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## **YOUTH RESEARCH IN LUXEMBOURG AND ITS PROSPECTS<sup>1</sup>**

One may wonder if a small country of some 400,000 inhabitants (which normally corresponds to a medium-sized city) really needs to carry out research on youth, and if it would not be better to refer to studies in the field coming from large neighbouring countries. They indeed have institutions specialising in this area, as well as the required know-how. Although such an option might prove advantageous financially speaking, it is nevertheless impossible to systematically appeal to knowledge-production going on in Germany, France or Belgium as their socio-economic, linguistic, educational and cultural context is different. The obvious conclusion is thus that specific research on Luxembourg youth cannot be evaded. It proves all the more necessary due to the fact that socio-economic and cultural conditions change rapidly and sometimes even in different ways depending on countries. Let us examine briefly the contextual parameters forming the framework of such research.

### **1 Contextual parameters**

#### ***1.1 The linguistic background***

This situation, which is easily explained by the Grand Duchy's history, is specific enough to be mentioned here (Hoffmann 1979; Berg, G. 1993; Newton 1995). Luxembourgish is the mother tongue of most people having Luxembourg nationality. It was originally a dialect belonging to the group of Frankish, but it has on the other hand extensively borrowed from French. The law of 1984 on languages used in the country has taken into account the growing influence of Luxembourgish. The law defines Luxembourgish as the national language of Luxembourgers and, without using the term "official language" for either French or German, has defined their use in public life. French is the "sole binding legal language", while in administrative and judiciary matters the three languages, i.e. Luxembourgish, German and French, may be used indifferently, the choice of the language resting not with the Administration but with the applicant (Soulas de Russel 1992).

#### ***1.2 The economic situation and immigration***

The country's economic situation can only be termed as "good" when compared with that of neighbouring countries. An unemployment rate of 4%, of which one fourth are young people, would indeed be considered as negligible in most other countries. Until the mid-

70s Luxembourg depended on the iron and steel industry. The crisis which hit the sector demanded a radical change (Weides et al. 1987). The new market favoured by the Government in order to ensure the future has been the banking sector (through favourable tax rates, a guaranteed banking secrecy, etc.). This policy has borne its fruit; currently economic growth is indeed due to the tertiary sector (i.e., banks, insurance and associated services) (Als 1995). Thus, on the whole, for fifty years the Luxembourg economy has created a number of jobs well in excess of its domestic demographic capacities (Als 1989). This was true when the steel industry was flourishing, and it is still true nowadays, when services offer the largest number of jobs. Luxembourg's economy could thus not do without a foreign work force. 33.4% of the population currently inhabiting Luxembourg (whose total population numbers 412,000 as shown by the 1996 census) is foreign; officials from the EU and their families are included in that number. But Luxembourg's economy also offers jobs to a sizeable number of people residing in France, Belgium and Germany, who cross the borders each day to come to work (Tibesar 1992; Fehlen 1995). The number of these frontier workers is currently in excess of 55,000 which corresponds to almost 15% of the population.

### ***1.3 The school system<sup>2</sup>***

Considering the country's multilingual situation, the use of languages in education is also more complex than it is in neighbouring countries (Berg/Thoss 1996). The *kindergarten* welcomes children over four years of age for a period of two years. Luxembourgish is the main common language. Children learn German from their first year in *Primary* school; it is in that language that they learn both reading and writing. German is the main common language for the six years of primary education. The teaching of French begins in the second year of school; it is not used as a common language except for French lessons. German remains the main teaching language along the lower cycle of *post-primary* education; in the upper cycle, and in particular in high school (i.e., Lycée), French becomes in its turn the essential common language, so much so that for the secondary school leaving examination evaluation in the various subjects is carried out almost exclusively in French.

