Evaluation study of Open Method of Coordination in the youth field

Evaluation study of the information access, actors roles and openness in the process implementation

Nina Rahja and Anna Sell
The Finnish Youth Research Society

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List of figures and tables

Figures

Tables

Introduction

The focus of this research is on one of the new forms of political coordination in the EU, namely the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The research gives up-to-date information about the practical implementation of the process in the youth field. The Open Method of Coordination was established by the European Council in Lisbon on 23 - 24 March 2000. It is often referred to as a "new" mode of governance (de La Porte & Pochet 2003, 3), which is based on principles such as flexibility and participation (Borras & Jacobsson 2004, 189, Trubek & Trubek 2005a). The concept of governance has been particularly useful for describing the unique European structure. Governance is not a new term, but its popularity has undoubtedly grown in the last decade (Sloat 2003; Jordan et al. 2005). The Open Method of Coordination's emphasis on transparency, democratic participation and learning has led to a particular interest in this governance mechanism from the perspective of deliberative democracy and active participation.

The research provides both quantitative and qualitative results. Research material consists of questionnaire replies presented by National Ministry representatives, National Youth Council representatives, NGO representatives and researchers. We have also conducted thematic interviews, which help to corroborate the earlier findings of the process and implications of OMC conducted during the Spring 2006.

In this research the main objectives are: 1) To examine the process of implementation of the OMC 2) To make observations on how actors have received and experienced the process 3) To evaluate youth participation in the policy-making process. The objectives and methods of the OMC in the youth field are meant to increase the involvement of young people and youth organisations in the European youth policy, especially aimed at increasing participation of young people in society.

I. OMC IN THE YOUTH FIELD

1.1 What is the OMC?

OMC is a new form of coordination of national policies consisting of the Member States, at their own initiative or at the initiative of the Commission. The OMC has been applied across a growing range of policy areas, including employment, social inclusion/combating poverty, and pension reform. With this method it is possible to define collectively, objectives and indicators in a specific area, and allowing the Member States, on the basis of national reports, to improve their knowledge, to develop exchanges of information, and to further promote the agreed objectives, which could possibly lead to revised guidelines or recommendations.(De Burca & Zeitlin 2003.) It is an experimental approach to EU governance based on benchmarking national progress towards common European objectives and organized mutual learning.

In the Lisbon strategy[1] the method is defined as involving:

> ➢ Fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long term;

> ➢ Establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practices;

> ➢ Translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;

> ➢ Periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organized as mutual learning processes.

OMC commits EU Member States to work together towards shared goals and obliges them to pool information, compare themselves to other states, and reassess current policies against their relative performance, thus promoting experimental learning and deliberative problem solving across the EU. It has been hailed as giving practical content to the idea of a distinctive European Social Model based on shared values. [2]

1.2 OMC in the youth field

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[1] Lisbon European Council (2000): 'Lisbon Extraordinary European Council. 23-24 March 2000. Presidency Conclusions.' *Bulletin of the European Union,* No. 3.
[2] (http://eucenter.wisc.edu/Conferences/OMC_Oct04/index.htm.)

The Commission[3] notes that the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) for youth is different from the OMC in other areas in two main ways.

➢ First, the objectives are qualitative, not quantified.

➢ Second, the implementation of the common objectives "is not the subject of national plans of action coordinated at European level".

The Commission says that these two differences were "indispensable for a consensual approach in the implementation of the new cooperation framework". But it adds that it is now important to consider the balance between the method's flexibility and effectiveness: "The implementation of the common objectives by the Member States is crucial for the success of the OMC. Each Member State, depending on its national situation, should draw up a plan of action to achieve the agreed objectives". (COM 2004.)

The framework for European Cooperation in the youth field is a political instrument that focuses, in its Open Method of Coordination (OMC) strand, on active citizenship. The other strand of the Framework focuses on the youth dimension in other policies.[4]

The White Paper along with a lot of other researches finds that young people are clearly less interested and less involved in official politics and official forms of memberships. This disengagement is often registered as a 'failure' to participate. William Walters (2005) has called into question the idea that young people are not engaged in practices of citizenship, but are involved in ways that are only barely recognized by contemporary political theory and research. It seems possible that the frameworks of the White Paper are incapable of registering or recognizing these forms of citizen participation.

