can meet and exchange information.

One aspect that was discussed with much enthusiasm during the expert group's meetings was how to involve young people in shaping the transition process and give them more responsibility. They ought to be given more opportunities to contribute towards developing measures and activities, too, ideally on the basis of existing structures and participatory formats of different kinds. In this regard, peer-to-peer approaches could prove particularly helpful and should be given greater weight in the transitions field.

Aside from the individual priority themes, there was much discussion of relationship management, resource orientation and holistic approaches. Long-term, stable relationships are just as important for young people as they head towards training and employment as professional integration – particularly for disadvantaged young people. Social integration deserves the same attention as professional integration, so any support that is offered in the transition phase needs to be tailored to the young individuals' needs, also in terms of type and duration. The same applies to eligibility and age limits, which should be handled flexibly.

From impulses to ideas

The impulses from the international expert exchange didn't just provide input to the experts who were involved in the national process; they were also enthusiastically received by the participants of the expert programmes and helped to give the participating organisations a more international focus. The exchange produced a large number of new informal relationships, and inspired a job shadowing session in Finland and even an international project.



Participants of the multilateral expert exchange programme in Luxembourg

The experts also gained some new ideas for their practical work at the local level. For instance, an educational organisation decided to adapt the peer-to-peer approach for use by careers counsellors. And sometimes even very unusual impulses can lead to extraordinary new ideas. During one of the expert programmes, our French partner presented some major national activities that are designed to help disadvantaged young people in the transition phase. One of them was a preparatory vocational programme that is run by the military – for Germany and the other partner countries, a highly unlikely provider when it comes to transitions, at least at first glance. However, this inspired a German expert to come up with ideas for a new and innovative project which consists in cooperation with the Federal Army's training services to provide careers counselling to disadvantaged young people.

From a German point of view, "transitions" has had a genuinely broad impact. It has prepared the ground for new and unusual approaches, the resulting impulses have led to new ideas for work at the local level, and it has delivered valuable input for the national debate on how to overcome the challenges of transition.

National results and insights

Luxembourg



When IJAB approached the National Youth Service to request Luxembourg as a partner country for the project “transitions”, we hesitated to agree – even if only for a short time. On the one hand, it is very important for a small country to think outside the box and receive new impulses from abroad, but on the other hand, the effort is proportionally higher if one wishes to be a fully-fledged partner in a transnational project with the same tasks and duties as everyone else.

In retrospective, the effort was worth it and even before the end of the project, we had achieved concrete results and managed to establish and expand national and international networking. The participants experienced the expert exchanges in a positive way and had the opportunity

The Mission Locale was particularly interesting for me ... and I could receive information regarding common features and differences in the day-to-day work, such as the communication with the target group.

(Yves, participant of the expert exchange in France)

to discover and get to know *new concepts and methods* they can appropriately use in their day-to-day work.

In the process, the special impact of the transnational exchange between professionals has been emphasised, because it calls for a different kind of *self-reflection* compared to a strictly national exchange. The new perspective on professional and personal attitudes triggers new reflections which support further development of one’s attitudes and thus change and improve one’s professional actions.



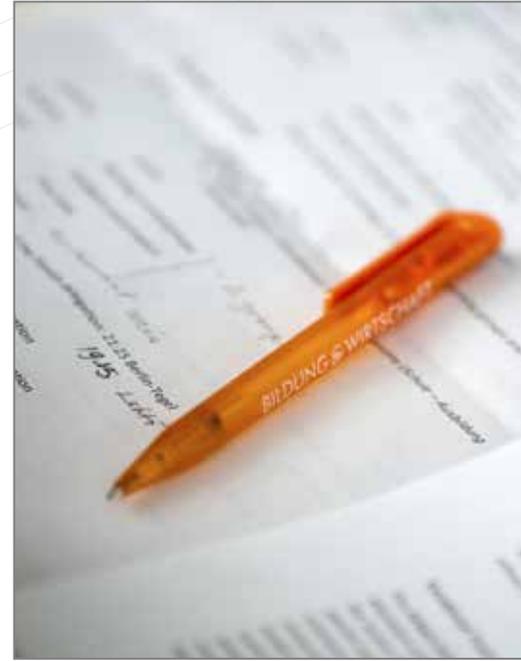
Nathalie Schirtz, head of the Transitions department at Luxembourg’s Service National de la Jeunesse

... the international exchange of experience and knowledge brings a new dimension into the whole and allows to some extent to see the big picture – maybe even in a different kind of way.

(Martine, participant of the expert exchange in Luxembourg)

I became more aware of the meaning of networking in the context of the transition system and I am increasingly going to help young people, youth workers, teachers and institutions to get in contact with one another.

(Romi, participant of the expert exchange in Luxembourg)



The participation in “transitions” did not only have positive effects on the professional practice and on the individual support of young people in the transition period between school and professional work, but in the context of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, Luxembourg could also benefit from new impulses from the partner countries. Especially the contributions from Finland and France were helpful and could directly be used in the conception of this important action.

