

Spain

To understand the meaning of youth work in the Spanish welfare state it is essential, on the one hand, to understand the focus on the family environment which characterises young peoples' transition processes to adulthood and which also permeates public policies. This is equivalent to saying that the Spanish welfare state has until now been based on solidarity, particularly cross-generational solidarity, which explains young people's delayed emancipation from their family. Issues relating to the socialisation of young people are normally solved within the family (private environment), while issues relating to young people's schooling and labour qualifications are solved within the educational system (public environment). This explains why family-orientated southern European welfare state policies and youth work activities tend to be underdeveloped. Moreover, these welfare states are characterised by a polarised revenue policy essentially directed towards the elderly, where budgetary allocations intended for family and for youth policies, such as for the development of youth work, have been very scarce. This has considerably restricted the development of national programmes for youth work, restricting the development of these programmes to a local level. On the other hand, and as a consequence of this family orientation that characterises the southern European welfare states, welfare and socialisation assistance have to be provided within the private family environment. Policies intended to promote the Third Sector and non-formal education of young people have just recently been implemented. This has had certain negative repercussions on the shaping and introduction of the concept of youth work.

In the case of the southern European welfare states, there is no official term or underlying concept of youth work. In contrast to the countries in northern Europe, in Spain this concept is difficult to apply when referring to youth policies, since there is an institutional and conceptual void on the subject, which is reflected in a variety of youth programmes. In many cases, youth work is understood as labour education policies developed at a local level and in the Third Sector, policies intended to promote the labour insertion of disadvantaged young people. The meaning of youth work in Spain is therefore fundamentally exemplified in youth policies intended to counteract the social exclusion and marginalisation of young people.

The main goal of youth policies with regard to youth work is to strengthen the participation and integration of young people in different spheres of society as citizens with full rights. As clearly stated in the YOYO project (2004), current policy discourses in Europe promote participation as a key principle of civil society. However, if participation is not linked to social rights – with the exception of the universalistic transition system in the Scandinavian countries – it tends to increase self-responsibility and individualises social risks. In particular, active labour market policies tend to undermine and restrict individual autonomy. However, if active citizenship is the democratic formula for self-determination within flexible labour markets, individual motivation is a valuable key for policy. From this perspective it is necessary to point out that in the southern European countries, and specifically in Spain, the limited development by the welfare state of social policies referring to family and youth has had a certain negative repercussion on the formulation of policy strategies and on citizens concerned with strengthening and legitimising the fields of action of youth work and youth workers.

The fields of action related to youth work in Spain have been channelled through an indirect and limited means by way of educational policies related to the formal education system. To a lesser degree, actions in non-formal education and in the vocational training sector have been developed by Third-Sector agents (associations, NGOs, etc.).

In Spain, the field of action of youth work is as limited in the hard policies as in the soft policies. This has had negative repercussions on the development of the sector and on the development of voluntary work, as well as on the affirmation of young people's rights as citizens and, in particular, in those groups of young people with inadequate training and with labour integration or social participation problems.