Non-Formal Youth Work – Quo Vadis?

The Implementation of EU Youth Policy on Non-Formal Education and its Impact on National Youth Policy and Youth Work in Germany

Annette Mütter

Student number 0728489

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MACESS Maastricht
P.O. Box 634
6200 AP Maastricht
The Netherlands

Formal requirements

- The date of submission of the dissertation is **15 September 2008** (as per postmark) at the MA CESS Secretary by 17:00 hrs in the form of 4 paper copies plus a copy on disc. Only 1 paper copy must bear the original signature of the student.
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Assessment criteria

- clarity and viability of hypothesis;
- critical analysis of theory and literature;
- clearly articulated and justified methodology;
- quality of comparative framework and analysis;
- quality of conclusions and recommendations;
- rationale, cohesiveness and logical consistency;
- relevance for social professional practice and/or social policy;
- relevance for comparison at European and/or global levels;
- total presentation: linguistic style, lay-out, proper use of language.

This dissertation is the original work of Annette Mütter, student n° 0728489, and has been completed solely in fulfilment of a dissertation for the MA in Comparative European Social Studies at Zuyd University in Maastricht.

This dissertation complies with the aforementioned formal requirements and recognises the assessment criteria.

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Abstract

Non-formal education and learning has received increasing attention in policy, research and practice at national and international levels in the past decade, particular encouraged by the European Union. But at the same time as non-formal education moved into the focus of policy, certain shortcomings with regard to its understanding and interpretation got obvious: By the example of non-formal youth work, one might see that the understanding of what non-formal education should, can and may achieve, might pretty differ across Europe. The issue of diverging interpretations of the demands towards non-formal education has not yet been a matter of research on European level, yet.

While European youth policy is basically made up of a series of policy documents and lacks a deep theoretical basis, Germany's youth policy and non-formal youth work is characterized by its own national socio-culturally specific interpretation rooted in educational theory.

In my research I want to explore the implementation of EU youth policy on non-formal education and its impact on national youth policy and non-formal youth work in Germany. With regard to the units of comparison, I compare the requirements of EU policy on non-formal education in the youth field (supra-national level) with the German youth policy approach in the non-formal youth work field (national level) by the example of the implementation of the EU Youth in Action programme in Germany.

With regard to the research methodology, I used documentary research and data that I collected by interviewing German experts from the field of European youth policy, research and practice.

Since, in order to be able to compare European and German demands towards non-formal education it is necessary to understand the full political and conceptual background, I described the German policy framework and contextual understanding of non-formal youth work, including the legal imbedding, specific approaches and interrelated policy fields. Moreover, I presented the EU policy framework with regard to non-formal education and learning, including the main political initiatives and instruments as well as the main EU attributes towards non-formal education.

The results of this study indicate that European youth policy on non-formal education has made a strong impact on German youth policy and youth work already. Based on the analysis of the current European areas for youth cooperation, I was able to prove that German youth policy and non-formal youth work are marked by growing European convergence.

Main findings were:

- Non-formal education's link to employability has to be faced in German youth policy and non-formal youth work
- The inclusion of the target group 'young people with fewer opportunities' as an integrative policy approach is now on the agenda of German youth policy as well
- The impact of European youth policy on non-formal education on the German concept of non-formal citizenship education (*Außerschulische Politische Bildung*) demands a rethinking about or even a redefinition of the field
- Although the European effects of youth policy as cross-sectoral policy have been more than limited in Germany, there is rising awareness for this new way of thinking.
- Finally, the European Youth in Action programme contributes to the quality development and qualification of (international) non-formal youth work.

1.Introduction

1.1 Background

The subject of this dissertation could hardly be more topical. Non-formal education and learning has received increasing attention in policy, research and practice at national and international levels in the past decade.

One major drive of interest in non-formal education and learning has been the European Union. At the Lisbon summit in March 2000, the European Council set the ambitious goal for the European Union" *to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and social cohesion*" (Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, paragraph 5). Highlighting that *"people are Europe's main asset and should be the focal point of the Union's policies"* (Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, paragraph 24), the heads of governments and states emphasised the need for better education and training, and promoted lifewide and lifelong learning as a clearly established priority in Europe's employment strategy. The recognition and enhancement of non-formal and informal learning, which had been undervalued for a long time, are seen as vital in achieving Lisbon's social and economic objectives.

Additionally, recent political initiatives, such as the White Paper on youth or the European Youth Pact (cf. Chapter 5.3), put young people in the focus of European policy and set the base for European cooperation within the field of youth. European youth work, as the main field of non-formal education within the European Union, plays an important role in those political processes which are related to lifelong learning and education and training policy. The EU main funding instrument to support non-formal European youth work, the Youth in Action programme, developed from 'a pure educational programme' towards a tool

supporting youth policy development at European level in order to enhance impact and coherence of national policies.

1.2 Identification of the topic

At the same time as non-formal education and learning moved into the focus of policy, certain shortcomings got obvious, especially with regard to the theoretical development of different concepts used by EU policy makers. According to Colley, Hodkinson, & Malcome (2003, p. 23) "*it is important to remember that the EU documents are a series of policy documents, not academic analysis. Their prime purpose is to direct policy and practice within the EU member states; and to provide a focal rationale for EU funded projects and initiatives […] They are also, inevitably, the result of political activity, including bargaining and compromises between the member states"*. It is therefore no wonder, that the meaning of terms, such as non-formal education and learning, remained rather unexplored within many EU documents.

On the other hand, the practice of non-formal youth work in Europe is diverse. Although *"traditions in the field of non-formal education are strong in the Scandinavian countries and Germany, they have been weak in southern Europe and rather absent in communist countries except for state youth organisations"* (Du Bois-Reymond, 2003, p. 12). There are enormous differences between the member states with regard to the understanding of what non-formal youth work should, can and may achieve.

Whereas on European level various efforts have been made to encourage further exchange and discussion on this topic (e.g. the publication of a policy paper on non-formal education by the European Youth Forum in May 2008, or a recent European conference with stakeholders from the youth field in Prague in June 2008), a deepening national discourse of political and academic actors is still missing.

To be able to put policy on lifelong learning into practice and to foster the process of validation and recognition of non-formal education at both national and European levels, it is necessary to clarify and explore culturally specific and national youth political interpretations of the context, meaning and purpose of non-formal youth work.

This is where this dissertation comes in. Germany has a strong tradition of non-formal youth work, including its own national theoretical understandings and interpretations. In contrast to other countries, which do not have traditions within this field, it can be assumed that the German concept, meaning and purpose of non-formal youth work differs to some extent from the European demands on non-formal education.

Within this research project I want to explore German and European demands towards non-formal education and learning by analysing the implementation of European youth policy on non-formal education and its impact on national youth policy and youth work in Germany. For this purpose I chose to study documents and to conduct semi-structured interviews with German experts from the field of European youth policy, research and practice (further explained in Chapter 3.3). To set a clear framework for my research, I decided to restrict the focus of the empirical part of my study to the main EU instrument for supporting non-formal youth work and European youth policy cooperation – the Youth in Action programme. The EU Youth in Action programme can be considered as the 'moment of intersection' where European and German demands towards non-formal education meet. While policy and guidelines with regard to the programme are decided upon on European level, the implementation of the programme takes mainly place at local and national levels. For my dissertation, I decided to study the programme from the German perspective to find out where European and German demands to non-formal education converge or diverge.

The main focus of my dissertation is determined by the following research questions:

- To what extent does the implementation of the Youth in Action programme in Germany meet the European requirements towards non-formal education?
- How far do those requirements converge with or diverge from the demands on and traditions of non-formal education in Germany?

With regard to my research questions, I put forward the following hypothesis:
Despite its long tradition and strong theoretical foundation, German youth policy and non-formal youth work are marked by growing European convergence ('Europeanisation').

1.3 Personal motivation and relation towards the topic

I approach the task of my dissertation with considerable prior knowledge and experience. Having worked as a practitioner for more than ten years in the field of European youth work, I am personally very familiar with the context of the Youth in Action programme. On the one hand as project applicant, I have organised and implemented a variety of projects. On the other hand, as a European youth work trainer I have been involved in quite a number of training courses, seminars or conferences dealing with the topic of non-formal education and learning.
With specific regard to the validation and recognition of non-formal learning experiences within the framework of the Youth in Action programme, I have been part of an advisory group for the development of the 'Youthpass'(cf. Chapter 5.5.2) and contributed to the implementation of this instrument on a national level by training different actors of the Youth in Action field (the employees of the German National Agency, trainers, project applicants and coordinators, mentors for the European Voluntary Service, etc.).

As a result, I am also familiar with the ambivalent concerns of different German stakeholders. Whereas there is common agreement that the youth field is undervalued and deserves more and better recognition, there is concern about the labour market driven interest of policy to make learning outcomes more visible and of benefit for economic usability. However, I noticed that colleagues from other European countries fear far less that the validation and recognition of non-formal learning might lead to a 'formalisation' of non-formal education. As a consequence, I wanted to explore more in-depth what kind of influence the German culturally specific interpretation of youth policy and youth work might have on this debate.

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

When I started to investigate the relevant literature, I became aware that there is no common understanding of non-formal education and learning in Europe and, moreover, the simple translation of non-formal education leads to certain biases. In order to set the base for this study, I try to clarify differences within the conceptual thinking about education and learning in Chapter 2. Additionally, I present the understanding of education in the context of lifelong learning.

In Chapter 3, I expand on my thinking about the research methodology by explaining the comparative and qualitative dimension of this study, the methods of data collection (including documentary and empirical research) and the approach to data analysis. In addition, I discuss ethical issues and limitations of the research.

The comparative part of this study deals with the examination and analysis of the European and German requirements towards non-formal education and learning. In order to be able to compare European and German demands towards non-formal education it is necessary to understand the full political and conceptual background. The following two chapters are therefore a prerequisite for the comparative and analytic part of this dissertation.

Chapter 4 describes the German policy framework and contextual understanding of non-formal youth work, including the legal imbedding, specific approaches and interrelated policy fields. This is followed, in Chapter 5, by a rather descriptive presentation of the EU policy framework with regard to non-formal education and learning, including the main political initiatives and instruments as well as the main EU attributes towards non-formal education.
In Chapter 6, based on the results of my empirical study with regard to the implementation of the Youth in Action programme in Germany, I analyse and compare how far the European requirements towards non-formal education meet the German demands and challenge my hypothesis. Based on the current areas for European youth cooperation, the main categories being studied are the promotion of young people's active citizenship, their social and occupational integration, the youth dimension in other policies, and the validation and recognition of non-formal learning and education.
Finally, in Chapter 7, I present a summary of my major findings which is followed by recommendations about the implications of my analysis for policy and practice.

2. Definition of key terms: Non-formal education and learning

2.1 General considerations with regard to education and learning

Education might be as old as human existence, but the concept of education as such evolved with the upcoming middle-class at the turn of the 19th century. Since its origin the concept includes different contents, therefore it is not possible to give a generally recognized definition. However, for the sake of this study, it is necessary to understand the biases that different cultural understandings and translation might produce when it comes to the interpretation of the term.

Within the Roman and Anglo-Saxon understanding, education includes everything that is necessary for life, such as practical work requirements, reflective behaviour in society, as well as the development of superior humanity (cf. Massing, 2007a, p. 39).