Furthermore, the opportunity to build mutual trust within the delegation from Luxembourg and to establish an inter-ministerial working group regarding the Youth Guarantee arose.

To conclude, it can be noted that the intended goals on a national level have been achieved.

On the level of professionals who are in direct contact with young people, we have noticed an increase of knowledge for the functioning as well as the revision of professional attitudes and actions.

Youth workers, who are rather engaged in conceptional work, could use the new impulses in their everyday work and contribute to improve the offers in the field of transitions.

Ultimately, the project “transitions” had a modest influence on Luxembourg’s youth policy in general and on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in particular. To this end, Luxembourg should no longer hesitate when it is requested as a partner country in a peer learning project.

The project “transitions” came along at exactly the right time for Luxembourg, namely in parallel with the elaboration of the national concept regarding the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. The exchange with partner countries was very helpful; ideas could be tested and new impulses could be included.

(Georges, participant of the expert exchange in Finland)



Georges Metz, director of Luxembourg’s Service National de la Jeunesse

Participants of the peer learning activities

Project partners in transitions were these countries' youth ministries and in Luxembourg the National Youth Service. Germany's Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth commissioned IJAB to plan and implement the project. The following organisations participated in the different peer learning seminars and the study visit:

FINLAND

Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for Uusimaa	<i>Sanna Puura</i>
Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for North Savo	<i>Anna Kapanen</i>
City of Vantaa, Youth Services	<i>Yrjö Lassanen, Eija Ahola</i>
Finnish Youth Research Network	<i>Tomi Killakoski</i>
Finnish Youth Research Society, University of Tampere, School of Management Finland, Project "Knowledge into the use", Social Development Ltd	<i>Tapio Kuure</i>
Helsinki Deaconess Institute, Youth Services	<i>Olli Alanen</i>
Helsinki Education Department	<i>Soile Kotamäki</i>
Kokkotyö Foundation	<i>Margita Lukkarinen</i>
Ministry of Education and Culture, Department for Youth and Sport Policy	<i>Seija Astala, Seija Kähkönen, Georg Henrik Wrede, Miika Pajula, Jaana Walden</i>
Ministry of Employment and the Economy	<i>Janne Savolainen</i>
National Workshop Association (NWA)	<i>Mari Ahonen-Walker</i>
University of Helsinki	<i>Matilda Wrede-Jäntti</i>

FRANCE

Academy of Orléans-Tours, Engineering for School	<i>Fanny Brajou</i>
Champagne-Ardenne Regional Council, Youth Commission, "The strategic role of regions in youth policy"	<i>Yann Djermoun; Nicolas Marandon</i>
Committee for National and International Relations of Youth Associations and Non-formal Education Organisations (CNAJEP)	<i>Emmanuelle Bertrand; Gwendal Ropars; Benoit Mychak</i>
Delegation for Information and Guidance (Prime Minister Service), Regional Public Service for Guidance	<i>Véronique Duchaud Fuselli; Micheline Hotyat</i>
France Strategy / General Commissionership on Strategy and Prospective	<i>Quentin Delpech</i>
French Ministry for Employment, Youth Inclusion Unit / Employment and Continuous Training Delegation, Youth Guarantee	<i>Anne-Marie Courage; Anna Peresson</i>
French Ministry in charge of Youth, Youth Experimental Funds (Fonds d'expérimentation pour la jeunesse)	<i>Malika Kacimi; Martine Cambon-Fallières; Virginia Mangematin</i>
French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research	<i>Nicolas Tariel; Anne Bonnefoy; Angélique Ragot</i>
National Council of Local Youth Centers (Missions Locales)	<i>Karine Brard-Guillet</i>
National Institute for Youth and Community Education	<i>Agathe Dirani</i>
University of Toulon Var, Portfolio of Experiences and Skills	<i>Denis Gasté</i>

