

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AS EARLY PREVENTION

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The effort of USA learning from Finnish policies and services, and vice versa, has two problems. One is the overall high contextuality of what works in one country and its low transferability elsewhere. Thus learning from the practices in other countries is not so much about *imitation* as it could be about *inspiration*? Perhaps one of ideas to get inspired is the way out-of-school learning is emphasized in Finland; learning a variety of skills and competences in the 3rd space between school and the family can be an important early prevention of social and individual problems. At the same time, there is lot that Finland can learn from the US practices; for example, from the way the voluntary sector cooperates with the private sector, how it recruits, trains, motivates and uses voluntaries to work with youth and from its overall flexibility.

The other problem limiting comparisons is the different perception of individual versus societal responsibility and of the consequent role of the public sector. Finland is an example of "Nordic Welfare Ethos" which emphasizes (1) equality, (2) strong public responsibility and (3) generalist services for all. The citizens justify high taxes to make this possible: 81% of tax-payers agree with the statement: "Although it costs a lot to keep up good social security and other public services, a Finnish welfare society is always worth its price". This thinking is based on the idea of collective responsibility. World Values Survey (2009) asked the question: "Why are there in this country people who live in poverty?". In the USA 47% said it is "Laziness, no will-power" and 22% said it is because "The society treats people unjustly". The Finnish respondent did not think it is "laziness, no will-power" (20%), but rather that "The society treats people unjustly" (66%).

In Finland social policies are conceptualized as a layered pyramid. The top of the pyramid (the smallest part) consists of measures of "care" like children taken in custody, psychiatric services, treatment of drug dependancy etc. The second (a bigger) layer is "targetted early intervention", like targetted social work at school or with families at-risk, outreaching youth work and so on. The main emphasis is on the base of the triangle (the biggest part); "general early prevention" (basic services) like good quality school, free or low-cost day care, free health services, libraries, sports, cultural activities and youth work. The belief is that if you cut resources on the lower parts of the pyramid, the top (care) becomes unmanageable. Or the other way around, if you invest enough into the two lowest levels, there will be less to do in the top of the pyramid ("care").

The cities and municipalities run children and youth welfare plans (for 4 years), which typically consist of collaborative activities and services together with the Social, Health, Sports, Cultural and Youth Services. Thus all the services agree that a balanced investment in all levels of the welfare pyramid is the most effective approach. Many European countries which neglect early prevention and targetted intervention, face sizable and costly workload in trying to handle the problems of marginalized young people.

As a follow up to this approach Finnish Government has launched a priority initiative (2017) "One hobby for every child": "One hour physical movement per day for each school children" and "improving the accessibility of arts, cultural hobbies and youth activities for all children and young people". The Government argument for this is that "Recreational activities support a child's holistic growth and development, health and well-being."

Yet another example of the Welfare Ethos is the Youth Services, which exist in all municipalities as a free general welfare service (funded by the City). Bigger cities have a Youth Center in all City districts. The most developed one is the Capital, City of Helsinki (600 000 inhabitants), with about 50 Youth Centers and 300 professional youth workers. Typically the local youth services include:

- Youth Centres with 2-5 youth workers and a variety of hobby and cultural activities
- Support to Youth Organizations
- Digital Youth Work
- One-Step Guidance Centres – a multi-agency counselling service
- Street work
- Employment Workshops
- Targetted youth work with youth at-risk
- Cross-sectoral youth welfare teams

STRENGTHS OF YOUTH WORK/YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- ✓ Expertise in reaching, empowering and developing citizenship skills of young people, as well as the art of communicating with them.
- ✓ Access to youth not reached by other authorities.
- ✓ Capacity to work with youth through groups.
- ✓ Providing space and place for youth to meet and engage.
- ✓ Flexibility.
- ✓ Producing non-formal learning outcomes (see below)

THE STRENGTHS OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING/THE THIRD SPACE"

- ✓ Generic competences; critical thinking, solving everyday problems, communication skills, interpersonal and expression skills, empathy, teamwork competences
- ✓ Capacity to make context-sensitive judgements
- ✓ Learning values, norms and democracy, understanding and internalizing equality and other human rights, ability to act accordingly
- ✓ Becoming an active citizen (agency/participation/making changes)
- ✓ Including 'emotions', 'peers' and 'practice' as corner stones of learning
- ✓ Motivation and empowerment
- ✓ Innovation, flexibility and resilience
- ✓ Identity work; developing meaning in one's life