Quite different from that, the German understanding of education comprises two terms: *Erziehung* and *Bildung*. According to Massing (2007a, p. 43) *Erziehung* can be described as the intentional, organised process of conveying societal relevant, useful and usable qualifications, norms and values. Whereas the classical concept of *Bildung,* as defined by Humboldt, Kant, Schiller or others at the turn of the 19th century, describes the development of the individual in confrontation with oneself and the world as an ideal for the individual's perfection and the improvement of society. Thus, the concept is characterized by a person-oriented perspective and a social dimension. The term *Bildung* refers to the normative aim as well as to the process itself (cf. Massing, 2007a, pp. 39ff, BMBF 2004, pp. 21ff).

Particular mention deserves the fact that the classical German concept of *Bildung* is considered to be an open autonomous process independent of social expectations or purposes (cf. BMBF 2004, p. 22). As such, it rather conflicts with any kind of educational approach that puts emphasis on the future usability of achieved qualifications and competences.

Finally, it should be added that in the light of changing societies current actors within the field of education demand a concretisation and transformation of the concept of *Bildung* into acquirable competences (e.g. see Chapter 5.1.2 on key competences).

As many documents, specifically those written in English language, do not distinguish between different conceptual understandings of education, I decided to use solely the term education for the course of this study.

At the same time there has been a shift in the terminology used in research and policy documents during the past years. The term 'education' has been recently complemented by 'learning' (cf. Colley et al., 2003, p. 9). While 'learning' is related to activities as well as individual and group processes, 'education' is more related to systems as well as outcomes (cf. Chisholm et al.,2006, pp. 23, Fennes & Otten, 2008, pp. 8). Yet, many documents do not differentiate between the two terms.

2.2 Education in the context of lifelong learning

At the beginning of the 21st century, the debate about education and learning has received a new impetus by the Lisbon Process. The European Council affirmed that European societies have moved into a knowledge age and recognized education as the key for learning and understanding how to respond to social and economic challenges of modern societies.

On top of that, life wide and lifelong learning – all purposeful learning activity undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence -

was promoted as a guiding principle for all learning contexts. The European Council acknowledged the complementarity of formal, non-formal and informal learning and put them on an equal ranking within the so called 'learning continuum' (cf. European Commission, 2000).

The types of learning contexts can be specified as follow:

"Formal learning is typically provided by an education or training institution and leads to certification. It is structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and is intentional from the learner's perspective. Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, both structured and intentional. Informal learning is not provided by education and training institutions, does not lead to certification and is not structured. It is the result of daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It may be intentional but in most cases it is not (i.e. incidental/random)" (European Commission, 2001a, p. 34).

The three types of learning are neither completely distinct nor do they have clear boundaries as the separation might indicate. Contemporary research thinks of them as constructions along the continuum of formality and informality (cf. Chisholm et al., 2006, pp. 23, Colley et al., 2003).

3. Methodology

In this section I will describe my research design and strategy, my choice of methods of data collection and my approach to data analysis. Additionally, I will discuss ethical issues and limitations within my research.

3.1 A comparative framework as research design

In times of globalisation and growing internationalisation comparative studies have increasingly gained importance in social research. One of the most obvious forms of comparative studies are cross-cultural or cross-national ones that refer to nations as units for comparison. According to Hantrais (1995) such research takes place "*when individuals or teams set out to examine particular issues or phenomena in two or more countries with the express intention of comparing their manifestations in different socio-cultural settings (institutions, customs, traditions, value systems, lifestyles, language, thought patterns), using the same research instruments either to carry out secondary analysis of national data or to conduct new empirical work."*

Although being the most prominent form, comparative research is not limited to cross-national or cross-cultural research. E.g. Bryman (2008, p. 60) points out that *"comparative research should not be treated as solely concerned with comparisons between nations. The logic of comparison can be applied to a variety of situations."*

In my research I want to explore the implementation of EU youth policy on non-formal education and its impact on national youth policy and non-formal youth work in Germany. With regard to the units of comparison, I compare the requirements of EU policy on non-formal education in the youth field (supra-national level) with the German youth policy approach in the non-formal youth work field (national level) by the example of the

implementation of the EU Youth in Action programme in Germany. The EU Youth in Action programme can be considered as the 'moment of intersection' where both youth policy approaches towards non-formal education meet. For my dissertation, I decided to study the programme from the German perspective to find out where European and German demands to non-formal education converge or diverge.

Of course, the choice of these units raises questions of appropriateness and equivalence because the research tries to link very different aspects. While European youth policy is basically made up of a series of policy documents and lacks a deep theoretical basis, Germany's youth policy and non-formal youth work is characterized by its own national socio-culturally specific interpretation rooted in educational theory (see Chapter 1). However, the issue of diverging interpretations of the demands towards non-formal education has not yet been a matter of research on European level, yet. Exploring and comparing European youth policy on non-formal education from a specific national perspective, in this case the German angle, can be considered as the added value of my research.

Without being a classical type of comparative research, the study aims for the same benefits, such as to give explanations for similarities and differences, to generate new knowledge as well as to get a better understanding of social reality in different contexts (cf. Hantrais, 1995; Ragin, 1994, pp. 108ff).

At the same time the study is confronted with similar problems (cf. Bryman, 2008; Hantrais 1995; May, 2004, pp. 212ff):

- In order to be able to compare data in terms of categories and data-collection methods, it is necessary to understand what kind of role the cases of analysis play in the respective contexts. I therefore try to explore as much as possible the social, cultural and political contexts of the units of analysis (see Chapter 3 and 4).

- The results of this study are strongly linked with the context which is relative and peculiar to that time and place; causal explanations which may provide for generalisations across societies are thereby excluded.
- With English being the language of this study, I must take translation problems into consideration. To avoid translation undermining genuine comparability, I openly refer to different language concepts and defined key terms wherever necessary.

3.2 Choice of a qualitative research strategy

While there is no common agreement in academic cycles about how to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative research approaches, the labels are of common use in most research literature. According to Bryman (cf. 2008, pp. 21ff) they differ in terms of the role of theory, epistemological foundations and ontological considerations.

Bryman (2008, p. 22) defines qualitative research as a research strategy that

- predominantly emphasises an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which emphasis is placed on the generation of theories;
- has rejected the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular in preference to an emphasis in which individuals interpret their social world; and
- embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation.

Corresponding to this definition and with regard to the topic of my investigation, I decided to opt for a qualitative research approach because of the following reasons:

- In order to explore to what extent European and German demands on non-formal education converge or diverge, I have to investigate a socio-cultural context, which is under permanent construction (on national and European levels).
- Additionally, I am aware that the research process and the gathered data are influenced and determined by subjective, interpretive processes.

3.3 Methods of data collection

The choice of particular methods is determined by the research topic and the nature of information needed to answer the research questions (cf. Chapter 1.2). This research is based on the collection of primary data, originally collected for the purpose of this study, and secondary data, collected and interpreted by others for different reasons.
For the purpose of my dissertation subject I decided to use documents and interviews as sources of data.

3.3.1 Documentary research

With regard to my research topic one might think it is evident to use documentary research. According to May (cf. 2004, pp. 175ff) it is a valuable method of data collection because it offers insights into theories and the way research issues are constructed. In order to achieve my research objectives I needed to define key terms and to explore the conceptual and political framework of non-formal education from EU and German perspectives.
Consequently, I used a lot of government documents and a variety of other written sources, such as books, studies, reports, articles or web pages. However, I carefully chose the documents, critically reflected for what kind of purpose they were created and gauged them against the following criteria: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning

(cf. May, 2004, pp. 188f; Scott, 1990 in: Bryman 2008, p.516). By applying those criteria I tried to estimate the validity of documents in relation to my research question.
Although this method offered a lot of insight into and evidence for my dissertation topic, I felt that this was not sufficient. European and German youth policy in the field on non-formal education are ever-changing. Accordingly, it was difficult to find a proper basis of academic material that covered recent political developments and provided an in-depth analysis. On top of that, I wanted to crosscheck my findings with another research method (triangulation).

3.3.2 Interviews

The interviews were conducted for several reasons. First, I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the implementation of the current Youth in Action programme in Germany in order to find out how far this meets with the European requirements towards non-formal education. As the programme only started in January 2007 and is not subject of accompanying evaluation measures, there is a lack of academic material. Secondly, I wanted to get an in-depth insight into the German cultural specific and youth political interpretation of non-formal youth, with the objective to discover to what extent German and European requirements on non-formal education converge or diverge. With the outcomes of the interviews I expected to corroborate the earlier findings from documentary research in order to test my hypothesis.

3.3.2.1 Type of interviews

There are different approaches towards qualitative interviewing in terms of structure and number of interviewees. For the purpose of my study, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews have the capacity to provide in-depth insights into research participants' points of view, but offer a great deal of flexibility to the interviewer and

interviewee: Although using an interview guide, that is a list of specific questions or topics to be covered in the interview, the researcher has leeway to change the sequence of topics, go beyond written questions (cf. Bryman, 2008, p. 438) and to pick up things said by the participants. At the same time, semi-structured interviews allow respondents to answer more on their own terms. They thereby enable the researcher to get into a real dialogue with the interviewees (cf. May, 2004, p. 123).

3.3.2.2 Selection of interview respondents

With regard to the selection of my interview partners, I used a purposive sample. I strategically selected people who were relevant to the research questions (cf. Bryman, 2008, pp. 415; Robson, 2002, pp. 265) according to the following criteria:

- They had to be experts in the field of European and German non-formal youth work, that means they needed to be familiar with the Youth in Action programme and its predecessor programme as well as with related European and German youth policy developments.
- At the same time, I wanted to have a wide-ranging panel of informants with different experiences and opinions in order to be able to challenge my own assumptions as much as possible. Accordingly, interview partners needed to be as diverse as possible - from different contexts (policy, research and practice) and different institutions (governmental, non-governmental in the field of cultural, denominational or citizenship youth work). Moreover, I wanted to take into account the gender dimension and involve equally men and women in the study.

With the support of a key informant, who also served as a vouching figure in the recruitment process, I was able to interview the following German experts from policy, research and practice:

- the head of department of the BMFSFJ, responsible for European youth policy and youth work;
- the head of the German National Agency of the Youth in Action programme,
- a researcher of the field of European youth research, and
- four persons representing different kinds of youth organisations, mostly national and federal umbrella organisations from catholic, cultural and citizenship youth work.

3.3.2.3 Process of data collection

In order to be able to conduct these interviews, an exploratory and preparatory phase was of extreme importance to me. I needed to develop coherent interview guidelines to be sure to gain from my respondents that information, which provides answers to my research questions. To choose the right topics and questions for the interviews I carefully analysed the results of German and European evaluation studies of the predecessor YOUTH programme and explored the youth political requirements with regard to the current Youth in Action programme. Being unsure about the first draft of my interview schedule and being an interviewer for the first time, I decided to make a pilot interview. According to Weiss (cf. 1994, p. 48) and Davies (cf. 2007, pp. 48f) pilot interviews offer the possibility to test a draft of the interview guide and can suggest where it is skimpy, redundant and overweighted. Moreover, starting with some interview partner already known to the researcher, allows getting a methodological feedback on the interview approach as such (cf. Davies, 2007, p. 155). As a result, I conducted one pilot interview with a respondent, well known to me, modified my interview guidelines (final version see Appendix) and tried to adapt my interview approach according to the received feedback. I finally carried out seven thematic interviews (including the pilot) with three women and four men. The recorded interviews were conducted face-to-face, usually in the offices of the experts (in Bonn, Hannover, Magdeburg, Weimar and Munich), and typically lasted between one hour and 90 minutes.