Mainly, through language requirements, which in a way are vital for the country, school in Luxembourg is rather demanding and very selective (Kraemer 1995). The rate of pupils successfully finishing secondary school is sensitively lower than it usually is in most European countries. Different steps have been taken to reduce excessive strain on pupils. Thus, one of the aims of kindergarten education is to draw foreign children to the practice of Luxembourgish language; firstly, because this will later on make communicating in

school and daily life easier, and secondly, because it will facilitate the learning of German. Traditionally elementary education is longer than it is in the neighbouring countries; it indeed lasts till the age of twelve. In addition to this secondary education even comprises seven years. Moreover the new curriculum of elementary education stresses the integration function of schooling. At the level of secondary education, the great strictness of assessment has recently been somewhat attenuated by allowing pupils to compensate poor achievements in one or two subjects by an overall high average mark. Nevertheless, transition from primary to secondary school remains a most critical moment in a pupil's life course. This is partly due, to the hierarchical and ramified structure of the educational system. It characteristically lacks a comprehensive phase for students between the age of 12 to 15 years old, and students' own choices are only taken into account in a rather marginal way.

Youthlife is furthermore affected by the intercultural background of schooling in Luxembourg. This may be explained by different reasons. First, teaching and learning take mostly place in a foreign language. Thus, the gap between classroom and daily life communication is increased. Moreover, as all secondary teachers have been trained abroad and as secondary education aims at qualifying students for attending foreign universities, references to various cultures outside the system are almost permanent. Finally, the percentage of foreign children in the educational system is very high. Locally, especially on the elementary level, it may exceed 80%.

## **2 Current youth research**

### ***2.1 A high potential, insufficiently used***

Considering this particular situation as defined by Luxembourg's multilingualism, the characteristics of the educational system, the multicultural environment, the strong and uninterrupted immigration since the beginning of the century, and the diversity between the various areas of the Grand Duchy's territory, Luxembourg presents itself as a kind of predestined laboratory for social research. Considering the over-80 percentage of foreigners in the young population of various neighbourhoods or towns, youth research would undoubtedly be quite interesting.

Generally speaking, Luxembourg has at its disposal a structure allowing scientific research to be carried out on an institutional basis. Until recent times the respective constitutive bills<sup>3</sup> conferred the right to do research to institutions of higher education, like the *Centre*

*Universitaire (C.U.)*, the *Institut supérieur d'études et de recherches pédagogiques (ISERP)*, the *Institut supérieur de technologie (IST)* and the *Institut d'études éducatives et sociales (IEES)*. The main problem was that research funding lacked clear legal rules. In 1987 parliament passed an important bill on the public funding of scientific research and development.<sup>4</sup> Research projects have to be submitted to a governmental committee which selects the projects to be carried out and decides upon their financial resources. Moreover the legislator, by the same text, contemplates the possibility to create public research centres (*Centres de recherche publics, CRP*) directed by a steering board and owning their own budgetary means. Until now four CRPs have been created: CRP-Centre universitaire, CRP-Henry Tudor which belongs to IST, CRP-Health which belongs to the National Health Laboratory and finally a CRP appointed to the postal and telecommunications service. Practically, this means that projects in the field of human sciences are mainly proposed to the governmental committee by higher education institutes, whereas projects belonging to the domain of applied sciences and technology transfer, which very often involve private partners, are rather set up in the CRP-framework.

The above mentioned general set rules have been sectorially modified by two steps in educational policy.<sup>5</sup> In 1993 the Ministry of Education created a service, called *Service de coordination de la recherche et de l'innovation pédagogiques et technologiques*, whose main task is the coordination of educational research, but which is also allowed to initiate and to carry out research projects. In 1996 the reform bill on higher education has given higher education institutes a large autonomy at the financial and decision-making level. So that one could expect that in a few years time it will be made easier for them to develop their own research policy. Even with regard to political and social decision making it could be imagined that through the effect of the new status of higher education the right to intervene will not rest solely with the usual partners of social tripartite, but also with a representation of the sector of training and knowledge production as well as of other non-governmental and associative organisations.

Unfortunately, at present there is no institution having as its mission to carry out research on youth, and neither is there any research worker occupied full time in this field. The amount of the funds devoted to social science research in general and to youth research in particular, has until now been rather small. There is also, except in very rare instances, no link whatsoever between the various authors of surveys on the situation of young people: we are not used to contacting one other, no general outline is drawn up, we rarely quote others, we even often to read others and to be read by them. There is in consequence no

reference to shared paradigms and little continuity in the various contributions made to the research on youth. The socio-political visibility and impact of surveys carried out on youth are very scarce, and the general public usually has little knowledge of it, if any.