In this research we want to examine the OMC and the possibilities of this process to offer chances for young people to participate. The EU Commission has sent questionnaires to the Member States and candidate countries in order to get specific answers on their expectations and common objectives they would like to see. The purpose of this study is to analyse if the OMC has been a workable method to achieve these common objectives to date, and potential improvements in methodology in the future.

1.3 European Youth policy

The concept of youth in a policy context is the product of national and historical traditions. It is concerned both with the general population of young people and with specific sub-groups within that general population, such as young women, offenders or ethnic minorities (Williamson 1999). In European countries with a long historical tradition for youth work and youth policy, there is a marked tendency to define youth policy as policies directed towards "young people" which includes some or part of children (depending on the definition), and sometimes even expand into age groups beyond the age of 24. In other

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[3] Commission of the European Communities (2004): Communication on the follow-up to the White Paper on *A New Impetus for European Youth*: evaluation of activities conducted in the framework of European cooperation in the youth field. Brussels, 22.10.2004 COM 694 final.

[4] Commission of the European Communities (2005): Commission staff working document. Annex to the Communication from the Commission to the Council "Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship" Brussels, 30.5.2005 SEC 693.

European countries, the generic term "young people" is not used at all in policy contexts, and in these countries there is separation between child policy and youth policy. Because of the fundamentally different youth concepts – the narrow one which excludes children and the wide-ranging one – it is very difficult to compare youth policy across Europe.[5]

In general, it is impossible to speak of "youth" as a collective singular in the sense of a subject adopting a more or less unified position; rather, the internal divisions among young people are at least equally strong as those among older adults, both in their attitudes towards politics and towards other areas in life. Heterogeneity often means inequalities, risks and vulnerabilities. For example, in many countries the transition paths take a very different trajectory among the higher social class young people and those belonging to some minority group. (Paakkunainen 2001; Siurala 2004.)

In adopting the White Paper, the Commission gave a clear signal that it stands with young people in their concern to be more closely associated with the policies that concern them. William Walters (2005) points out that the EU appears not as a parent but as the partner of young people, consulting and advocating on their behalf. It is said that Member States lose a lot of their position and status in the face of globalisation, markets and individualism. At the same time "New citizenship" is living based on situational, cultural and local factors. (Paakkunainen 2001.) It is difficult to perceive the new European citizenship and youth policy as a whole. There are no standard models on how the youth field is organised. On the state level there is a department or unit, in most cases as part of the ministry of Education, responsible for youth affairs. On the civil society side there are often *national youth councils* which bring together youth organisations under a joint umbrella organisation functioning as a lobby and internal service body. (Siurala 2004.)

The youth field is a small sector in the public administration. In many countries it has joined forces with the voluntary sector and other public sectors, like the social, cultural or the sports sector. Furthermore, youth policy finds it important to look after the needs and interests of young people during their transition to adulthood. (Siurala 2004.)

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) supports the Commission's view that processes that encourage young people to become active and involved citizens, that are aimed at helping them develop their capacities should be developed at local, regional, national and European level within the framework of the different European programmes. YFJ states that one of the most far reaching initiatives to create a European youth policy has been realised by the White Paper on Youth and the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC), established by the Council Resolution in 2002 and then followed by the European Youth Pact in March 2005. The Council of Europe has also conducted a lot of work on European youth policy such as national reports, study visits and international reviews.[6]

The concept of governance has been particularly useful for describing the unique European structure. In our research we have interpreted EU Governance to mean those networks, processes and practices through which ''citizens'' exercise control over the organisations to which they belong. By adopting the White Paper the EU has encouraged a dialogue with young people.

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[5] IARD (2001): Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe. Milano: Instituto di Ricerca S.c.r.I.
[6] (Youth Forum: http://www.youthforum.org/en/our_work/white_paper/ypolicyeurope.html)

1.4 Youth participation

Citizens' involvement in politics is essential for the credibility of institutions, as well as for the citizens' articulation of their demands (Letki 2004, 665). Participation in formal associations is considered a key activity in establishing a general level of social integration in terms of democratic citizenship. Civic participation is nearly always regarded as a "good thing" whether it is in the context of the development of the Third Sector between State and market. (Offe & Heinze 1992 according to Spannring et al. 2001). But there is a marked difference between countries with and without a long and strong tradition for youth associations: in the Mediterranean countries, there is a small but growing number of youth who are organised in youth associations; in the rest of Western Europe, the percentage of youth who are members of youth organisations and associations is higher but not increasing.[7] In the Eastern Europe the collapse of communism has meant a decline in the formal organisations representing "youth" as a category, for example, the voluntary activities was one part of the communist socialisation programme (Wallace & Kovatcheva 1998). Nordic countries have proved to have high membership of all forms of organisation and this has been stable or rising. Participation has also been traditionally high in Central-Western Europe. (Spannring et al. 2001.)