3.3.2.4 Data analysis

As a start I organised and prepared the data for analysis by transcribing the interviews. But because of the large corpus of unstructured text material, interviews are not straightforward to analyse. I decided to use a thematic approach in order to carry out the data analysis. Although not being outlined or characterized in terms of a distinctive cluster of techniques, thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches in qualitative data analysis (cf. Bryman, 2008, p. 554).

Once the transcriptions were finished, I thoroughly read each interview and started to code the text according to central themes and categories by highlighting text segments.

Secondly, I sorted that material which I thought to be of relevance for my research topic, rearranged the data and placed it into my comparative framework. Based on the current areas for European youth cooperation, I used the following main themes and categories: young people's active citizenship, their social and occupational integration, the youth dimension in other policies, and the validation and recognition of non-formal learning and education.

When I was grouping the data together, I got concerned about the reliability of my categorisation of the qualitative data and therefore asked colleagues to give critical feedback.

Finally, I analysed and interpreted the data in two steps:

1. I studied the implementation of the Youth in Action programme in Germany in relation to the European policy requirements towards non-formal education in order to find similarities or differences within the European and German understandings and interpretations of non-formal youth work.
2. I examined the data with respect to the effect on youth policy and non-formal youth work in Germany .

3.3.2.5 Ethical issues

Conducting research also involves taking into account certain ethical principles. According to May (cf. 2004, p. 59) ethical decisions are concerned with what is right and just - not only in the interest of the project and the researcher but also for its participants. In order to avoid any discriminatory behaviour, I organised my study according to the following criteria (cf. Bryman, 2008, pp. 118ff; Davies, 2007, pp. 45):

- Informed consent: As part of the recruitment procedure for my interviews I provided prospective participants with full information about my research project and research process (general topic, research question, criteria for the selection of participants, purpose of the study, approximate duration of the interview, etc.). As a result, they were able to take an informed decision whether they wanted to participate in the project.
- No harm to participants: In order to ensure confidentiality I asked my interviewees' permission to tape the interviews. However, I promised to use the records only for the purpose of this study. Although I asked for permission to refer openly to the experts' names and positions in my dissertation, I decided to quote anonymously in order to respect the privacy of participants.

3.4 Experiences and limitations of the research

When I started to work on the topic of my dissertation, I did not imagine the daunting task I faced. In my literature research I worked through enormous amounts of documents on non-formal education to finally realise that there is a lack of academic material on my research topic.

In order to provide a valid and reliable data analysis it was therefore necessary to use more than one method and to get primary data from the field (triangulation).

But I also faced problems within the recruitment process of the interview respondents. The specificity of my topic narrowed down the choice towards a relatively small group of interview candidates. Some of the people I requested were not able to take part in the research due to lack of time. Others did not feel competent enough to respond to my research topic. In the end, my interview partners were located across Germany, so that I needed to carefully schedule the interview dates and plan travel arrangements. The entire process of gaining primary data with the means of interviews took a lot more time than expected.

With regard to the complexity of the topic, I felt very uncertain about my research approach. Hence, I regularly fed back my thoughts, impressions and findings to colleagues in order to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the research process.

4. German policy and conceptual framework with regard to non-formal education in the youth field

4.1 Introductory remarks about the German state

The Federal Republic of Germany is a federal state that consists of 16 federal states (*Länder*) with a population of 82 million people. The federal system is a principle which characterizes Germany's legal system and state organisation. The distribution of responsibilities between the Federation and the federal states is laid down in the German Constitution. Accordingly, the federal states have rights and responsibilities. Within the scope of the Federation's framework regulations it is necessary to know that some issues are part of the exclusive legislation of the Federation, in other matters the federal states are entitled to make their own laws if they are not regulated by the Federation's own laws. Moreover, certain legislative areas are fully left to the federal states.

National law-making and administration is not only up to the parliamentary assembly (*Bundestag*). The federal states do also take part in the legislation processes through the *Bundesrat* which is made up of members or representative of the governments of the federal states. The constitution also regulates the government at local level: all towns, cities or districts are self-governed. They are responsible for all affairs with regard to the local community itself (cf. IJAB 1994, 2008).

4.2 German children and youth policy

German children and youth policy is characterized by various interdependencies of different levels and responsibilities. In compliance with the federal structure, the responsibility for children and youth policy is shared by the Federation, the federal states, the local communities as well as the statutory and voluntary bodies of youth work.

On national level, the Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) is in overall charge of children and youth policy including special federal laws. It is responsible for core youth policy topics, such as non-formal youth work or different national voluntary services, it supports supra-regional and central institutions as well as central youth policy programmes, and it provides a stimulus for the development of child and youth care through model projects.

In addition, the BMFSFJ is in charge of representing the interests of children and young people vis-à-vis other policy areas that may directly or indirectly be of importance for the target group. Children and youth policy as transversal task includes areas such as employment or health as well as education policy, the latter - with the exception of non-formal youth work - is the joint responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) and the federal states. However, the responsibility for educational matters lies primarily with the federal states.

The central support measure for children and youth policy on national level is the Children and Youth Plan of the Federation (KJP). Additionally, children and youth policy is regulated by the Children and Youth Plans of the federal states and directives and programmes on the local level (cf. IJAB 1994, 2008).

4.3 Non-formal youth work

4.3.1 Legal background and provision

Non-formal education, also known as out-of-school education (*Außerschulische Bildung*), is not unique to the youth field; it also plays an essential role within the field of adult education in Germany. However, non-formal youth work is recognized as a separate field of learning complementing formal education. It is part of the complex of youth work and youth welfare services and has its legal basis in the Child and Youth Services Act. Youth work's primary

tasks are to foster self-determination, to encourage social and community involvement as well as to enable young people to share social responsibility. These goals emphasise the person-oriented perspective and the social dimension of non-formal youth work. Among others, the main areas of concern are non-formal and international youth work. Non-formal youth work includes cultural, sports and citizenship education (cf. BMBF, 2004; IJAB, 2008; Köhnen, 1992).

In contrast to the definition used by the European Union (see definition of non-formal learning above as *not* being provided by education or training institutions), non-formal youth work is an explicit mission of educational bodies, advocating different sets of values, dealing with a wide range of topics, using various methods and types of work. In order to acknowledge the pluralistic needs of young people, non-formal youth work is provided by statutory bodies responsible for youth work and youth welfare services as well as different associations, groups, youth initiatives. Depending on their goals, these youth organisations and groups are e.g. denominational organisations, cultural organisations, political organisations or organisations devoted to leisure time activities. Besides their task of direct educational work with young people, they represent the interests of young people vis-à-vis society and the state. As a consequence they are involved in all political processes and decisions affecting the interests of young people. Many local youth organisations are represented in umbrella organisations at the level of the federal states or the Federation (cf. IJAB, 2008; Köhnen, 1992).

The principle of subsidiarity permeates the structure of the entire social security system as well as youth welfare services and youth work in Germany. It also defines the relationship between statutory and voluntary bodies of youth work; the former must subsidize the latter as is necessary. Only if voluntary associations are unable or unwilling to make a provision, the

statutory bodies have to intervene and to provide adequate establishments and services (cf. IJAB, 2008; Köhnen, 1992).

4.3.2 Citizenship education within the field of non-formal youth work

Citizenship education (*Politische Bildung)* has a long tradition in Germany and can be traced back towards the end of the second world war. After 1945, the Western Allies decided that Germans "had a very limited awareness of democratic processes and principles" and therefore were in need of a re-education programme. The accompanying re-education measures aimed to foster the democratisation process in Germany and were closely in accordance with Dewey's philosophy of education who promoted democracy not only as a form of government but as a general way of life (cf. Lange, 2008, p. 89).

Within the field of youth work, citizenship education can be considered as one discipline or main area of concern, but occasionally also a guiding principle for non-formal youth work in general (cf. Hafenegger, 2007a, p. 283).

It aims to inform young people about society and the state, to enable them to assess political processes and conflicts, to represent their own interests and rights, to carry out their duties and responsibilities towards society, and to encourage them to take part in the creation of a democratic and liberal society (cf. IJAB, 2008; Köhnen, 1992; Massing, 2007b).

During the course of time citizenship education has developed its own educational field, with theoretical foundations, paradigm changes, various thematic and methodological approaches and principles. Although there is no common valid approach among the German scholars and the field is challenged by constant redefinitions and clarifications of its educational approach, it is commonly acknowledged that citizenship education aims to contribute to the development of the individual towards a mature and responsible citizen. This normative dimension of citizenship education is strongly linked with the ideas of emancipation and

autonomy. It usually refers to the German classical understanding of education (cf. Massing, 2007a, p. 45).

Current developments in the field of non-formal education that emphasize its contribution towards the development of qualifications and competences for professional usability are under strong debate among German actors of non-formal education, especially those of citizenship education. There are supporters who see it as an opportunity to re-orientate and adjust the field and its services according to the needs of participants – e.g. the cooperation with the field of vocational education and training could have professional usability as one but not the only purpose (cf. Sander, 2007, p. 39). But there are also many critics who look at this topic as an effect of neo-liberalism They think that education is increasingly subordinated to the interest of growing global competitiveness and fear the loss of its emancipatory approach (cf. Massing, 2007a, p. 45).

4.3.3 Principles of non-formal youth work and citizenship education

In line with the tradition of the field of non-formal youth work and citizenship education, there is a continuous discourse about the development of principles and normative orientations. Although there are different conceptions, certain aspects are characteristic for the field and distinguish it from the field of formal education.

First of all, non-formal youth work is based on the principle of voluntary participation. It is characterized by the idea of non-competitive achievement and usually free from any kind of constraint. It offers young people an experiential learning field for self-organised learning and practicing active participation in society through ‘learning by doing’. Contents and methods of non-formal youth work are close to real life-concerns, needs and interests of young people (cf. IJAB, 2008, p. 135).

In contrast to the systems of formal education, the field is characterized by flexible structures and process-oriented educational objectives. Recognized as public responsibility and safeguarded by accompanying legislation and support measures, the pluralism and autonomy of organisations and their activities within the field of non-formal youth work guarantee the openness and balance of educational objectives (cf. Hafenegger, 2007b, p. 309).
Finally, non-formal youth work does not teach citizenship education as a topic. It rather aims to convey and practice values, skills and behaviour necessary for democratic life. In other words, it is a person-oriented educational and emancipatory approach that aims primarily at the individual's capacity to act and it tries to foster personal and social competences as a prerequisite for the development of the politically mature person (active citizenship). Accordingly, non-formal youth work contributes to the development of key competences that are necessary to participate actively in democratic societies (cf. Hafenegger, 2007b, pp. 310f).