GERMANY

Regional Human Resource Development Ltd., Bielefeld, "Jugendhaus Bielefeld" (Youth Service Centre)	<i>Thorsten Strehl</i>
BiBeKu (Organisation for Education, Vocation and Culture)	<i>Sandra Wagner</i>
Municipality of Göttingen, Child and Youth Office, Department for "Child and Youth Social Work"	<i>Ute Reichmann</i>
City of Kaufbeuren, Coordination Centre, Youth and Family Department	<i>Lutz Tokumaru</i>
City of Nuremberg, Vocational Education Office, "Schlau transition management"	<i>Hans Dieter Metzger</i>
City of Viersen, Department Children, Youth and Family	<i>Paul Fülbier</i>
Kreisdiakonie Stralsund (Protestant charitable organisation), Deployment Location for Young People with a Vocational Problem	<i>Mechthild Helms</i>
District of Göttingen, Service for Youth, Children and Youth Office, Career Orientation in school	<i>Dirk Glowatz</i>
FAA Bildungsgesellschaft mbH Nord (commercial educational company), Unit "Transition School – Employment"	<i>Fanny Rosenthal</i>
Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Department "Children and Youth"	<i>Albert Klein-Reinhardt; Tina Jansen</i>
German Youth Institute, Branch Office Halle, Project "Peers in the context of the transition school – employment"	<i>Sarah Beierle</i>
Educational Centre Jugendhof Vlotho	<i>Heidrun Kaiser</i>
IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bonn	<i>Franziska Koch; Claudia Mierzowski; Christiane Reinholz-Asolli</i>
KWB – Coordination Centre for Education and Employment	<i>Elke Moritz</i>
Municipal Education Office Schwäbisch-Gmünd	<i>Sema Toykan</i>
Offenbach District, Occupational Path Guidance	<i>Dorothee Gehrke</i>
Open House Sinzig (HOT Sinzig), Competence Agency and Youth Centre	<i>Petra Klein</i>
The Senator for Social Affairs, Children, Youth and Women, Bremen, "Encouraging Youth – Active in the Region" (national programme)	<i>Robert Stracke</i>
University of Frankfurt, Institute for Social Pedagogy and Adult Education	<i>Thomas Verlage</i>
Catholic Social Youth Services Landshut, Vocational Training in Cooperation with Companies (training partnership)	<i>Claus Sixt</i>
Youth Office Dresden, Department for Job Market-oriented Social Youth Work	<i>Valérie Cohen</i>
Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, District Office Altona, Special Office "Social Environment Management", Department "Integrated Social Planning", Division "District Labour Market Coordination", Youth Vocational Agency / Cooperation School – Business	<i>Birgit Gutenmorgen</i>

LUXEMBOURG

National Youth Service (Service national de la jeunesse – SNJ)	<i>Jeanne Adam; Martine Lentz; Georges Metz; Nathalie Schirtz</i>
National Youth Service (SNJ) / Antennes régionales – Regional implementation of the integration programmes for disadvantaged young people	<i>Raymonde Bauer; Jeff Karier; Yves Pütz; Jil Steines; Romi Werner</i>
Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, Department for Vocational Training / Local Youth Action (Action locale pour jeunes – ALJ)	<i>Gilles Schmitz; Yves Pauly; Claudine Colbach</i>
Agency for the Development of Employment (PES) – Professional Guidance / Youth Employment	<i>Kate Schummer; Carlo Koerner</i>
Centre for Psychology and Scholar Guidance	<i>Esther Giebels</i>

48 hours in transition: Fresh ideas from young people

International youth conference “Visions for your Future”

Verena Münsberg

“Talking to other young people has given me lots of new hope for my job search”, says Ernestine from France. Ernestine, 22, is one of around 40 young people from all over Europe who travelled to Bonn to attend from 13 – 15 October 2014 an international youth conference entitled “Visions for your future” and to discuss the challenges that young Europeans face during their transition from school to vocational training or working life. They developed ideas on how to improve their situation and, towards the end of the conference, discussed them with youth policy and child and youth services experts.

Youth conference participants





Presentations and discussions at the youth conference

This meeting was not the first cross-border mobility experience for the young participants. All of them had previously taken part in different international youth projects where they discussed the challenges of transition with their peers. And all of them have first-hand experience of these challenges because of their personal situations: some come from socially disadvantaged families with few educational opportunities, others dropped out of school early, and some have an academic qualification but no hope of a job because of the long-term downturn in their home country's economy.

A dynamic warm-up exercise

The young participants travelled to the conference together with their personal coaches – the youth workers and educators who had already accompanied them in their international youth projects. They were delighted to reunite with the friends they had made during the projects, and curious to meet others who had attended projects other than their own. To break the ice, coaches Ute Sauerwein-Weber and Ansgar Bütter-Menke began by mixing and matching the group randomly. Once they'd been assigned to small groups, they scribbled each other's first names on posters and the spelling of some produced much hilarity. Then came some physical exercise: Accompanied by heavy bass notes from the loudspeakers, the group marched through the large room in lines, clapping rhythmically and shouting "transitions" again and again. After the warm-up session came a speed-dating round: Everyone was given exactly one minute to find out as much as possible about the unknown person in front of him or her – a highly intense exercise that made the room buzz with conversation.