## ***2.2 Further enriching elements***

The situation described above is however not as gloomy as it seems. Quite a large number of surveys have been carried out. We try to discuss a small sample of the studies from the last two decades in order to present various institutional settings and thematic issues. The most famous research coming from Luxembourg is probably the MAGRIP study (Bamberg/ Dickes/Schaber 1977), which was started at the teacher training centre, now called *Institut supérieur d'études et de recherches pédagogiques*, in the late sixties. It probably holds a key position in the institutional and disciplinary history of empirical research in social and educational sciences. MAGRIP means *matière grise perdue* (i.e., lost brain matter), and the choice of this title actually documents an approach aiming at equal opportunities, quite similar to the one meant by Georg Picht's slogan on undisclosed talent reserves ("*unausgeschöpfte Begabungsreserven*") in the Federal Republic of Germany at the same period. MAGRIP is a longitudinal study covering a sample of 2327 students out of a population of 4802, who attended the 6th form of primary school in 1968/69. The variables considered concerned social background, academic achievements, intelligence and personality, the regression model proposed explains about 53,7% of variance of school careers.

The MAGRIP-study, representing a kind of break-through, has generated a lot of subsequent projects, as for instance highly sophisticated path analyses of factors explaining success in school (e.g. Kneip 1979; 1989) as well as evaluation studies (e.g., Bamberg et al. 1988). A most interesting study has been carried out by Lucien Kerger (Kerger 1988/89) who reexamined the former MAGRIP-children almost twenty years after the initial data collecting and thus creates an important element of a kind of generation history. Gaston Schaber, the former head of ISERP, founded the CEPS-Institute (*Centre d'études de de Population, de Pauvreté et de Politiques Socio-Économiques*) where he has gone on with research on, for instance, delinquency, poverty and regional socio-economic development. In regard to European youth studies it may be interesting to mention that in the context of these studies a sophisticated know-how concerning developing comparative data-bases (Schaber 1994) has been created.

The research team working at the training centre for social workers (IEES) is actually also rooted in the MAGRIP study through the professional origin of senior researchers. Two

research projects carried out there were concerned with youth. The first one deals with transition from school to labour (Matheis 1980). The second one is a study on drug abuse. It is a questionnaire survey examining a sample of 1428 students with an age mean of 17.6 years (Matheis et al. 1985). It bears on knowledge on drugs, information sources, opinions and attitudes towards drugs as well as young people's consumption of drugs. Further chapters are devoted to schooling, leisure time, attitudes towards family and life expectations. As the empirical analysis is strongly subordinated to pedagogical objectives, the conclusions present proposals on preventing young people from drug consumption. Fortunately, the study was replicated nearly ten years later (Matheis et al. 1995) and thus provides a basis for comparative analysis.

Some of the other empirical studies belong to a wholly different area. Non governmental organization, such as the Olympic Committee or Caritas, ordered studies from researchers working at the nearby university of Trier. Thus, Georges Steffgen and Peter Schwenkmezger (Steffgen/Schwenkmezger 1995) reported the results of an inquiry addressed to 2316 adolescent members of athletic clubs about social and personal determinants of activities in sports, in order to make recommendations on the promotion of young talents. A group of student researchers gathered around Manfred Schenk, an educationalist at Trier University, committed the assessment of social work in Luxembourg, have produced descriptive studies of the youth welfare and care system, among which there is an interesting document analysis on Luxembourg's social policy concerning young people (Schenk/Meyers 1996).

Generally speaking, the wealth of these surveys, is made up of disciplinarian and methodological diversity, as it has already been shown for educational research (Berg 1990). Most of them should be considered as "beginnings", and apply models imported from the outside. The links with the university systems of various neighbouring countries act as a further factor of enrichment. Most of these surveys pursued other objectives, as did those ones dealing with school failure or the situation of drop-outs, but they nevertheless allowed to enrich knowledge of youth. Indeed, they actually remain open a transversal representation integrating different arenas of youth life. So, while establishing a specific youth research, we should mind not to reproduce traditional subdivisions between education, vocational training, family and leisure time in too strong a way.