4.4 Voluntary services for youth as a form of active citizenship

Participation of young people in society is not solely encouraged by the field of non-formal youth work as described above, it is also promoted and fostered through voluntary work in all kinds of different forms. A specific German format of voluntary involvement in society are the Voluntary Social Service and the Voluntary Ecological Service. They have their legal basis in the Promotion of the Voluntary Services for Youth Act (Bundestag & Bundesrat, 2008), a legislative area that is also covered by the BMFSFJ. The law accords to volunteers the same rights as apprentices as far as social insurance, child care or tax benefits are concerned. Regularly carried out for a period of 12 months, the voluntary services are designed as learning services for young people that take place either in Germany or abroad. Possible areas of intervention are organisations within the fields of social care, youth work, sports, culture or cultural heritage. An essential feature, besides the practical voluntary work,

is the on-going educational support in the form of training and tutoring for the volunteers. Its aim is to foster young people's sense of responsibility for society and to convey personal, social and intercultural competences. As a consequence, voluntary services are considered to be a learning field for professional orientation and experiences, and also for acquiring personal and social competences (cf. BMFSFJ, 2006; IJAB, 2008).

4.5 International and European youth policy and youth work

The start of international youth work in Germany can be dated back towards the beginning of the 20th century when the government decided to systematically support exchange and encounters. Yet, the field obtained an important significance only after the end of the second world war. On the one hand, young people were motivated to make new experiences, to travel and get to know other people and societies. On the other hand, there was a strong political motivation by the Western Allies. In order to encourage the democratisation of young people as part of the re-education process and with the aim of mutual understanding of and reconciliation with the former wartime enemies, a variety of youth encounters were initiated. These initiatives built the base for a continuous development of international youth work as an own sector in Germany (cf. Thimmel, 2001, pp. 12ff).

Today, international youth work is an explicit mission of non-formal youth work and at the same time part of national youth policy. It is considered to be an experiential learning field to gain international experiences and to develop intercultural competences. The overall responsibility for the development and support of international youth work is shared by the Federation, the federal states and the local authorities - yet, all levels foster international youth work and youth policy cooperation in their own way and set different priorities.

Germany's international youth policy is put into practice by the BMFSFJ. The main support measure for international youth work on national level is the KJP which is supervised by the

BMFSFJ. It supports international exchanges for young people and youth work professionals. As the Federation is in overall charge of matters of cross- national cooperation, the BMFSFJ is not restricted to an initiating role (like in general matters of non-formal youth work) and is allowed to support activities on local level as well.

Moreover, there are also a variety of exchange programmes which are carried out under bilateral agreements. The modes of cooperation and financial support are decided by bilateral committees, composed of representatives of the involved governments and youth organisations. A specific role within the bilateral cooperation is taken over by the German-French Youth Office and the German-Polish Youth Office: Both youth offices are autonomous and fully financed by the involved governments (cf. IJAB, 2008, pp. 165f).

At the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe, in all bodies responsible for European youth policy cooperation the German government is represented by the BMFSFJ. The BMFSFJ provides co-financing to the European Commission in order to support the implementation of the European mobility programme Youth in Action in Germany. The appointed German National Agency for the implementation of the Youth in Action programme (*Jugend für Europa*) is supervised by the BMFSFJ (cf. IJAB, pp. 159ff).

5. EU policy on education, training and youth and framework for European youth work

5.1 The Lisbon follow up within the education and training sector

5.1.1 General policy framework for education and training

Education and training issues have not been in the focus of policy for a long time. While vocational education and training had been identified as an area of Community action in the Treaty of Rome already in 1957, the area of general education was only formally recognised as an area of European Union competency in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Yet, according to the principle of subsidiarity, the role of the European Union within education and training policy is complementary and supportive towards national member state policies (cf. European Commission, 2008a).

Since the adoption of the Lisbon strategy, European education and training policy has received increasing attention. The European Lisbon Council recognised that education and training are essential to the development and success of today's knowledge society and economy. In order to meet the needs of a knowledge society, Heads of State and Government asked for a radical transformation and modernisation of education and training systems throughout Europe aiming to make Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 (cf. European Commission 2000, 2001b).

Moreover, politicians on European level recognized the necessity of lifelong learning as a guiding principle for the development of education and training. Furthermore, they acknowledged that lifelong learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, informal and non-formal learning in order to promote employability and active citizenship. Though the promotion of employability is an essential aim of the lifelong learning strategy, it is also commonly agreed that, in a lifelong learning perspective, education and training

systems have broader goals and responsibilities to society. Their role goes beyond equipping Europeans for professional life – they also aim to promote personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social inclusion (cf. European Commission, 2000, 2001b).

As a follow up on the Lisbon strategy, the ministers of education agreed on concrete objectives for education and training systems to be achieved by 2010 which were subsumed together with the lifelong learning strategy under the generic term 'Education and Training 2010 Programme' one year later. The three major goals of this common policy framework are:

- improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU,
- facilitating the access of all to education and training systems,
- opening up education and training to the wider world (Council of the European Union, 2002, p. 4).

To achieve these strategic goals the Education Council defined key priorities and areas of cooperation covering various types and levels of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal) aimed at making a reality of lifelong learning. They decided to apply the open method of coordination as an instrument for the development of a coherent strategy in education and training in order to spread best practice and organise a mutual learning process among the member states.

'Education and Training 2010' integrates all actions in the field of education and training at European level, including the Bruges-Copenhagen process on cooperation in the area of vocational education and training, which put emphasis on the special potential of non-formal learning for young people; it also links up to the Bologna process within the field of Higher Education. The Bruges-Copenhagen process initiated the development of a common set of principles regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim to ensure

greater comparability between different approaches in different countries and at different levels (cf. Otten, 2007, pp. 139; Schild & von Hebel, 2006, pp. 8).

5.1.2 Mobility and lifelong learning instruments

'Education and Training 2010' has led to a number of EU reference instruments that support citizens' mobility and lifelong learning.

Europass is an instrument based on a proposal of the European Commission to establish a single community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences. It aims to foster mobility throughout Europe for lifelong learning purposes by helping people to make their skills and qualifications easily understood. Currently, it consists of five documents: Europass Curriculum Vitae, Language Diploma Supplement (Higher Education), Certificate Supplement (Vocational Education and Training), Language Portfolio and Europass Mobility. The latter can be used for any kind of mobility experience in a European country abroad (cf. Schild & von Hebel, 2006, p. 9).

The *European Reference Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*, released at the end of 2006, identifies and defines the key skills that young people and adults need in order to achieve employment, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship. The Reference Framework sets out the following eight key competences:

- Communication in the mother tongue;
- Communication in foreign languages;
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- Digital competence;
- Learning to learn;
- Social and civic competences;
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and

- Cultural awareness and expression (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2006b, p. 4).

Only recently, in April 2008, the overall framework for all kind of learning outcomes, namely the *European Qualifications Framework* (EQF), was adopted. The EQF acts as a translation device for qualifications across different EU member states. By making national qualifications more readable, it should help individual and employers to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems.

The EQF encourages the member states to relate their national qualification systems to the EQF by 2010. The EQF takes into account all competences and qualifications that have been achieved - whether in formal systems, such as school, academic or professional education, or by non-formal or informal learning. As a consequence, the EQF shifts the focus from the traditional approach of 'learning inputs' (related to the length of the learning experience or training institution) towards 'learning outcomes' (what a learner knows, understands and is able to do). It thereby encourages lifelong learning and, in particular, the validation of non-formal and informal learning as key elements in national and European lifelong learning strategies (cf. European Commission DG Education and Culture, 2008b, p. 3; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2008).

The European Commission complements its Education and Training 2010 work programme and lifelong learning strategy with a variety of funding programmes, e.g. the Lifelong Learning Programme including the Grundtvig, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Comenius programme, Tempus and others.

5.2 European youth policy: Background and legal framework

The inclusion of 'youth' as a concept in European policy is a quite recent phenomenon. Under constitutional law European's policy role within the youth field has been very limited. According to the principle of subsidiarity, youth policy falls under the remit of the member states of the European Union. It is a policy field which is excluded from any form of harmonisation of national legislation. The one and only legal reference for European cooperation within the youth field can be found in Article 149(2) of the Treaty establishing the European Community: "Community action shall be aimed at encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors" (cf. European Commission, 2001a, pp. 6; Wicke, 2004, pp. 195).

On the basis of this article the European Union was able to foster cooperation within the field of youth work and youth policy primarily on two different levels. On the one hand, it was the basis for developing and implementing a series of educational mobility programmes, from 'Youth for Europe' (already launched in 1988) till the current Youth in Action 2007 -2013 programme. On the other hand, on the occasion of cooperation within the framework of these educational programmes, the ministers responsible for youth affairs were able to pass several decisions and resolutions relevant for youth policy. Moreover, they commonly agreed that cooperation and action in the youth field should be expanded on further on European level. With their consent to launch a White Paper on youth they affirmed their willingness to redefine the role of the European Union with regard to youth policy issues (cf. Wicke, 2004, pp. 195f).

5.3 Political initiatives in the youth field

5.3.1 White Paper on youth

In 2001, following wide-ranging consultation at national and European levels, the European Commission published the White Paper 'A new impetus for European youth'. Though the White Paper acknowledged the member states' responsibility and the application of the principle of subsidiarity within the youth field, in general, it also underlined the European Union's role of enhancing the impact and coherence of national policies with regard to youth . It thereby laid the foundation for an new framework for youth policy cooperation. The framework compromised two main aspects:

- Increasing the cooperation of the member states by appyling the open method of coordination (OMC) in four youth priority areas: participation, information, voluntary activities and a greater understanding and knowledge of youth
- Taking more account of 'youth' in other sectoral policies, such as education, lifelong learning and mobility; employment and social inclusion, anti-discrimination and autonomy for young people (cf. Wicke, 2004, pp. 197f; European Commission, 2001a).

At the same time the White Paper was also a response to the dissatisfaction of young people with the traditional forms of participation in public life, and called on young people's development of active citizenship (cf. European Commission, 2001a, pp. 4f).

5.3.2 European Youth Pact

In 2005 the framework for cooperation received an update by taking into account the European Youth Pact which has its origin in a common initiative of the heads of government of France, Spain, Sweden and Germany who lobbied for intensifing the integration of a 'youth' dimension in European policies (cf. Wicke, 2007, p. 409).

The adoption of the European Youth Pact by the European Council as part of the revised Lisbon strategy focusing on growth and jobs is a recognition of the need for a better integration of young people into society and working life.

The European Youth Pact calls upon the European Union and its member states to implement a youth-specific dimension in three main fields of action:

- Employment, integration and social advancement;
- Education, training and mobility;
- Reconciliation of working life and family life.

Accordingly, all measures taken within these areas should be coherent and fully incorportated in the revised Lisbon strategy, in particular within the European employment and social inclusion strategies and the Education and Training 2010 Work programme (cf. European Commission, 2005, pp. 3f).

As a consequence, the implementation of the Pact follows the annual procedures of the Lisbon strategy. The member states have to submit reports on their national reform programmes which also includes the achievements with regard to the Pact. The Council of the European Union emphasised that the success of this initiative depended strongly on the active participation of all parties concerned, in particular young people and youth organisations. The requested consultation of young people on Pact issues is supposed to take place in the form of a structured dialogue (cf. European Commission, 2005, pp. 11f; Wicke, 2007, pp. 409f).

As a consequence of the European Youth Pact, the current framework for European cooperation within the field of youth consists of three strands:

- Young people's active citizenship
- Inclusion of a 'youth' dimension in other policies
- Social and occupational integration of young people (European Commission, 2008b).