Introducing four international projects

With much anticipation, the young people and their coaches listened to the others' presentations of "their" international exchange projects. ManuFUNtory was first. Initiated by the Bruno Bröker Youth Centre in Ahrensburg, Germany, the project was implemented together with partners from Portugal, Denmark, Italy and Slovakia. The young participants had travelled to Germany to discuss the challenges of transition and spend a few days working in various local crafts and trades businesses. Haus der

Offenen Tür in Sinzig, Germany, joined forces with partner organisations in Italy, Spain and Hungary to tackle the transition challenge: The aim here was to let young people experience an international exchange that would strengthen their personal development and help them gain access to vocational training and employment. The Youth for Employment project, run by a Catholic youth social work organisation in Landshut and Munich, invited 40 young people from Egypt, Russia, Poland, France, Sweden and Germany to discuss and find solutions to the problem of youth unemployment. They identified best practices for promoting youth employment, drew up a list of existing support projects to encourage cross-border mobility, and developed political demands. The fourth initiative, the German-Spanish model project JobScouts on Tour, aims to make young people more employable by giving them an active role to play in careers counselling in formal and non-formal educational settings. This initiative, which also works with local businesses, was developed by Verein Niedersächsischer Bildungsinitiativen e.V. (VNB), an educational organisation, and Integrative Gemeinschaftsschule Hannover-Badenstedt, a comprehensive school. These organisations will continue to implement the project until mid 2015 together with their Spanish partners.

It actually works! Peer learning and intercultural experience

The youth conference was a good opportunity for participants to reinforce what they had already learned and experienced in their international exchange projects. *"On my project, I met people from Italy who are completely different from me but have similar problems. They just said, I can get through this. So I thought, I can too. I've decided to believe in myself and start a course in tourism management",* says Filipe from Portugal. Filipe, who is 19 and has African roots, lives with his unemployed father and three siblings in a run-down part of Lisbon. He used to hang around in the streets after school without much of a plan.



“On my project, I met people from Italy who are completely different from me but have similar problems. They just said, I can get through this. So I thought, I can too. I’ve decided to believe in myself and start a course in tourism management.”

Filipe

The committed social workers in his district invited him to the ManuFUNtory exchange project. He signed up, travelled to Germany and met young people from five countries with whom he spent a few days working for crafts and trades businesses in Northern Germany. Filipe realised for the first time in his life that despite the language barrier, his skills were valuable. It was very helpful, he says, to have been able to try his hand at various jobs. But the most valuable experience of all was meeting people from other European countries, he continues. *“I’ve learnt to extend my horizons and not to clam up when I meet people who have different opinions. This will be very helpful to me if things become difficult in future”,* he concludes.

Inspiration through cultural diversity

For his mate Emanuele, from a town near Turin in Italy, ManuFUNtory was also a turning point. After suddenly dropping out of school in March, Emanuele, 18, has decided to return to school and graduate. Despite the difficult labour market in Italy, he’s also decided to take a positive attitude to his future career plans. *“For us young Italians, it’s very helpful to see how successful Germany is at getting young people into training and introducing them to the world of work, for example by offering them internships. I’d love to somehow share this experience with people back home”,* he says. Emanuele was particularly impressed to see how people from very different cultural backgrounds were able to live and work together as part of their exchange project. *“Everyone wanted to share his or*





Thomas Thomer, Deputy Director-General at the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) at the youth conference

her talents, knowledge and identity with the others. That was amazing”, he says enthusiastically. The positive effects of all this cultural diversity spilled over into the youth conference, too: during the Intercultural Evening, the young people and their coaches presented the many culinary specialities that they had brought along especially for this occasion: sardines from Portugal and herring from Poland, cheese and ham from France and Italy, artisan sausages from Northern Germany and of course lots of sweets and desserts. The buffet was a great success and a major talking point for all participants.

In strong demand: Precise information

Time and again, the conference showed that many young people lack access to suitable information and advice at the local level. “We need more youth centres that help us to find training places and give us information. You can’t just close them and claim it’s because there’s no money”, demands Seyithan from Sinzig, Germany. Seyithan, 20 years old and son of Kurdish immigrants, graduated from technical school this year. All his applications for an internship were refused. The job centres were unable to help him in this situation, he remembers. On the contrary: They already put pressure on him to start applying while he was still sitting his exams. The only place he felt taken seriously was the youth centre in Sinzig. The counsellors sat down with him, discussed his career prospects and finally

offered him an internship in the accounts department. Seyitan is interested in politics and is lobbying for more youth participation. He also wants the voting age to be lowered. “I want politicians to realise they need to spend more on education and youth work, because young people are the future”, he says forcefully.

A necessity: Cross-sectoral cooperation

When it comes to managing the challenges of transition, it can be helpful for schools, non-formal educational institutions and local businesses to work closely together. “I think, it’s great that we’re able to spend so much time talking to our teachers about our strengths and weaknesses and our future. We’re even able to invite local businesses



“For us young Italians, it’s very helpful to see how successful Germany is at getting young people into training and introducing them to the world of work, for example by offering them internships. I’d love to somehow share this experience with people back home.”