Structural aspects of youth conditions currently vary significantly within the European Union and additionally are not very well known. This also applies to the cultural aspects of youth conditions. By and large, it can be said that, despite the fact that several surveys have been carried out over the last thirty years on the cultural characteristics of younger generations in many European countries, a general picture of this topic is not yet available. [8]

One might anticipate that there will be more 'social action' by young people which will be attributed to arbitrary individualism. Recent changes in youth policy have moved the decision-making processes away from the orbit of youth participation. (Williamson 1999.) The aim of OMC method is give a chance to young people to participate in policy making processes.

1.5 Active citizenship

It is widely believed that globalisation calls for new, and more devolved kinds of political and social structure, in which individual citizens will play a more active part. However, across Europe, there is clear evidence of declining engagement in traditional democratic processes, and governments and other organisations are felt to be remote, and insufficiently accountable to their stakeholders. (Laitinen & Nurmi 2003,1) The "generational" explanation suggests that the world in which today's young people find themselves is not conducive for the development of their active engagement and participation (Henn et al. 2005). There have been efforts to encourage "active citizenship". This model emphasizes the responsibilities of citizens rather than their rights and stands in stark contrast to the original notion of social citizenship. (Wallace 2001, 22.)

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[7] IARD (2001): Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe. Milano: Instituto di Ricerca S.c.r.l.
[8] IARD (2001): Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe. Milano: Instituto di Ricerca S.c.r.l.

This suggests that people need to be re-engaged as 'active citizens', and able to make informed decisions about their lives, communities and workplaces. However, many people lack the skills, knowledge or understanding to do this, and this is particularly true of those with least formal education, and most at risk of social exclusion on other grounds. (Laitinen & Nurmi 2003, 1.)

Traditional notions of citizenship focus strongly, and often exclusively, on the formal political processes of the state domain. In this domain active citizens had been active in political parties, in pressure and interest groups, in local or national government, or in providing expert support for political causes. (Laitinen & Nurmi 2003, 7.)

However, today, individuals are members of multiple communities, with people increasingly drawing their sense of identity and membership from communities of gender, lifestyle, or consumption patterns, as well as from nations, work organisations, religious groups or political parties. Citizenship can be practised in many areas, not merely the formal political one. Individuals play a part as citizens in their local communities, their homes and workplaces, and through a very wide range of kinds of structure. They are driven by personal ethical values, and many are resistant to the competitive cultures of traditional political processes. (Laitinen & Nurmi 2003, 2-6.) Also the White paper recognizes young people as aspiring citizens (Walters 2005, 9).

To stimulate active participation of young people in society, one suggestion has been that the voting age should be lowered, in combination with citizenship education from primary age in schools using non-formal methods to make sure that every young person has an equal base of information.[9]

This research is organised in six parts, in which the OMC-process implementation will be described, analysed and criticised. Part 2 is about research methods. Part 3 provides findings from our research material on information channels of OMC. In part 4 we concentrate on the forms of implementation and actors involved. Part 5 highlights the factors that facilitate or complicate mutual learning or pooling of the information and part 6 gives proposals and views for the future development; how to strengthen the process and how to improve the participative potential of the OMC.

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[9] The Declaration of Vienna and Bad Ischl (2006): Declaration on the outcomes of the Youth Event hosted by the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Vienna/Bad Ischl, 28-31 March 2006.

II. DATA AND METHOD

This process-tracing research is predominantly based on expert interviews and questionnaires. Twelve full-length interviews were conducted with key public actors of the process, and questionnaires were sent to other people involved in the process. The questionnaire answers provide comparable, measurable and quantitative results and the open-ended questions as well as thematic interviews are used to gather qualitative data in order to give nuance to quantitative findings. Research data was gathered during spring 2006.