5.4 EU policy instruments in the youth field

In order to foster young people's active citzenship as well as their social and occupational integration, the European Union applies a variety of instruments. The following presented instruments are of major relevance for the subject of this study.

5.4.1 Open Method of Coordination within the youth field

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is a relatively new instrument of governance which has its origin within the European employment strategy. It was strongly promoted and extended as a far-reaching Community instrument by the Lisbon strategy in 2000.

The OMC is an intergovernmental method that takes place in areas that fall under the competence of the member states. In principle, it is based on joint identified objectives, common established measuring instruments (indicators and guidelines), benchmarks and an exchange of best practices which is monitored by the European Commission. However, its implementation differs across the various policy areas where it is applied (cf. Hodson & Maher, 2001, pp. 724; Linsenmann, 2003).

Within the youth field the OMC is applied in four youth priority areas (see Chapter on White Paper on youth) according to the following steps:

- After consultation with the member states the European Commission develops a standardised questionnaire for each priority
- Based on the consultation of young people and other youth policy structures each member state responds to the questionnaires
- On the basis of their responses, the Commission presents a synthesis report and proposes common objectives for each priority to the Council
- Member states are responsible for the implementation of the common objectives and have to hand in national progress reports

- On the basis of these reports, the Commission prepares a progress report who might decide to adjust the common objectives (cf. Wicke, 2007, p. 407).

As the implementation of the objectives is without reference to indicators or benchmarks, the only degree of pressure to the member states is the obligation to report back to the Commission. By the end of 2008 the member states will have reported on all four priorities, and in 2009 the first cycle of the OMC will be finished and evaluated (cf. IJAB, 2008, p. 160).

5.4.2 Structured Dialogue

The Structured Dialogue is a direct follow-up of the White Paper on youth and the European Youth Pact which both demanded to consult young people on matters that concern them.
It aims to set the framework for a working relationship between authorities and youth in order to involve young people in the shaping and implementation of youth policy at all stages and levels (cf. Forschungsgruppe Jugend und Europa am Centrum für angewandte Politikforschung, 2008).
The dialogue is structured in thematic cycles based on a Youth Political Agenda which is set up cojointly by European institutions and young people: The topic of the recent cycle, launched in April 2008, deals with the future challenges of young people. It thereby aims to reflect on the contents of future EU youth policies beyond 2009 in order to define the new cooperation framework in the field of youth policy (cf. European Commission DG Education and Culture, 2008a, p. 1).
The dialogue takes place in a variety of decentralised and European events, such as European Youth Weeks and Presidency Youth Events. In trying to adress all young people, the important role of youth organisations, who speak on behalf of a great number of young people, is recognized. However, the Commission puts emphasis on the inclusion of all young

people, including those with fewer opportunities or not formally organised, and encourages youth organisations to reach out beyond their memberships.

According to the Commission (cf. European Commission DG Education and Culture, 2008c) the main actors of the Structured Dialogue are the following:

- European Commission, responsible for steering and coordinating the process;
- Member States and National Youth Councils, responsible for organising decentralised debates and feedback the results to European level;
- European Youth Forum as main umbrella organisation representing young people on European level
- The National Agencies of the Youth in Action programme who manage the instrument to fund debates at national level and support the implementation by advising applicants, monitoring projects and disseminating the results.

5.4.3 Youth in Action programme

Adopted for the period of 2007 to 2013, the EU mobility programme Youth in Action builds on the experience of its predecessor programmes (YOUTH and Youth for Europe) and provides the legal framework for non-formal learning activities of young people with a European dimension.

It is an instrument which reinforces active citizenship of young people and supports the general framework of European cooperation in the youth field through the promotion of intercultural learning. At the same time, the programme contributes to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy and the European Youth Pact (cf. European Commission DG Education and Culture, 2008d, {European Parliament 30.12.2006 #51}p. 3).

The Youth in Action programme aims to achieve the following five general objectives:

- promote young people's active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular;
- develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to foster social cohesion in the European Union;
- foster mutual understanding between young people in different countries;
- contribute to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field;
- promote European cooperation in the youth field (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2006a, Article 2.1).

Those general objectives, which are even further specified within the legal decision on the programme, are to be implemented at project level, taking into account the annual priorities and the following four permanent priorities: European citizenship, participation of young people, cultural diversity and inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

The programme ist structured around five operational actions:

- *Action 1 - Youth for Europe* encourages young people's active citizenship, participation and creativity through youth exchanges, youth initiatives and youth democracy projects.
- *Action 2 - European Voluntary Service* helps young people to develop their sense of solidarity by participating, either individually or in groups, in non-profit, unpaid voluntary activities abroad.
- *Action 3 - Youth in the World* promotes partnerships and exchanges among young people and youth organisations across the world.

- *Action 4 - Youth Support Systems* includes various measures to support youth workers and youth organisations and improve the quality of their activities by providing means for exchange, training and networking.
- *Action 5 - Support for European Cooperation in the Youth Field* supports youth policy co-operation at European level, in particular by facilitating the Structured Dialogue between young people and policy makers. Moreover, this action supports to improve the knowledge on youth related to the four priorities which are dealt by the OMC (cf. European Commission DG Education and Culture, 2008d, pp. 11f).

Though the European Commission holds the general responsibility for the running of the programme, the implementation is mainly decentralised and dealt with by the National Agencies who are appointed by the national government. The National Agencies are responsible for managing the programme at national level by providing information and support to applicants, selecting and monitoring the projects as well as administering the EU funds. Additionally, they are a main actor within the framework of cooperation in the youth field (cf. Chapter 5.4.2 on Structured Dialogue), (cf. European Commission DG Education and Culture, p. 13).

5.5 Non-formal education and learning in the context of European youth work

Although there are also other sectors of non-formal education, European educational and training policies recognize the role of youth work as a key instrument of non-formal and informal learning in order to develop young people's key competences. Within the European Union the educational programme Youth in Action is ascribed to be the Community's key instrument for providing non-formal and informal learning experiences to young people and plays a major role in implementing the goals of the lifelong learning strategy in the youth

field (cf. Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 2006).

5.5.1 Principles and characteristics of non-formal and informal learning in youth activities

Since 1998 the European Commission has developed a close cooperation with the Council of Europe in the youth field. This partnership is embedded in the Youth in Action programme which stipulates that the European Union should strengthen its cooperation with international organisations, in particular with the Council of Europe. Among other things the partnership aims to "*contribute to the recognition of non-formal learning and to foster visibility of youth work with a view to further increase youth work's positive impact on young people's personal development, their involvement in society and increased employability"*(Council of Europe & European Commission, 2007, p. 2).

In their common working paper 'Pathways towards validation and recognition of education, training & learning in the youth field', the respective youth services of the European Commission and Council of Europe underlined that non-formal learning is the key competence of the youth field. According to the Council of Europe & the European Commission (2004, p. 6) "*Non-formal learning in youth activities is structured, based on learning objectives, learning time and specific learning support and it is intentional… It typically does not lead to certification, but in an increasing number of cases, certificates are delivered*".

Non-formal and informal learning in youth activities are characterized by the following principles:

- the voluntary and often self-organised character of learning, the intrinsic motivation of participants

- the close link to young people's aspirations and interests, the participative and learner-centred approach
- the open character and structure, the transparency and flexibility of the underlying curricular construction
- the evaluation of success and failure in a collective process and without judgement on individual success or failure, the 'right to make mistakes'
- a supportive learning environment
- a preparation and staging of activities with a professional attitude, regardless of whether the activity is run by professional or voluntary youth workers and trainers
- the sharing of results with the interested public and a planned follow-up (Council of Europe & European Commission, 2004, p. 6).

According to Fennes & Otten (cf. 2008, p. 14) these principles are linked to democratic values and practices which are in the focus of European youth work at different levels - as content itself and as underlying pedagogic approach.

5.5.2 Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning (within the youth field)

The rising European attention to the topic of validation of non-formal and informal learning is closely linked to the debate on lifelong learning and the political initiatives in the education, training and youth sector (see above). Validation's main purpose is to make visible and value the full range of knowledge and skills held by an individual, irrespective where these have been acquired. It may aim at certification for formal recognition (summative purpose) or support an ongoing learning process (formative purpose), (cf. Bjornavold & Colardyn, 2004; Council of Europe & European Commission, 2004, pp. 9f).

Bjornavold & Colardyn (2004, p. 69) argue that it is very much directed towards the utilisation of learning in the labour market: *"For an employer it is a question of human resource management, for individuals a question of having the full range of skills and competences valued and for society a question of making full use of existing knowledge and experience …"*

Traditionally, learning outcomes within the formal and training systems have been the most visible and the ones to be likely recognized by the labour market and society. In order to realise a European area of lifelong and lifewide learning, the Commission emphasised that all kinds of learning outcomes, in particular those acquired by non-formal or informal learning, should be understood and appreciated. Additionally, the Commission put forward the demand to develop a common approach to value learning in order to build links between different learning settings and contexts (cf. Council of Europe & European Commission, 2004; European Commission 2000, 2001b).

The result of this political demand can be seen within the framework of the Education and Training 2010 programme. Validation of non-formal or informal learning has been subject to a number of instruments and initiatives, such as Europass, EQF and the common set of European principles regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning initiated by the Bruges-Copenhagen process (cf. Chapter 5.1).

Furthermore, although already taken up by the White Paper, the role of the youth field within providing non-formal learning experiences was further highlighted by the Council of the European Union in the resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning. According to the resolution *"the work and achievements of young people and those active in youth work and youth organisations deserve greater recognition in order to enhance their value and visibility, and should be given due consideration by employers, formal education and civil society in general"* (Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 2006, p. 2).

The resolution also pointed out that non-formal youth work activities are particularly relevant for young people with fewer opportunities as they provide an additional source of learning and may encourage a way into formal learning and training. By helping young people to acquire key competences which contribute to their personal development, active citizenship and social inclusion, and thereby improving their employability, activities within the youth field provide a significant added value for young people, the economy and society. As a consequence, youth work should be made more visible and be better recognized (cf. Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 2006, p. 2).

In 2005, the European Youth Pact asked for the development of a specific tool for the recognition of youth work with the view to include it within the existing Europass instruments. But the development of an appropriate and satisfying tool for certification and recognition, that meets with the development of quality standards, (self) evaluation and assessment procedures for non-formal learning, is a sensitive task. Still, since 2007 the Youth in Action programme holds its own tool for the recognition of acquired learning outcomes. This 'Youthpass' aims to foster the recognition of non-formal learning within the Youth in Action programme in order to support the employability of young people and youth workers, the social recognition of youth work and the reflection upon the personal non-formal learning process. It is based on the common European principles regarding the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and uses the key competences for lifelong learning as a reference framework for the description of and reflection on learning experiences. On the one hand, Youthpass is a qualified certificate which confirms the participation in a Youth in Action project and describes the learning outcomes. On the other hand, it is a self-assessment instrument which aims to raise awareness about the strengthened competences during the project. It thereby contributes to the quality development of the entire programme and provides an added value for participants, organisation, National Agencies and

the European Commission. Although Youthpass forms part of the Youth in Action programme, the instrument also serves as an impulse for better recognition of non-formal learning within national contexts (cf. Bergstein, 2007).