Emanuelle and Coach Chiara

to come and discuss career and training opportunities with us”, says Sarah. Sarah is a ninth-grade student at a comprehensive school in Badenstedt, a run-down part of Hanover, and participates in JobScouts on Tour, a model project led by her school in cooperation with an educational organisation (Verein Niedersächsischer Bildungsinitiativen e.V.) in her home state. Gabriella from Hungary, 24 years old, wishes her school back home had partnerships like this. It doesn’t offer any career guidance, the government-run information centres have only just been set up, and non-governmental organisations have hardly any money at their disposal for information that would be suitable for young people, she says. Gabriella did a number of internships and temporary jobs before the Carpathian Foundation Hungary introduced her to a project called “JobNet – Active citizens combating youth unemployment”. Together with Haus der Offenen Tür in Sinzig, Germany, and other organisations,



the project conducted a survey of labour market experts, unemployed and employed young people, social workers and company managers to find out what challenges young Europeans face as they look for jobs and training. The concluding report proposed a number of strategies to overcome these challenges.

Visions for the future

What do I want to be? What do I want to achieve? These are the most pressing questions for young people as they consider their future careers. So the next day, the young conference participants designed their own avatars: an idealised image of themselves, equipped with all the talents they need to look ahead to the future with confidence and



“At the moment, all our children learn at school is how to make a quick buck. They’re not taught enough about how to contribute to their communities”, he says. “And those who fail at school are left behind. Society needs to rethink its attitude to these aspects.”

Coach Jean-Baptiste



Youth conference participants presenting their ideas

courage. Their colourful drawings were proof that despite the differences in their situation, all young people have similar expectations for their future: They want a fulfilling, reasonably paid job that corresponds to their skills and interests. Besides work, they want to have enough time to spend with family and friends, and many also want to do charitable work. However, as Jean Baptiste Collet regretfully says, these social aspects are very often neglected in the debate surrounding transition. Jean Baptiste, 27, from France has been “in transition” for a long time, as he puts it himself. When he left school, he tried out various jobs and now works for organisations that manage international youth projects. Most recently, he was a coach on the Youth for Employment project. *“At the moment, all our children learn at school is how to make a quick buck. They’re not taught enough about how to contribute to their communities”, he says. “And those who fail at school are left behind. Society needs to rethink its attitude to these aspects.”*

Seize every opportunity...

Don’t give up in the face of adversity and seize every opportunity, even if it’s only small – those were the messages that Ralf Mengel from Hanover wanted to put across to the participants on the afternoon of day 2. In an inspiring interview, the 28-year-old former technical school pupil



“We need more youth centres that help us to find training places and give us information. You can’t just close them and claim it’s because there’s no money.”

Seiythan

spoke of the high and low points of his search for an apprenticeship in the IT industry, of temporary employment contracts and his varied experience with government support programmes. The turning point for Ralf Mengel came in 2012, when a representative of an educational organisation (VNB) in his home state of Lower Saxony told him about an international exchange programme for long-term unemployed young people. Ralf jumped at the chance. Towards the end of the exchange, the Turkish partner organisation asked him whether he would like to stay in the country and spend a few months volunteering with them. *“I didn’t hesitate for a minute. My time in Turkey had been incredibly enriching, and I finally felt I was being offered some real prospects”,* he remembers. He even decided to turn his back on Germany completely because his Turkish colleagues wanted to employ him as an IT specialist. However, just three months later the promise of long-term employment fell through and Ralf returned to Germany, homeless and jobless. Having completed yet another internship, he then fought his way back onto the labour market and today has a stable job in the computer industry. *“I feel grateful that I was able to live and work abroad, that there were always people around me who would give me a chance, and that I never gave up on myself”,* he says.

...and believe in yourself

The participants then split into international groups to prepare presentations that they later held in front of the entire group. All of them took a critical yet positive look at their potential futures. Some groups had prepared short role-plays to show how young people with less than ideal prospects can gain access to training and employment if they develop intercultural skills in an international exchange programme or by volunteering. A humorous Polish-Italian talk show appealed to young people to be crea-



“There are already lots of good programmes that assist young people. If the European Commission can’t get the job done, we simply need to take over and inform our peers. Maybe we could even start a campaign!”

Monika

tive when looking for jobs. And the energy-filled “future rap” using the well-known tune “Don’t worry, be happy” urged the audience to believe in their dreams and never stop pursuing them: “If you can dream it, you can do it!”

Be proactive!

So it’s clear that for many young people, being proactive, creative and open-minded is very important when it comes to planning the future. Hannah and Alex, friends from Ahrensburg in Northern Germany, would agree. The two girls are still reeling from the positive experiences they had while taking part in ManuFUNtory in July. Although they won’t graduate from school for a while yet, they are already thinking about what they want to do afterwards. Alex wants to be a media editor or actress, while Hannah is considering event management or marketing. “*You need to have a realistic idea of the professions that interest you, and talk to lots of people who work in those areas*”, says Alex. “*No one will tell you about these jobs if you don’t ask them to. You need to ask the right questions yourself*”, adds Hannah. Taking action, showing initiative – the girls know exactly what they are talking about. Both of them

decided to leave home after some severe trouble with their families. They’ve lived in a residential facility for young people for two years. The financial support they receive from the government doesn’t stretch to much, so Hannah and Alex feel it’s important for them to prepare now for life after school. That’s the reason why they decided to join ManuFUNtory and explore various professions, such as bricklaying, heating engineering and printing. “*We definitely don’t want to work in crafts and trades. But you need to try these things out so you get a realistic impression of what it’s like to work*”, says Hannah and Alex agrees: “*We’ve realised that it’s all about finding something that matches your personality. If you are not motivated, you’ll never be successful.*”