2.1 Data Collection

Questionnaire

40 completed responses were submitted by email. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the actors' position in the OMC process:

Figure 1. Respondent profile
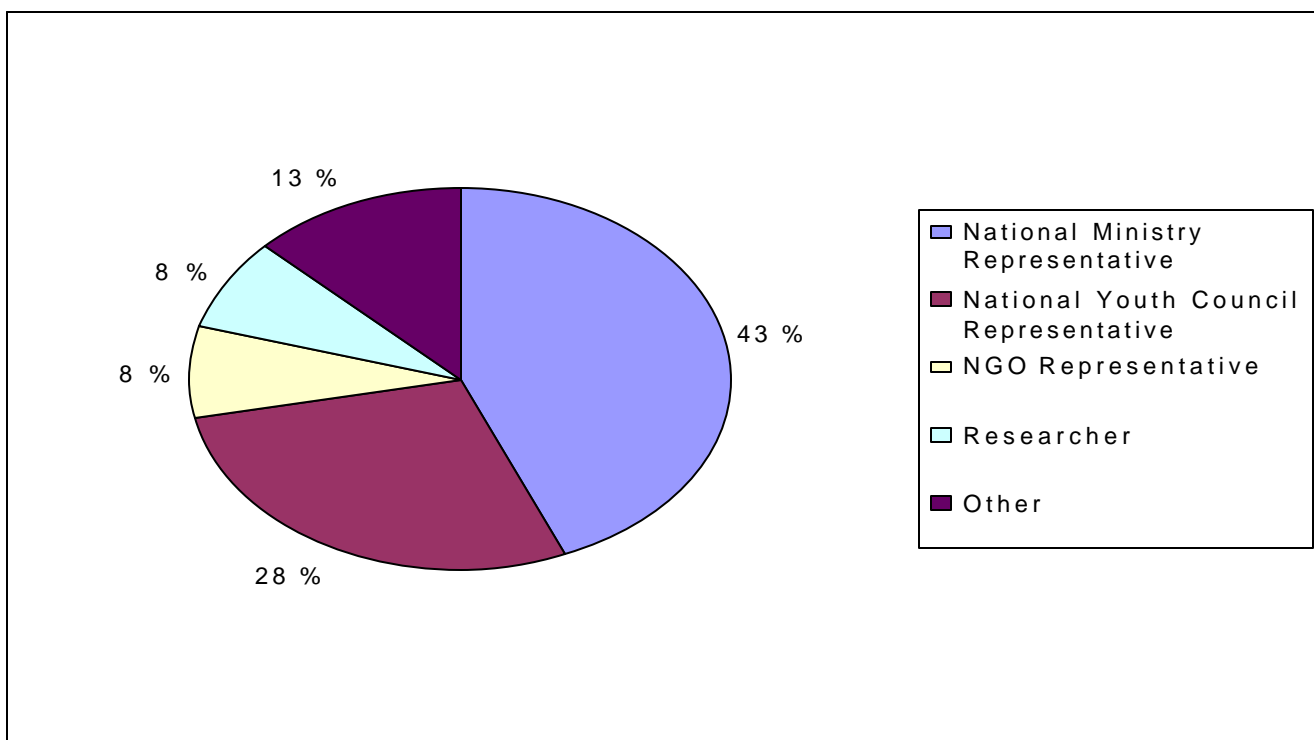
The survey results were geographically diverse (answers came from nearly all of the EU countries, excluding Denmark, Italy, Hungary and Poland). Despite the relatively small sample, the expertise of the respondents suggests that some valid generalizations can be drawn from the results. By expertise we mean that the respondents have been drectly involved in various stages of this process.

The open-ended qualitative questions in the questionnaire enable us to clarify what is important to the respondents as well as to gather information on further issues not covered in the scope of the presently applied questionnaire.

Interviews

Twelve thematic interviews were conducted. Interviews and the open ended questions were the primary source of data collection, applied in order to get information on the OMC and to build the case studies on the politics of youth at national and European levels. The interviews helped to corroborate the earlier findings about the process and implications of the OMC conducted during spring 2006. The interviews were conducted with the objective of understanding the situations and characteristics of the national institutions and local organizations. Also some observations were carried out in European Youth Forum meetings during the research.

Thematic interview material was collected from three interviewees from the National Ministry of Youth, four interviewees from Youth Councils and two researchers and three representatives of different kinds of youth organisations. The recorded interviews were conducted face-to-face, and typically lasted between 45 minutes and one hour.

The interviewees were selected from three different countries, those countries being selected because of their different EU history and different structure in the way Youth Policy is conducted. This framework portrays comprehensive information on understanding a youth policy system in a particular country. Elements of a country's socio-cultural, demographic and political context, organizational structure, reforms and development are of central importance (cf. Wamai 2004).