However, it is commonly agreed by all actors in the youth field that non-formal education and learning should be better regognized and more action is needed. Within a just recently published policy paper on non-formal edcuation, the European Youth Forum proposes a quality assurance framework for youth work in order to improve its recognition (cf. European Youth Forum, May 2008). Furthermore, in Prague in June 2008, on the initiative of the youth departments of the Council of Europe, the European Commission and others, stakeholders from youth policy, research and practice met to discuss the further strategy for a better recognition of non-formal learning.

6. European and German youth policy on non-formal education in a comparative perspective

The following Chapter deals with the results of my empirical study with regard to the implementation of the Youth in Action programme in Germany. Following the programme's general objectives, the current framework for European cooperation in the youth field, and taking into account that the programme is ascribed to be a key instrument for providing non-formal learning experiences to young people (cf. Chapter 5.5), I focused my analysis and interpretation of the data on these themes: young people's active citizenship, social and occupational integration, youth dimension in other policies, and validation and recognition of non-formal learning and education.

First, I present the results concerning the implementation of the programme in relation to the European policy requirements towards non-formal education from a German perspective. Secondly, I will show to what extent European policy on non-formal education has an impact on German youth policy and non-formal youth work in general.

6.1 The implementation of the Youth in Action programme in Germany

To what extent does the implementation of the programme in Germany meet European policy requirements towards non-formal education? How far do those requirements converge or diverge with the demands on and traditions of non-formal education in Germany?

6.1.1 Active Citizenship

According to Hoskins (2006, p. 4), active citizenship can be defined as *"participation in civil society, community and/or political life characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and*

in accordance with human rights and democracy". In order to assess to what extent the Youth in Action programme contributes to an increased active citizenship of young people, one might differentiate between individual outcomes (civic competences) and social outcomes (participation and values connected to participation) achieved through educational processes (cf. ECOTEC & ECORYS, 2007, pp. 97ff; Hoskins, Villalba, van Nijlen, & Barber, 2008, pp. 13).

In order to encourage young people to become active citizens, and in particular European citizens, the Youth in Action programme aims to increase the participation by young people in the civic life of their communities and in the system of representative democracy, and to provide support for learning to participate (cf. Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 2003, pp. 1ff). Consequently, all Youth in Action projects should be based on and use participatory approaches as a pedagogic principle. In addition, they are required to have a 'European dimension', that is to say they should encourage young people to reflect about European society and its values (cf. European Commission DG Education and Culture, 2008d, pp. 4f).

6.1.1.1 Participation as a pedagogic principle: Active involvement of participants

The final evaluation of the predecessor programme YOUTH criticized that the activities did not sufficiently encourage the participation of young people and recommended to consider more the active involvement of participants in projects (cf. ECOTEC & ECORYS, 2007, pp. 28f).

Overall, the interview respondents of this sample agreed that the programme guidelines and actions put a strong emphasis on the involvement of young people in all parts of the projects – compared to other programmes Youth in Action is considered to be very participatory. Youth initiatives, projects that are initiated and set up by young people themselves, are the prime

example for active participation. However, the interview respondents also listed several reasons for limitations of participation:

The active involvement of participants is strongly dependent on the self-concept of the project promoters. *"There are projects where the involvement of participants is outstanding because it is part of the credo of the organisation…but then there are also organisations who already prepared the programme in advance in order to offer young people something. … I am convinced that participation is not a priority issue of many applicant organisations."*

It was also mentioned that the application requirements are rather result than process oriented and thereby impede young people's participation. The expert from the German National Agency said: *"We expect perfectly described projects…the more perfect, the better the possibility to receive a grant… if somebody just writes on a piece of paper that he or she doesn't know what the project is about, because the young people are just beginning to develop it, that would be difficult*". As a result of the application criteria, the projects are much more steered by professional youth workers than actually wanted.

Apart from this, it was recognised that the active involvement of participants is also strongly related to the issue of short term and long term pedagogy. With regard to short term projects such as youth exchanges "*this has to do with the question how to create out of a short term a long term experience…how to involve young people in the preparation and in what way the project evolves from their life situation."*

Furthermore, one interviewee commented that the idea of *"young people teaming up and developing their own projects"* might be too idealistic or even a *"constructional fault"* of the programme. The need for supporting structures is acknowledged, but they should offer enough space for young people to take part in the project development and decisions.

To sum up, in general, the pedagogical principle of participation is theoretically accepted by the German experts, as it conforms with the educational objectives of non-formal youth work

and citizenship education in Germany. But in practice, there are several obstacles with regard to the active involvement of young people: Administration requirements related to the application procedure, action dependent involvement possibilities and the self-concept of youth organisations.

Increasing the involvement of young people poses more of a challenge for the project promoters than for the programme itself. Therefore it was e.g. suggested to include them already in the preparation phase before the application procedure starts and/or to create more long term educational experiences (irrespective of the project duration). Additionally, respondents proposed to qualify youth workers and youth organisations by raising their awareness and offering training courses on how to better involve participants in all parts of the projects.

The lack of youth participation in the project development of some organisations might be explained by the fact that there are different types of organisations working in the field of European non-formal youth work in Germany (cf. Chapter 4.3.1): Youth organisations whose explicit educational mission is based on the active participation of young people as a principle and other organisations whose mission rather is to provide services to and for young people, e.g. vocational training or youth welfare organisations.

Altogether, I think that the result oriented focus of the application does challenge the German and European understanding of process-oriented non-formal youth work (see Chapters 4.3.3 and 5.5.1).

6.1.1.2 Participation by young people in community and civil society

The final evaluation of the predecessor programme YOUTH also tried to assess the programme's effectiveness on 'citizenship in practice' by measuring young people's

participation in lobby groups, community or society related institutions after the actual project. According to the evaluators the programme is could be more effective in increasing active citizenship in practice. However, compared to overall participation rate of young people it is rather promising (cf. ECOTEC & ECORYS, 2007, pp. 99ff).

The interview respondents had very diverse ideas concerning this issue, most probably due to their different background and due to different ideas and dimensions of participation. According to them, youth initiatives and European voluntary services are projects which offer a social dimension and aim to bring an added value to the local community. They thereby develop explicitly active citizenship.

One expert believed that the programme's impact on young people's participation is difficult to measure: On the one hand it may further encourage those which are already on their way (to participate actively in civil society), on the other hand it may just set "a biographic landmark" for those who participated in their first mobility experience.

According to the conviction "*the longer the experience, e.g. European voluntary service, the more people get actively involved"* it was considered necessary to create more long term educational experiences. Therefore the project EuroPeers (that joins young people who have participated in the programme and who then inform other peers about their European experiences) was launched by the German Agency and may serve as an example of 'best practice' with regard to the active 'citizenship in practice'.

But it was also admitted that the majority of the projects fail to build a bridge between the local level and national and European policy, and do not sufficiently encourage young people to become politically active or involved. *"If I think about the project presentations of European volunteers, it is a strong matter of individual progress and experiences"*. With reference to the political dimension, the respondents stressed the significance of strengthening the European dimension by improving the knowledge and critical reflection about Europe's society and its values in all projects. As a prerequisite, youth workers need to have an

understanding of Europe's policy, society and values. Furthermore, they need to be better qualified in terms of methodological approaches how to promote European citizenship in practice. In order to support the implementation of the programme in this, the advisory committee for the Youth in Action programme of the BMFSFJ established a working group on 'European consciousness'.

Whenever the interviewees referred to the German concept of citizenship education (*Politische Bildung*), it was evident that the European requirements with regard to the issue 'participation in community and civil society' correspond to the German approach. However, although citizenship education is a general principle of non-formal youth work, it appears that German educational bodies from the field of citizenship education have higher and more specific demands towards the inclusion of a political dimension within the programme than other youth organisations (see Chapter 4.3.2).

6.1.1.3 Participation in representative democracy: Participation as a topic itself

As a response to the missing political dimension within the predecessor programme, Youth in Action offers new sub-actions to better encourage young people's participation in democratic life: Youth democracy projects which deal with participation as a topic itself, and meetings of young people and those responsible for youth policy (e.g. Structured Dialogue). The latter will be dealt with more explicitly in Chapter 6.2.1.

According to the experts of this sample, youth democracy projects take more explicitly into account the political dimension. Although there still seems to be a lack of understanding among the relevant stakeholders what these projects are exactly about, the interviewees approved that the German National Agency for the Youth in Action programme tries to creatively develop a common understanding together with project promoters. However, one

interviewee from the field of citizenship education expressed concern whether these projects actually intensively reflect upon the term and meaning of democratic participation (see above).

The co-operative attitude of the German National Agency and the project promoters towards developing a common understanding of youth democracy projects shows that youth organisations are considered as partners and are involved in decisions affecting the interests of young people in Germany (see Chapter 4.3.1).

6.1.2 Social and occupational integration

6.1.2.1 Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities

As stated before (cf. Chapter 5.5.2), non-formal education is ascribed to complement formal education and training. By using an approach that is closely linked to young people's needs, aspirations and interests, non-formal education provides positive learning experiences that should ease a possible route into formal education and training. The resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 2006, p. 2) recognised especially the potential of non-formal education with regard to the social integration of young people with fewer opportunities.

According to the German and final European evaluation, the predecessor YOUTH programme was not sufficiently effective in targeting young people with fewer opportunities, although this has been a permanent priority. Yet, the evaluators were not able to measure this matter very precisely because there was no precise definition of the term or concept of 'young people with fewer opportunities' nor any benchmarks or indicators concerning the percentage to aim for (cf. BMFSFJ, 2007; ECOTEC & ECORYS, 2007; JUGEND für Europa, 2004).

The interview respondents agreed that the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities remains a challenge for the current programme. However, they insisted to have a closer look at the reasons for the difficulties.

First, it was pointed out that the involvement of this target group strongly differs with regard to the different actions. Statements of the interviewees were: *"The European Voluntary Service is not a service that attracts young people with fewer opportunities to such a degree"*. *"The Voluntary service is traditionally opted for by middle-class girls with secondary school diplomas, inbetween school and study time."* Since the requirements of this action are often too demanding for young people with fewer opportunities, it would be necessary to create more and better support structures, e.g. more financial support, projects with more guidance, etc.

Secondly, it was noticed that the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in short term projects, such as youth exchanges, is quite difficult. The more they become involved in a long term pedagogically supported process, the easier it is possible to motivate them for participation and to include these respective experiences in their daily life.

Although the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities is undoubtedly linked to the programme structures and requirements, it might also be partly explained by the fact that the missions of many German project promoters do not specifically aim at this target group. Like European youth work, non-formal and international youth work in Germany have always been open to all young people. Although there are specific programmes targeting at young people with fewer opportunities, the transversal integration of this target group is not an issue in general national funding programmes (such as the KJP), in the work of many German youth organisations nor in youth work reports and statistics. It seems that German youth organisations and associations have not been too encouraged to address specifically this target group to participate in international or European mobility experiences. However, there is a

rising awareness for this issue on national level. E.g. within the German report on 'Voluntary activities' in the framework of the OMC, the BMFSFJ underlined the need to improve the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in voluntary work and reported on different local, federal and national initiatives (cf. BMFSFJ 2006).