Mobility for all

Experiencing international mobility is incredibly valuable for one’s personal development, concluded the young conference participants on the last day during a session with youth policy and child and youth services experts from France, Germany and Luxembourg. They all agreed that there is a lot of room for improvement when it comes to informing young people about existing support programmes. Thomas Thomer, Deputy Director-General at the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) pointed out that mobility programmes need to be open to all young people, especially those with fewer opportunities. Albert from Spain agrees wholeheartedly. “*Don’t forget us young Europeans. Reach out to all of them, including the low academic achievers*”, he urged. Albert, a gardener by training, lives with his parents in a small town close to Barcelona. He’s been looking for a job for four years, has taken online courses on various subjects and dreams of building energy-efficient, “smart” houses one day.

An attentive audience at the youth conference





In the shark pool

Albert's story illustrates the damage that Spain's long-term economic crisis and high unemployment is causing to the country's young generation in particular. His unsuccessful job search made him dependent on his family and led him to become severely depressed. He began to see changes in his social environment that worried him greatly. *"The only ones who stand a chance are those who perform best and are most courageous"*, he says. *"You have to behave like a shark, or else you lose."* But Albert didn't want to be a shark. He began to volunteer with the Red Cross and help people who were even worse off than he was. This is how he found out about the existence of international exchange projects and finally settled on one that took him to Germany. The positive experiences he made there gave him fresh hope, he says. He was able to open his mind to new ideas and differing opinions. Albert now hopes to join the European Voluntary Service in Germany, and to get a second chance to make things work.

Ambassadors of their own future

During the final round of talks, Malika Kacimi from the Youth Experimental Fund of the French Ministry in charge of Youth, and Karine Brard-Guillet from France's National Council of "Missions Locales" encouraged the young people to join forces and contribute towards the political debate. This is, they said, the only way that the difficult situation faced by young Europeans can be resolved in the long term and in a manner that meets their needs. Nathalie Schirtz, head of the Transitions Department at Luxembourg's



National Youth Service, directed an appeal to the young people: *"Be ambassadors for your peers and for youth exchange programmes! Tell other young people about your positive experiences!"* Peer-to-peer propaganda, this is what many of the participants of the youth conference have already begun. For instance, the Youth for Employment project led to the setup of a Facebook page where the young participants have listed information about mobility projects across Europe. As Monika, a participant in the project, explains: *"There are already lots of good programmes that assist young people. If the European Commission can't get the job done, we simply need to take over and inform our peers. Maybe we could even start a campaign!"*

"The only ones who stand a chance are those who perform best and are most courageous. You have to behave like a shark, or else you lose."

Albert

Results of the scientific monitoring process and evaluation

International peer learning for experts – New approaches towards supporting young people in transition to employment

Thomas Verlage/Andreas Walther

The project “transitions. Successful transitions to training and employment” aims to promote an exchange between experts from Germany, Finland, France and Luxembourg in order to create new approaches towards supporting disadvantaged young people during their transition from school to working life. The project is coordinated by IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany, with scientific monitoring by the Social Education Research Unit at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. At the heart of the project are four multilateral peer learning seminars/expert programmes¹ attended by various actors from the participating countries.

The research project aimed to examine the potential of peer learning for practitioners working in vocational assistance for young people. How can international exchanges and comparisons help to develop new practical approaches at the national and local level and within organisations? To answer this question, the following methods and instruments were employed:

- participatory observation during three expert programmes;
- questionnaire filled in by all participants upon completion of the expert programmes²;
- qualitative interviews with five selected German participants several months after the expert programmes;
- participatory observation during video conferences and one “transfer workshop” attended by the German participants to follow up on the outcomes of the expert programmes;
- participatory observation during meetings of a group of accompanying experts from Germany.

This paper describes the experts who participated in the project and their assessment of the instrument of peer learning; it covers the learning effects reported by the participants; and it outlines the ways in which the participants

expect to implement these learning processes in their day-to-day work. The latter aspect was examined by interviewing a number of German participants.

The participants and their assessment of peer learning

Most of the participating experts are employed by a ministry (19), a local authority (13) or an independent organisation (9). Only few of them work for firms, schools or research groups. While most of the German participants are employed by local authorities or voluntary organisations, the majority of participants from Finland, France and Luxembourg work for a ministry. The composition of the group hence reflects the subsidiary nature of the structure of transition support that is specific to Germany, in contrast to the more centralised organisational structures in Finland and France, for instance.

