



By Hans-Joachim Schild

In memoriam Peter Lauritzen

an inspirer and a challenger

When the editorial team of COYOTE magazine decided to dedicate an article to Peter Lauritzen on the occasion of his planned retirement in November 2007, we did not know that this would sadly become an obituary. The original idea for this article was to look back at his professional career and particularly to the last 10 years when the Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission was one of his many priority areas.

Now, after Peter passed away on 29 May 2007, we have the sad duty to remember his extraordinary contribution to the development of a European youth sector. His impact on what we call today the triangle of Youth Work, Youth Research and Youth Policy and more particularly on the people who work and worked in this sector is immense. It's up to all of us to carry forward his life's work and testimony.

Peter joined the Council of Europe in 1972 as the first tutor of the then newly-established European Youth Centre in Strasbourg. In 1985 he became Deputy Director of the Centre. From 1995 to 1999, Peter was Executive Director and instrumental in establishing the European Youth Centre Budapest, which became the first permanent service of the Council of Europe in a country of Central and Eastern Europe. Since 1999, he was Head of the Youth Department and Deputy Director of Youth and Sport. Peter committed his whole career to the development of the Council of Europe youth sector and was instrumental in shaping youth policy, youth research, youth work and youth participation in Europe.

For obvious reasons it is impossible to highlight all his contributions and stages of life in a professional career that lasted more than 40 years. We would like to concentrate on the current key priorities of the Directorate for Youth and Sport in

the period 2006-2008 and show how clear it is to see where Peter has left his indispensable marks:

- Human rights education and intercultural dialogue
- Youth participation and democratic citizenship
- Social cohesion and inclusion of young people
- Youth policy development



► Human rights education and intercultural dialogue

When the European Youth Centre was created in Strasbourg in 1972 as a residential out-of-school educational establishment, one of the leading ideas was the 'intercultural learning laboratory'. The youth field started to work with intercultural issues as part of their objective to foster youth mobility. At this time stakeholders in intercultural programmes agreed on an educational

concept which aimed at creating and experiencing tolerance of ambiguity, solidarity, empathy and creativity. This was a combination of critical work on prejudice and cultural dominance with values coming out of youth and community work. Peter, as a first tutor in this time, established and designed the work priorities, the working methods and the programme in a pioneering way. But he did not only invest in the development of practice, he always stressed as well the political



dimension of the work in the Centre, emphasising the need to live and work with basic values and convictions. Thus, within the Council of Europe intercultural dialogue and intercultural learning were embedded in a universal discourse on Human Rights on the one hand and a very specific discourse on the Council of Europe's core values on the other.



This approach generated the “all different – all equal” campaign against racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and intolerance in the nineties and is at the origin of the recent new campaign on “Diversity, Human Rights and Participation”. It also governs the Human Rights Education Programme and the COMPASS process, which must be seen as a success story as such. Consequently Peter focused his energies to a large extent on crisis regions where he saw the strongest need for intercultural dialogue and human rights education, be it in the beginning in Eastern and Central Europe (and his engagement in building up the European Youth Centre in Budapest), be it in South Eastern Europe and the Balkan region or in the cooperation within the EuroMed region.

But Peter saw also the risk of overloading the intercultural issue: in a Council of Europe internal text he stressed that “many conflicts in the world are simply rooted in political interests, social injustice and economic power. However, challenges like understanding the globalisation process, building the enlarged Europe and opening a promising future for children and young people require intercultural competence, which should become part of the school curriculum and of youth and community work in the future. What has been described for the youth field is just as valid for other sectors of the house – promoting the intercultural issues into a value and knowledge-based understanding of the Europe we live in”.

▶ Youth participation and democratic citizenship

The promotion of youth participation and democratic citizenship is one of the corner stones of the work of the Council of Europe in the youth field. In this context, particular value is attached to encouraging and educating young people to fur-

ther participating in public life. It was Peter who paid constant attention to relevant research on this subject, showing that young people are highly positive toward democracy as a form of government, but are increasingly critical towards the way its institutions work, declining participation in elections and membership of political parties.

Peter encouraged his colleagues and partners in the Council of Europe's youth sector to actively engage in the development of policy tools and educational and training activities with particular focus on: specific democracy related issues such as participation in local and regional life; the role of non-governmental youth organisations as a place for learning and practicing democracy; participation in democratic institutions and processes and access of young people to decision-making. The Council of Europe European Youth Campaign on diversity, human rights and participation, which was strongly promoted by Peter, is just one example of Europe-wide activities aimed at promoting active participation of young people in further building democracy.

Last but not least the unique co-management system in the Council of Europe must be mentioned: Peter was a committed advocate of putting the issue of participation into practice in this way, often likening the position of the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg to the idea of putting a youth club in a ministry. He accompanied various periods and modifications of this system and played an active role in protecting it and developing it further. Today it is an exemplary model for promoting participation and partnership in democratic institutions since it shares decision-making powers equally between representatives of governments and youth organisations.

▶ Social cohesion and inclusion of young people

It was Peters' deep conviction that it is impossible to build a Europe of Social Cohesion, which is one of the Council of Europe's main goals, without integrating into the mainstream society so-called deprived urban areas, which exist in many municipalities in the member states. Poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion in such areas he saw as a clear violation of human rights of the people living there, as they experience negative effects on their life chances as a result of the simple fact that they live in those neighbourhoods. Especially for children and young people, growing up in such circumstances means a lack of development chances and limited participation in the society right from the start; which represents a blatant discrimination. Therefore he believed that a major strategy for fighting against exclusion and discrimination was to foster identity, cultural diversity and citizenship.