6.1.2.2 Promotion of employability

Non-formal education is assigned to have a potential with regard to the development of key competences that are relevant for the access to the labour market. By contributing to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences with regard to personal development, social inclusion and active citizenship, non-formal education indirectly improves employment and training prospects. Although the European framework does not create a direct relation between employability and non-formal education, it can not be denied that this is anticipated. According to Du Bois-Reymond (2003, pp.18), non-formal education plays a crucial, but also ambivalent role within European and member states employment strategies. *"Non-formal education is more and more used to mend both the neglect of the formal education system, especially vocational training, which produces a growing number of 'misfits', and the inability of the labour market to absorb (all) young people."*

On the one hand, this development has upgraded the status of non-formal education as being indispensable to take action against youth unemployment. On the other hand, non-formal education gets tied to economic and labour market needs and thereby looses its autonomous status (cf. Du Bois-Reymond, 2003, pp.18ff). Obviously there is a dilemma between the objective of economic utility and the emancipatory objective of self-realisation.

While all experts in the sample acknowledged the important contribution of the programme to the acquisition of key competences, the ones with a research or practice affiliation uttered concern about the close link to employability.

According to them, as a non-formal education programme, Youth in Action's primary domain is to foster the personal development of the individual by engaging in a dialogue with 'the other', thus promoting in particular the development of social, intercultural and civic competences. It was also mentioned that, independently from any specific purposes, the programme helps young people to gain more self-confidence and autonomy. While this already is a value in itself, it is also regarded as a prerequisite for young people's professional and educational careers. *"Key competences are not professional qualifications, but they open up professional development"*.

The respondents strongly objected to look at the acquisition of key competences solely with regard to their professional usability.*" I would object that the programme receives a professional stamp, i.e. aiming to directly deduct job qualifying measures or modules from it. This would overburden the programme and it is also something that the programme does not want to achieve."* If non-formal learning experiences were just assessed with regard to their future usability in the labour market, then, non-formal education would be rather functionalised according to the interviewees. *"This is damaging and mortal for the thoughts that are realised in the field of non-formal education … the value as such…is not sufficiently seen. The programme needs to keep its autonomous character …it is not a step tread for professional careers.*"

Thus, taking a close look at the respondents' statements, one can easily discover that the German concept of *Bildung* shines through (cf. Chapter 2.1). The interview respondents from research and practice highlighted the intrinsic value of non-formal education and emphasised that the Youth in Action programme's main objective is to promote active citizenship. However, by recognising that the acquired competences are also job relevant the respondents also acknowledged the programme's contribution to employability. Although the European and German demands on non-formal education obviously differentiate with regard to the matter of employability, the Youth in Action programme achieves to build a bridge between

the different understandings by prioritising the goal of active citizenship without excluding employment related aspects.

6.1.3 Validation and recognition of non-formal education and learning

With the promotion of lifelong learning as a guiding principle the complementarity of non-formal and formal education was commonly acknowledged (cf. European Commission 2000). Although it is agreed that non-formal education should be upgraded and be better recognised, and that this matter implies a certain degree of formalisation, two major problems have to be faced: *"Firstly, it is by no means clear how formal and non-formal education/learning can or must be combined. Secondly, how the instrumentalisation of non-formal education/learning through economic and labour market demands can be avoided is also an open question."* (cf. Du Bois-Reymond, 2003, p.13).

With regard to the complementarity of non-formal and formal education, the interview respondents reported that in Germany both learning contexts traditionally used to be strictly segregated. At policy level, e.g. the BMFSFJ is in charge of matters of youth and non-formal youth work. *"But as soon as a young person undertakes anything with regard to school matters"* the responsibility shifts to the formal education sector which is taken care of by the federal states. However, though being separate fields, the cooperation of school education and non-formal youth work is a matter of discussion in Germany. Some primarilry underline the distinction of the two fields. As one of the interviewee's: "*There are the ones who do formal education, and there are the youth workers who do non-formal education"*. When cooperating with each other, youth work actors fear that non-formal youth work might not only loose its most valuable properties, e.g. its participatory and voluntary character, but that it might also be absorbed by the formal systems.

In contrast, another expert thought that the cooperation of non-formal and formal education could also be used to sharpen non-formal education's profile. *"Formal education institutions …should realise that our activities have an added value…it is therefore necessary to define it."*

The issue of reconciling the nature of non-formal education with the need for formalisation for reasons of validation and recognition has also been discussed in terms of development of assessment tools which are reconcilable with the nature of non-formal education (cf. Du Bois-Reymond, 2003, p.13).

As a result, Youthpass, as the instrument for the validation and recognition of non-formal learning experiences in the Youth in Action programme, is also approached with scepticism whether it is able to bridge this dilemma.

With regard to the assessment procedure one of the experts wondered: *„How far do we get tied up with formal education by issuing these certificates?"* Another interviewee thought that "*it is difficult to class non-formal learning into categories …as it is an individual and self-determined process. To classify this into comprehensible criteria according to the book is sort of a contradiction in terms… Assessment would be diametrically opposed to non-formal youth work."* While young people should know what they have learned, self-assessment is considered to be the one and only appropriate tool.

However, describing achieved non-formal qualifications in such a way that others might comprehend it, can be also regarded as a positive challenge. Furthermore, it was reported that Youthpass initiated reflection about the aim and educational concept of non-formal youth work activities and thereby contributed to an increased quality development.

Altogether, it was agreed that validation and recognition of non-formal learning within the framework of lifelong learning requires to make learning outcomes more visible. Therefore *"we will inevitably have to face the issue of certificates"*.

It was suggested that critics of Youthpass, who think that it *"puts a professional qualification grid on non-formal youth work and that does not do justice to the non-formal youth field",* should be taken seriously, the implementation of the instrument should be jointly evaluated. Furthermore, interview respondents expressed the need for academic periodical research about non-formal learning's processes and its effectiveness.

While at European level the issue of validation and recognition of non-formal learning receives high priority, the debate on this topic makes rather slow progress in Germany. However, one might observe an increasing importance of this matter by different examples. Being involved in an OECD activity in this field was intended to create a systematic overview of the various options for recognition in Germany. Unfortunately, the country report focused on vocational training and formal education and touched the field of non-formal youth work just marginally. With regard to the validation and recognition of non-formal youth work at national level, there are various national initiatives taken that rather follow and can be incorporated in the European attempts.

6.2 European cooperation in the youth field in practice: Effects on national youth policy and youth work

6.2.1 Participation in shaping youth policy

The matter of participation in representative democracy has received a new impetus with the application of the OMC and the Structured Dialogue in the youth field (cf. Chapter 5.4.1 and 5.4.2).

According to a study on behalf of the European Youth Forum (cf. Rahja & Sell, 2006), the OMC has so far solely been the matter of governments and has not yet sufficiently involved actors of civil society. Additionally, neither a guarantee of access to information and procedures nor a decision on clear structures for consultations has been achieved (cf. Wicke, 2007, p. 408).

Overall, these outcomes were confirmed by the interviewees with regard to the implementation of the OMC in Germany, yet, they were further specified.

While access to information is not guaranteed, the public transparency with regard to the German OMC reports was positively acknowledged, even if the dominant presentation of positive achievements in those reports may rather prevent a critical reflection (cf. AGJ, 2006). Additionally, the online survey of the BMFSFJ on the future of youth political cooperation in Europe was seen as a positive sign with regard to the involvement of civil society.

The representative from the BMFSFJ thought that, at European level, the cooperation of BMFSFJ with the representatives of the federal states, other policy sectors or the *Bundesrat* works quite well. Concerning European issues all relevant decisions are consulted upon in advance in order to avoid internal tensions and to be able to represent a German position. But *"the OMC foresees many actors…not just the national government…but also broken down on the federal, regional and local level…not just the official political level but also youth organisations, educational institutions, and also research institutes."* While the close cooperation of the BMFSFJ and the German National Agency for the Youth in Action programme and the ensuing concertation between German youth policy and European objectives received a positive feedback, the involvement of other levels and actors was judged rather negatively. *"The involvement of the federal states and the local communities is one of the problems"*, demonstrated very explicitly by the example of the Structured Dialogue. While all interview respondents appreciated the development of the Youth in Action programme with regard to the new youth political dimension and new funding formats, e.g.

the Structured Dialogue (*"that is the consequent further development of participation claims and thoughts"*), they reported on problems with regard to its successful implementation. First, they underlined the lack of structures for the consultation process. In Germany the Structured Dialogue has for far almost only taken place on national level, but hardly on regional level. It has not yet been resolved how the top down strategy with regard to the involvement of federal, regional or local levels nor how the bottom up process in terms of taking up the ideas by young people should work. *"The young people asked: Who do we talk to and what happens with the results?"*

Secondly, the Structured dialogue is supposed to be an instrument that strengthens the dialogue between youth and policy. But according to the opinion of one interviewee, *"there are many politicians …who do not even know the term 'Structured Dialogue'".* In this respect, it does not seem unlikely that in the case of missing dialogue partners, young people do not feel taken seriously. *"One needs somebody who is close to Europe.. and has an interest to promote it."* Or in other words, it is necessary that politicians from all levels bear upon European youth policy and youth work.

Furthermore, it was criticized that, so far, the Structured Dialogue has rather been a line up of a number of individual events without broad participation and sustainable results. According to the respondents, the successful implementation of this instrument requires a coordinating body or other reinforcing institutions who bundle information and thereby produce an added value between the different levels. Although the European funding of this instrument as part of one action of the Youth in Action programme was highly valued, it is considered to be at best a "*drop in the bucket*", and not sufficient in terms of achieving its task.

Last but not least, the involvement of young people with fewer opportunities or not formally organised ones within the consultation process was not regarded as satisfying.

To summarize the main points, the interview respondents thought that European youth policy and the Youth in Action programme offer the general framework for youth participation. Although the topic of participation has already been on the political agenda in Germany before, it has received increasing attention and recognition by the European initiatives.
Yet, with specific regard to the implementation of the European 'participation instruments' in Germany, one has to face the following challenges:

- While the government and other actors at national level are already open-minded, the involvement of the federal states, regions and local authorities and their interest in the programme and youth political developments has to be strengthened.
- Funding of European youth policy has to be complemented by other funding sources from local, federal or national level.
- Due to Germany's federalism and different levels of youth policy structures there is a strong need for a coordination of the dialogue process
- The involvement of young people with fewer opportunities or not formally organised ones demands a reconsideration with regard to the shaping of German and European youth policy: Traditionally organised at local, regional and national level, German youth organisations represent young people's interests at all political levels (cf. Chapter 4.3.1). The European demand challenges the exclusive representative claim of German youth organisations in youth policy matters.

6.2.2 Youth dimension in other policies

While the White Paper on youth already suggested to take more account of 'youth ' in other sectoral policies, the importance of including a youth dimension in other policy areas was further highlighted in the European Youth Pact. The Commission recommended to

concentrate on the policy areas stated by the European Youth Pact (cf. Chapters 5.3.1 and 5.3.2).

According to Wicke (cf. 2007, p. 411), the Pact however has hardly received any attention in the national reform programmes of the Lisbon process in Germany. This is probably due to the fact that German youth policy institutions and structures took rather long to realise the potential of the Pact. Because of its broad cross-sectorial approach German stakeholders did not immediately see their respective added value in it. There is a lack of comprehensive information, and little structured debate. There is no institution that actually coordinates the process and no services of information and support (cf. Wicke 2007, pp. 411f).