Within their respective organisations, most participants occupy a managerial function: 12 are in an executive position, 21 have a conceptual-managerial role and 15 have a conceptual-practical function. Only two described themselves as practitioners in the narrow sense. For around one third of all participants, the “transitions” expert programmes were their first experience of an international expert exchange. In other words, the programmes attracted interested experts who were new to this experience; however, the majority were experts with prior experience in this field. It emerged that the benefits of an international exchange were more immediately obvious to those participants who had prior experience.

The questionnaire also examined the participants’ level of satisfaction with the expert programmes by asking 15 specific questions plus one question on their satisfaction with the overall programme. Respondents could tick boxes ranging from “very satisfied”, “mostly satisfied”, “so/so” to “mostly dissatisfied” and “highly dissatisfied”. Around 80% of participants indicated, they were “very” or “mostly” satisfied with the overall event. Four aspects were considered particularly important by over 90% of participants: the atmosphere during the event (90% satisfaction), the possibility to exchange experiences with their peers (76%), the composition of the group (80%) and the relevance of the

¹ In the following, these seminars are referred to as “expert programmes”.

² 51 questionnaires were completed in total. However, some experts took part in more than one expert programme so that the number of persons surveyed was slightly lower. 75% of respondents were female.

programme to their own work (65%). The most dissatisfaction was caused by the aspect that participants felt that the amount of time reserved for discussion and reflection always seemed to be too short; around half of all participants indicated that they would have liked more time. This reflects the complexity inherent in such an international exchange, where technical discussions always involve repeatedly going over and attempting to understand unknown structures and assumptions about what is considered “normal”.³ In fact, this aspect elicited very different responses from participants at the four expert programmes, with satisfaction levels ranging from 75% to just 15%.

As for the choice of themes during the individual expert programmes, satisfaction levels varied again between 92% and 57%: a surprising result considering that the participants had been aware of the chosen subject areas when they signed up for the respective programmes. The data gathered does not indicate how participants felt about the way the subject areas were approached during the programmes.

78% of participants indicated they were “very” or “mostly” satisfied with linguistic understanding during the event, although almost 40% of them said that this aspect was “not important” to them personally.

Learning effects: “I returned home with loads of great ideas in my head.”⁴

Asked about the learning effects of the expert programmes, 78% of participants claimed they had gained a “very good” or “good” insight into the transition structures and support options in the host country. Around 60% of participants suggested that they had been “very successful” or “successful” at learning about the transition structures and support options in the countries other than their own. Most respondents (almost 70%) felt that gaining a fresh perspective on the structures and programmes in their own country was an important aspect; 51% of them indicated they had been “very successful” or “successful” at learning about these.

45% of participants indicated they had been “very successful” or “successful” at obtaining hands-on input for their own day-to-day work. Considering that 67% of them felt this was an important aspect of the programme for them, this suggests that a significant number of participants had been less inspired by the programme than they had hoped.

To assess the capacity of an international dialogue to change local and national practices, the participants were asked whether the programme had given them fresh ideas for their work in supporting young people at this stage in their lives in the context of their own countries. 65% confirmed this with reference to the institutional transition structures



in their countries (legislation, school systems, funding etc.). 56% of participants confirmed, they had come away with ideas for their day-to-day work and their own role in the system; almost 80% had come up with new ideas for concrete programmes and support measures. Again, almost 80% confirmed that the expert programme had led them to reflect critically on the programmes and measures in their own countries.

Regardless of what the participants planned to change within their own areas of responsibility as a result of the programme, 25% said they expected to be able to make these changes sooner rather than later. However, a clear majority were certain they would be able to make positive changes in their own areas of responsibility as a result of what they had learned either in the medium (77%) or long term (70%). These quantitative results of the questionnaire are complemented by the qualitative survey among the German participants, which is briefly discussed in the following.

While the quantitative questionnaire, which was completed by all participants of the expert programmes, provides an insight into the participants’ backgrounds, their satisfaction levels and learning outcomes, the qualitative interviews with selected German participants demonstrate how they felt the programmes benefited them personally and allowed them to try out new ideas upon returning home.

While most participants appreciated the opportunity to extend their horizons beyond their normal day-to-day routines, they indicated that the stresses and strains of these routines threaten to obscure the insights and inspiration gained during the programmes. Of particular importance in this regard, then, are the situation in the workplace (openness and support from supervisors/coworkers, contract terms etc.), and especially the experts’ motivation to share any insights and inspiration gained and, in turn, to initiate change at the local level. The expert programmes seem to have had this desired impact, with one participant stating that they had even had an effect on her coworkers: She reported that it had an impact on the team in their everyday

³ cf. Walther, Andreas (2011): *Regimes der Unterstützung im Lebenslauf*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Verlag.

⁴ The interviews were conducted in German and excerpts translated into English for this article.

work; she came back full of inspiration and her colleagues picked up on that and became more motivated as well.