In his speech “The social city as a space for citizenship in human rights education for young people” on the occasion of the conference ““Children and Youth policies in Europe – a chance for disadvantaged neighbourhoods” 2005 in Berlin, Peter

underlined that the most fascinating challenge in Europe is its incredible cultural diversity and - as a consequence - the various identities of its citizens. He saw Europe as a source of enjoyment and rejoicing, but also a potential for stereotypes, prejudices, misunderstandings, intolerance and racism.

His crucial question was how such a big European organisation as the Council of Europe, with such a wide mandate can reach out to citizens in Europe? How can it reach out to young people? Is there any chance that this organisation could make a useful contribution to young people in urban areas? Does it have any relevance to the concept of the 'social city'? His answer to these questions was simple:

"For us, in the Council of Europe, working with young people on items such as citizenship and identity in a changing world means, paradoxically, to go local. In a second step it means to confront what makes up our own identity - Human Rights, Democracy, the Rule of Law - with the concrete life circumstances of young people and to show how relevant these concepts are to living a decent life. In a third step it means to develop youth policies and to see to it that these are closely connected to youth and community work practice. Without opening the big chapter of what youth policies are about in Europe I would like to point to the triangle of 'personal development - employment - citizenship'. By proving the relevance of working with young people, of empowering them and by including them into the running of public affairs youth and community work is a key area exactly for better employment prospects and active citizenship".

“Peter saw as a main objective the provision of opportunities for young people to shape their own futures.”

▶ Youth policy development

It is only about 20 years ago that the Council of Europe started to focus more strongly than before on youth policy development and on supporting youth policy in member states in order to create the conditions necessary for an effective participation of young people in society and for ensuring their well-being and social inclusion. The first Ministerial conference 1990 in Lisbon stressed the need for more research on youth issues and the 1995 informal Youth Minister meeting in Luxembourg decided to start Youth Policy Reviews in member states. Since then in total fourteen reviews and in addition (since 2002) eight youth policy advisory missions were carried out.

Peter did not only administer these activities; he developed their conceptual framework and participated actively in most of them. Thus, the reviews and advisory missions contributed to better understand what youth policy is about in Europe. In his speech in the Luxembourg EU Presidency conference "Organising Dialogues between youth field actors through

networking and trans-sectoral co-operation" in 2005 he underlined that the event was "the fruit of a long historical process of ever-increasing co-operation between research, civil society and public authorities in the area of European level youth policy". He recalled that at the very beginning of European cooperation in the youth field there was not much or even no cooperation between research and policy or research and youth work practice.

It was also the result of Peter's efforts when the third summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Warsaw 2005 adopted an action plan in which "developing youth co-operation" played a prominent role. According to the plan, a youth perspective will be integrated in all Council of Europe activities and its unique position in the youth field will be further developed. It was for the first time that the summit had given such a degree of attention to the youth field.

Peter was dreaming of a Council of Europe framework convention on youth policies and a White Paper process at the Council of Europe, complementary to the White Paper on Youth in the European Union. This would bring the triangle of researchers, NGO's and governments together in order to prepare for the future of this sector in the Council of Europe. Today, his vision produces fruit and we are quite advanced: the Council of Europe is going to draft the "Agenda 2020", a document which will pave the way for the organisation's youth policy in the next decade.

When defining youth work and youth policy Peter saw as a main objective the provision of opportunities for young people to shape their own futures. Thus youth work is a summary expression for activities with and for young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature; it also includes sports and services for young people. In this understanding youth work belongs to the domain of 'out-of-school education', to culture and to the domain of social inclusion and welfare. It aims towards the personal and social emancipation of young people from exploitation and dependency. According to this definition Peter aimed at mainstreaming youth in all Council of Europe activities and giving a youth dimension an importance in the whole range of Council of Europe activities. This applies particularly when looking at the core values of the organisation, Human Rights, democracy and rule of law, but also to social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and civil society development. However, he also saw the risk when mainstreaming youth to foster the marginalisation of the youth sector in the organisation. For this reason he strongly insisted on the unity and cohesion of all youth activities, from education to the European Youth Foundation, from mobility schemes to study sessions, from campaign activities to joint programmes with partners such as the European Commission.



► Final remarks

Many more items could be highlighted and many more areas could be tackled to which Peter contributed in an extraordinary way: the whole area of recognition of non-formal learning, the dimension of quality in youth work and of indicators to measure such quality, the tendency of professionalisation of youth work(ers), the specificities and needs in regions such as South Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and in EuroMed, the Third Sector development..... also his contribution to the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe could be another story as such: situated between critical scepticism, full backing and alignment.

It remains to carry on his legacies, his visions and challenges, his historical memory and sociological thinking, his ability to anticipate needs and trends, his independency in the way of thinking, his institutional scepticism with regard to goals, strategies and methods. By reinforcing networks and dialogues he contributed to overcome the different tribes, as he called the various groups in the youth sector (and beyond), and to create real partnerships and friendship.

When we opened up a special tribute section to Peter on the Partnership web site, contributions flowed in from the different corners of Europe and even from Brazil. He has been a reference for youth work across Europe and gave his imprint to intercultural youth programmes, European youth workers training, non-formal education and needs-based youth policies, as it was expressed in one of the condolences. Others voiced that, over many years, we have all appreciated his warm



and generous personality and respected his solid professional competence. His forceful intellect, analytic strength, sense of humour and his dedication to the promotion of a pluralist, participative and culturally diverse Europe was and will remain an example and guideline for many. As one tribute stated: he was an inspirer and a challenger. Peter Lauritzen's legacy for European youth work, youth policy and non-formal education represents both a cherished value and a great responsibility for us. ■

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