### **3 Outlook on the future**

#### **3.1 *The need for coordination***

In as much as decision makers in our country lack the necessary information leading to the implementation of a coherent youth policy, the prime object of youth research should not deal with 'big science'. It is on the contrary important to provide for links in the classical triangle of youth policy, youth work and youth research. Institutionally speaking, it will thus be necessary to think in terms of exchange rather than in terms of monolithic research structures; the aim will be to establish a communication node and to bring together interested parties, however various backgrounds, through the intermediary of a light associative structure. The framework of the research on youth will have to be defined so as to promote the implementation of inter-institutional networking and the emergence of representations shared by actors in both theory and practice. The aim will be to arrange structures for synergetic knowledge production and to give youth policy and youth work the opportunity to become knowledge-based and problem-solving.

#### **3.2 *Intermediary structures***

Concerning research on youth carried out up to now, what was most lacking was a link between the various research undertakings, be they State or privately financed. In order to ensure a certain coherence in research in view of making an efficient youth policy possible, and without aiming at the setting up of a national institute for youth research, it would at least be necessary that means be granted by creating instruments allowing for the planning, coordination, supervision, not to say evaluation of the research.

Luxembourg already has at its disposal a series of recently set up instruments allowing to partly fulfil this task in various degrees. In chronological order, these instruments are the CeSiJe (*Centre d'Études de la Situation des Jeunes en Europe*)<sup>6</sup> and a work group on youth research cooperating with an inter-ministerial consulting committee. The work group and the inter-ministerial committee are aimed at allowing Government coordination: upstream, they are supposed to collect and make accessible the data of various government departments; downstream, they will explore what knowledge needs to be taken into account by research. Created in 1995 by a group of Luxembourg and foreign experts, the CeSiJe's purpose is to set up research in the field of the social sciences and that of youth in particular. It aims at preparing and launching survey projects on the situation of the young in Luxembourg proper and Luxembourg's greater area. Rather than to carry out such projects by itself, it endeavours to promote and coordinate. In its

pursuit of such objectives it emphasises a dialogue with large European and international structures, both public and private, with a close interest in the situation of youth; it intends to grant assistance to administrative and political decision makers in the setting up of survey or research projects as well as through the organisation of seminars and meetings between researchers and decision makers in political and private life, to promote a better understanding of the processes of the socialisation of young people in Luxembourg and in Europe. In the long run, in order to improve communication and cooperation between researchers, it also seeks to contribute to the setting up of an observation centre on the situation of youth in Europe.

The range of instruments necessary to build up a coherent youth policy resting on preliminary and parallel surveys and research still demands further agreements with native and foreign research institutions likely to carry out research considered as essential by the Consulting Committee and the CeSiJe, such as the present agreement concluded between ISERP and the National Youth Office, which was signed by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Youth. Similar agreements could be entered into with other higher institutes. Other arrangements between the political and research spheres could readily be imagined through the regulated intervention of researchers acting as experts in the planning and assessment of youth action at the communal level or yet again through the setting up of a youth-report as has been delivered by the *Jugendbericht* in Germany.

In order to render the CeSiJe and the Consulting Committee operational, their manysided competence relying on four different orientations will have to be articulated: communication and negotiation competence to be able to function within an inter-institutional framework linking both theory and practice; competence to fulfil a relay function with the scientific community in a resolutely interdisciplinary perspective; competence for taking part in already existing international networks and functioning by itself as a network; assessment competence to evaluate research projects, pilot projects and policies.

### ***3.3 About contents of research***

The themes with which youth research deals in Europe are no doubt essential, but in Luxembourg it is as yet too early for a catalogue of the problems to be studied and a research agenda to be established at a time when research structures are only in the process of being defined. It seems clear that precise themes should be defined through a process of social negotiation in which a certain number of forces may intervene in an organised way. A first and urgent task to be performed is to carry out an inventory of both

existing data and the gaps to be filled. This work will be the basis on which a research agenda can be set up following democratic concertation.