This dilemma is also reflected in the interviews. The experts mentioned several negative examples which show that the European Youth Pact has not been very effective yet. With regard to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, the ministries for education, employment and social affairs are much stronger involved than the one of the youth field. A cooperation with the BMFSFJ and the integration of the key competences as a prerequisite for young people's educational development or their access to the labour market has not been taken into consideration. *"Education has a lot of problems, in particular with young people with fewer opportunities, where traditional education structures fail…youth work has appropriate means and tools… but, although there is a lot of talk about the cooperation of formal and non-formal education… they stay separated, anyhow."*

Another example of bad practice referred to was the development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which is supposed to be strongly linked with and based upon the EQF. Although the EQF takes into account all learning outcomes, whether achieved in formal or non-formal education systems (cf. Chapter 5.1.2), the non-formal sector is not involved in the debate on the NQF. One expert criticised the blindness for the huge value of non-formal learning experiences in the youth field and commented rather cynically: *"So much concerning*

the practice of cross sectoral policy in a rather obvious area …even though the youth field is non-formal learning par excellence."

Nevertheless, the Pact contributed to an intensified cooperation between the Federation departments to a certain degree. One expert stated: *"My contacts to the Federal Ministry of Economics, Federal Ministry of Education, Federal Chancellery, Federal Ministry of Finance were considerably intensified around the topic European Youth Pact…we call each other more often… I get more information… I also get their papers for comments on the table and thereby have a broader spectrum of information."* Other respondents thought that the joint participation of representatives from the BMFSFJ (youth policy) and the BMBF (education policy) in the advisory committee for the Youth in Action programme can already be judged as a positive approach for an exchange of information.

So far there remains a sceptical attitude with regard to the impact of the European Youth Pact on youth policy as a cross sectoral policy all over Europe.

One interviewee stated with regard to the Lisbon strategy and the Pact: *"There is a lot of talk about young people… that they should be taken more into consideration transversally …but in the implementation …how does this take place?…how is that written down in the reports? How is every EU programme checked upon its effect on youths or whether young people need a specific agenda point?…unfortunately, the youth ministers are not transversally involved everywhere."*

Altogether the idea of including a youth dimension in other policies was generally welcomed by the respondents as an important step. At the same time, they stressed the importance of maintaining youth policy and youth work as intrinsic and separate fields of policy, too.

7. Final conclusions and recommendations

The issue addressed in this study is a very complex task, and whereas there is a vast amount of policy documents, academic material about the research topic is missing. In the following, I will tighten the main arguments developed in the course of the analysis.

The results of this study indicate that European youth policy on non-formal education has made a strong impact on German youth policy and youth work already. Based on the analysis of the current European areas for youth cooperation, I was able to prove that German youth policy and non-formal youth work are marked by growing European convergence.

First, it was observed that the debate on non-formal education is interlocked with the goal of the Lisbon agenda, to make the European Union the most competitive economy in the world. While it is important for non-formal education advocates to keep defending the merits of its emancipatory character against the pressures of the labour market needs, non-formal education's link to employability has to be faced in German youth policy and non-formal youth work as well.

Secondly, it was argued that the target group of 'young people with fewer opportunities', which had not been defined like this in the German context before, is now on the agenda of German youth policy as an integrative policy approach as well. Whether the European aim to achieve a uniform definition for this target group meets the different culturally based understandings of national youth policies with respect to the concept of 'youth' and major target groups of youth policies needs to be further explored.

Although the effects of youth policy as cross-sectoral policy have been more than limited in Germany, optimistically one could see a tendency or rising awareness for this new way of thinking.

The impact of European youth policy on non-formal education on the German concept of non-formal citizenship education (*Außerschulische Politische Bildung*) demands a rethinking about or even a redefinition of the field as such:

- Non-formal citizenship education has to deal thoroughly with the economic demand of usability of non-formal learning experiences and acquired key competences
- Non-formal citizenship education and formal education should be interlocked with each other. In order to be not absorbed by formal education, there is a need to sharpen non-formal education's own profile, e.g. to emphasise its quality and added value. Moreover, it should be debated to what extent it is possible to create a holistic approach to education.
- Although non-formal citizenship education is a rather established field with regard to theory and methods, it does not have a broad impact on the structures of representative democracy. The promotion of European tools, such as the Structured Dialogue, might give a new impetus to non-formal citizenship education with regard to the participation in democratic processes in Germany.
- The changing focus from process-orientation towards learning results can be seen as a positive challenge for non-formal citizenship education. Prior thinking about the learning outcomes may foster reflection about the aim and educational concept of non-formal youth work activities and thereby contribute to an increased quality development.

Finally, this is where the issue of quality comes further in. According to the interview respondents, the European Youth in Action programme has set quality standards for (international) non-formal youth work. Youth in Action has qualified and "europeanised" project promoters by training staff with regard to contents and methods. Furthermore, the programme fostered a common understanding of its users with regard to educational quality in

non-formal intercultural learning contexts (Otten, 2007, pp.144f). One interviewee stated with regard to this matter: *"The cooperation with professionals and young people who participated in the Youth in Action programme, is rather simple, because we have a common understanding about things…such as intercultural learning, youth participation, non-formal education. There are more discrepancies between organisations from the same country who use different funding sources and interpret non-formal education differently."*

The demands of validation and recognition of non-formal education put forward the necessity of quality standards for the field of non-formal youth work. Currently, there are different initiatives on this topic taken up at European level that also might be of relevance for the further development of German youth work, e.g. a quality assurance framework proposed by the European Youth Forum, a study on 'Quality in non-formal education and training in the field of European youth work' on behalf of the SALTO Training & Cooperation Ressource Centre (supporting structure of the Youth in Action programme), or a recent European expert meeting on further strategies for the recognition of non-formal learning in the youth field.

Accordingly, the further debate about quality and qualification with regard to the recognition of non-formal learning within the youth field needs to take place at the following levels:

- youth field itself.
- educational processes in non-formal activities, e.g. staff competencies with regard to selecting, designing and organising participants' learning process.
- recognition processes, e.g. the implementation of recognition tools such as Youthpass.

Finally, based on my study results I turn to some recommendations, first for research and then for policy and practice:

1) There should be more periodical research with regard to the effectiveness of non-formal learning and linked recognition processes.
It was stated more than once that there is a lack of academic material on the topic. In order to foster the recognition of the non-formal youth work field, it is essential to analyse non-formal learning processes and thereby enhance recognition.
Moreover, criticism with regard to recognition instruments, e.g. Youthpass, should be taken seriously and give reason to evaluate recognition processes thoroughly.

2) The cross-sectoral youth policy approach should be reinforced by strengthening the cooperation between youth administrations and those in charge of the implementation of and reporting on the Lisbon strategy at national level.
In Germany, there is a need for a coordinating body, services of information and support, and a structured debate.

3) It is important to be aware of different understandings and diverging interpretations of non-formal citizenship education.
There is a rising awareness that it is necessary to re-discuss the position and understanding of *Außerschulische Bildung* in Germany. In spite of differences, the term is usually equated with non-formal education in current debates at national level. Since there is obviously a theoretical deficit with regard to its nature and characteristics among German non-formal youth work actors, further discussion should be encouraged.

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9. Appendix Interview guidelines (English translation)

Introduction

Thank you for taking time and being willing to take part in the following interview.

May I first ask you for permission to record the interview (just for my personal use).

May I use direct quotations and if yes, may I use your name and/or function?

The structure of the interview will cover the following 3 main areas …

To start off, could you first describe your work relationship with the programme Youth in Action?

1.Assessment of the results of the mid-term and final evaluation of the predecessor programme YOUTH

- Could you point out 2 high and 2 low points from the evaluation that you consider to be important for the development of the new programme?
- According to the evaluation, the demand of the programme with regard to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities wasn't met. Additionally, it was criticized that the programme did not encourage sufficiently the active involvement of participants. Do you share this view? How do you explain this matter?
- According to the evaluation, "the programme has been effective in improving citizenship competencies, influencing job orientation and contributing to a higher sense of solidarity and the feeling of being a European citizen. The programme has been less effective in fostering active citizenship". In your point of view, to what extent was the programme able to accomplish this? Where yes, and how? Where no, and why not?

2. Changes within the new programme Youth in Action with regard to the extended youth political dimension

- Youth in Action is much less "a pure pedagogical programme" as the predecessor YOUTH programme. It has a much stronger political profile with requirements that reach beyond those aimed by short-term pedagogical measures. Do you welcome this change? If yes, why? If no, why not? How can the programme be used?
- With regard to the implementation of the lifelong learning strategy (aims of the memorandum fostering active citizenship and employability) Youth in Action is ascribed to have a pilot function in the youth field. In your opinion, how is this demonstrated in the programme? To what extent is Youth in Action as non-formal education programme able to fulfil this pilot function? Do you see fit that the Commission promotes the approach of non-formal education that way, and why?
- Youth in Action needs to take into account the context of the acquisition and promotion of the key competences for lifelong learning – it needs to foster those competences that should equip young people for adult and working life.
  How can Youth in Action as a non-formal education programme contribute concretely to develop these key competences? In your point of view, are there any key competences that Youth in Action is able to foster specifically? If yes, which ones?
- New in the programme: Youthpass as the instrument for the validation and recognition of non-formal learning experiences. How do you relate to the criticism that learning experiences within the programme are reduced to functionalised, social and market orientated utilisable key competences?
- The obligation to validate and recognize the participation in Youth in Action projects creates growing demands towards the programme with regard to quality and

efficiency. Does the implementation of the programme in Germany meet these needs, as far as you can judge this after 1,5 year?

3. Implementation of the Youth in Action programme in Germany and influence on German youth policy and non-formal youth work

- Youth in Action aims to foster transnational cooperation and partnership within the youth field. How does the European cooperation work in practice in Germany?
  What about the German federal system? What is the role of the federal states and the local authorities within this process?
  Does the European youth policy cooperation within the youth field in Germany show any concrete effects or visible results?
  (Ministry question: Did the German government have certain criteria/conditions in order to approve the new programme Youth in Action?)
- The practice of non-formal youth work in Europe is diverse. There are enormous differences between the member states with regard to the understanding of what non-formal youth work, should, can and may achieve. Is Youth in Action the lowest common denominator which the member states found regarding the cooperation within youth policy and youth work? Is that sufficient in view of the challenges that youth work is facing (in particular with young people with fewer opportunities)?
  Do you see opportunities/indications for an intensification of European cooperation within this field in the foreseeable future? Do you think there is a chance of youth policy becoming a transversal topic in national policy shaping?
- Significance of European cooperation for the practice of non-formal youth work in Germany. In your point of view, are there synergies of German and European levels with regard to youth work? If yes, what kind of examples do you know?
  Do European influences result into a reduction of non-formal youth work standards or do they contribute towards more quality standards in Germany?

How can YOUTH IN ACTION contribute to the qualitative development of non-formal youth work in Germany? According to your opinion, do the aims of and demands towards the programme contradict with the self-concept of non-formal education as such (fixed content, didactic planning of measures, etc.)?

To what extent does the traditional understanding of non-formal citizenship education in Germany comply or contradict with the European demands towards education?

<u>To conclude</u>

Is there anything else with regard to the topic that you consider important and I probably did not address with my questions?

Thanks for the interview… If further questions arise while analysing the interview data, may re-address you per e-mail?