The follow-up sessions after the expert programmes also helped to ensure that any impulses were incorporated in the participants' daily practice. The respondents were particularly enthusiastic about the documentation, despite the time it took to put it together. Although, as one participant reported, she did tend to complain about having to document everything afterwards, but looking back she felt that the exercise did her a world of good because now she could go back to her notes when she needed to check up on something. Also, she continued, it helped her to be able to have something at the ready when she was asked to give some input, and didn't have to come up with something on the spot.

As for the inspiration and insights gained during the programme, participants drew a variety of conclusions. One of them registered that her attitude had changed and reported on how she felt providing counselling to unmotivated youngsters. Sometimes, she said, she had to keep a tight grip on herself and then was reminded to "give it a value", which helped. To her, it really was more of an attitude issue that she still struggled with sometimes.

Other participants reported that they had started to incorporate certain aspects of other organisations' activities in their own projects; for instance, they had learned about a project where young people could get funding if they had a great idea and then they would give something back to the community. One participant said she was now trying to do something similar.

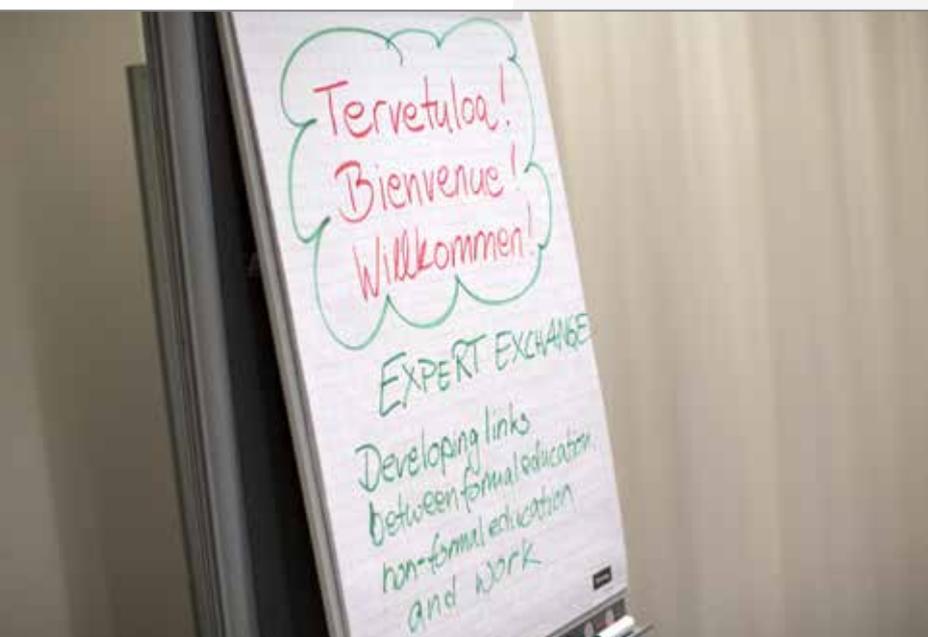
Finally, some said that they had even begun to try out some completely new approaches. For instance, one participant said she was launching a partnership with a major public-

sector organisation that previously hadn't been active in careers advisory services for young people at all. If she was able to develop this model successfully, she reported, it would have an impact nationwide.

Conclusions

To conclude, the way participants felt about the benefits of international peer learning for them personally varied from person to person; this is due to differing learning behaviours, so differences in the way in which – and under which circumstances – individuals learn. Other factors include the experts' reasons for participating in such a process (e.g. current challenges at work for which they hope to find solutions), their roles and positions, and any existing international experiences. Aspects that positively influence the learning process include good preparation, especially when this involves learning about the systems and practices in the partner countries, as well as plenty of time for discussions, both during the planned sessions and in informal settings.

In summary, the main benefits of international peer learning for experts working in the transitions field are that such events are an occasion and an opportunity to take a critical look at the structures in one's own country, and to take home some fresh ideas for concrete activities. To put such activities into practice, however, there has to be a clear connection to one's own area of work that is made clear already during the expert programmes, as well as a more systematic follow-up with the firm involvement of the organisations and local stakeholders in question. Innovations in the transitions field cannot be translated into reality through one-off impulses; rather, they require an ongoing analysis of existing problems, objectives and approaches. In Germany, one step towards this objective was the discussion of the outcomes by the national group of experts. Provided the above prerequisites are put in place, peer learning appears to be a promising method for introducing changes and identifying new ways to provide support during the transition period and depart from old, entrenched structures and assumptions about what is "normal".



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Currently, many young people are struggling to master the transition into training and working life. The three-year international project “transitions. Successful transitions to training and employment”, which ran from 2012 to 2014, directed the spotlight at these challenges.

An international expert exchange delivered insights that helped to gain a deeper understanding of national youth policies and practices in the participating countries. This publication illustrates these and other insights, both national and international, gained in connection with this project, outlines good transition practices, and draws some conclusions.

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