As we will of course be bound to take into account the simple fact that research contents will change in time depending on the political, social and cultural environment, contextualisation has to be an important work package in setting up the agenda. We should stick to a participatory methodology following a bottom up way of conceptualization and linking theory construction to the semantics of grass root initiatives. We have already exercised how this could be done in the peculiar field of youth project evaluation (Mørch 1995; Berg 1995).

Moreover, being aware of the pitfall of mere reactivity to semantic changes and discourse modes, we should profit of the opportunity to take part in the coming out of an emerging European youth research (cf. e.g. :du Bois-Reymond/Hübner-Funk 1992; Chisholm 1995). We hope, this hopefully will provide an integrating frame making our results comparable and giving stability to our concepts, for integrated and comparative studies will contribute to sharpen our conceptual tools (cf.e.g. Lagrée 1997). We should locate our projects clearly in subdomains which are, internationally speaking, gain a more precise outline, such as for instance: identity construction in the life course; sociology of ages, generations and intergenerational relationships (Lagrée 1992); youth participation in social, civil and cultural life and access to citizenship; the prevention of risks and the functioning and development of support networks for young people. In opposition to the situation in most countries, Luxembourg's national youth research, will be internationally integrated, or it will be not at all. Therefore, from the very beginning, we cannot avoid to cope with misunderstandings due to language and culture differences and we have to integrate intercultural reflexivity and comparative methodology in our approach. In the progress of our own work, it will be vital to us, to operate, in which form whatsoever, an international researchers' network, which will at least function as an echoing mirror to our own projects.

## **4 Conclusions**

Let us review at this point the characteristics which we deem essential for the future. Considering the fact that the national research market is very narrow, the actual setting up of a large research institute would indeed not be very realistic. The DJI model is not adequate for Luxembourg. Free room will have to be guaranteed for research in the system of higher education in order to preserve the necessary diversity. The Interministerial Committee and the CeSiJe, which act as the bodies responsible for the

coordination of Luxembourg research, have to exploit supply and demand on both the domestic and the international research markets. As regards the international outlook, Luxembourg youth research will have to fit into existing networks in order to exchange and create synergies, grant assistance in view of an international visibility of research, and duly take part in the internationalization of scientific research. In the very same spirit, Luxembourg research will endeavour to establish a dialogue with inter- and supranational European structures such as the European Union and the European Council. And it will also have to formulate offers towards cooperation inside the greater region.

<sup>1</sup> The present article is mainly based on papers which we presented at an international CeSiJe-seminar held in Luxembourg, February 24-27, 1997. We are greatly indebted to Sybille Hübner-Funk who has motivated us to write this contribution and to Marianne Hansen-Pauly for having revised our text.

<sup>2</sup> For general information on Luxembourg's education system, see (Ant, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Cf.: Loi du 11 février 1974 portant statut du Centre universitaire de Luxembourg; Loi du 21 mai 1979 portant création d'un Institut supérieur de technologie; Loi du 6 septembre 1983 portant a) réforme de la formation des instituteurs, b) création d'un Institut supérieur d'études et de recherches pédagogiques, c) modification de l'organisation de l'éducation préscolaire et de l'enseignement primaire; Loi du 6 août 1990 portant organisation des études éducatives et sociales.

<sup>4</sup> Cf.: Loi du 9 mars 1987 ayant pour objet: 1. l'organisation de la recherche et du développement technologique dans le secteur public; 2. le transfert de technologie et la coopération scientifique et technique entre les entreprises et le secteur public.

<sup>5</sup> Cf.: Loi du 7 octobre 1993 ayant pour objet: a) la création d'un Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Pédagogiques et Technologiques; b) la création d'un Centre de Technologie de l'Éducation; c) l'institution d'une Commission d'Innovation et de Recherche en Éducation; Loi du 11 août 1996 portant réforme de l'enseignement supérieur.

<sup>6</sup> CeSiJe, Centre d'études sur la situation des jeunes en Europe, Association sans but lucratif, 16 rue Notre Dame, L-2240 Luxembourg; Tel. +352 478-6456, FAX: +352 464186; chairperson of the governing board: Georges Wirtgen.

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