The countries selected were France, Finland and Slovenia. In France the local social, cultural and youth sectors join forces with volunteers to provide services for young people. France is an old EU member, where a governmental youth body has been established by the Ministry for Youth, Sports and Voluntary Associations. The independent National Youth Council, CNAJEP, acts as a voluntary coordinator of organisations, unions, federations and national youth and community education movements, providing a permanent link between its network of member organisations.

Youth policy in Finland is pursued within a strong consensual framework, which is based on early and constructive intervention in the interests of social integration. Finland's youth policy can also be said to serve the vast majority of young people well (Williamson 1999). Citizens are active in associations and groups providing public services, in campaigning groups and interest groups (Laitinen & Nurmi 2003,6). Finland has been an EU member for 10 years, taking an active role in the field of youth policy. For example, Allianssi (Finnish Youth Co-Operation) carries out a great variety of activities; this is largely because it inherited them from constituent organisations.

Slovenia is a new EU member, joining in 2004. Slovenia has an efficient and recognized National Youth Council. In contrast to some eastern European countries, the National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS) covers the majority of national organisations and has eliminated the division between old and new organisations.

With the help of key informants from each country in the youth policy field, the researchers were able to identify the interviewees.

2.2 Method

The method used in this research is content analysis. Content analysis is seen as a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their contexts. The researcher searches for structures and patterned regularities in the text and makes inferences on the basis of the following regularities:

    (i) sorting;
    (ii) categorizing;
    (iii) naming themes.

According to Silverman (2001, 122) "Content analysis involves establishing categories and then counting the number of instances when those categories are used". Early categories are based on answering the research questions involved in this research. While development of these categories can be a helpful organizational tool in conducting the analysis, it is important to allow unexpected patterns in the data to be represented by developing new categories as they appear in the data.

Content analysis techniques are often coupled with other statistical techniques, yet each technique has its own paradigm. Filstead (1979) contrasts the philosophical stance of quantitative and qualitative approaches to conducting research.

2.3 Experiences and Limitations of the Research

We have presented above our method approach to the research data analysis and interpretation. Collecting and handling the data and information was not always easy due particularly to its diversity of sources and access. It was not possible to obtain accurate information of the number of youth councils and NGOs from which this data is obtained.

In general, the use of triangulation was very helpful in identifying the issues to be included in the research and analysis, identifying sources as well as in dealing with the aforementioned challenges. In this regard, the quantitative and qualitative data and information obtained through interviews, observations and documents served to inform and reinforce our understanding of the research phenomena as well as to confirm accuracy of interpretations (cf. Wamai 2004). For example, to clarify the claim that the OMC is receiving increasing visibility in the youth field required evidence of statistical information such as information about opinions from different EU countries. In order to provide a valid and reliable data analysis and interpretations it was necessary to make observations in the 'field'. In addition to the triangulation, the so-called "member check" enhances the validity and trustworthiness of the research (Gilchrist 1992, 86-87).

III. THE AVAILABILITY OF THE INFORMATION CONCERNING THE OMC-PROSESS AND EXCHANGING THE INFORMATION

EU Governance was taken to mean in our research those networks, processes and practices through which ''citizens'' exercise control over the organisations to which they belong. Some academics and politicians have acknowledged the OMC as a new mode of EU governance, suitable for addressing common European concerns while respecting legitimate national diversity, because it commits Member States to work together in reaching shared goals and performance targets (Hemerijck 2002). Others have pointed to the OMC's promise as a cognitive and normative tool for defining and building consensus around a distinctive European social model and policy paradigm based on common objectives and values (Vandenbroucke 2002).

Some of its proponents have seen the OMC as a vehicle for enhancing democratic participation and accountability within the EU by opening up the policy-making process to inputs from "civil society" and sub national actors (such as NGOs, social partners, and local/regional authorities), while obligating Member State governments to justify their performance in meeting common European objectives to a broader public (Zeitlin 2005a). Additionally it is said that OMC has a deliberative nature and because of its openness, it allows for the definition of objectives to better reflect actors opinions, and therefore ensures better regulation as stakeholders are part of the decision making process. It is argued, that OMC gives a voice to civil society that would otherwise be voiceless. [10]

The process of deliberation among diverse set of actors fosters exchange of information; policy knowledge and experience, which allows actors to get to know each other's governing systems and ways of thinking, and promotes a common identity through continued interaction, socialization, and persuasion (Trubek et al. 2005).

3.1 The availability of the information concerning the OMC-process

It came up in the preliminary analysis of texts, that if people wanted to have information about the OMC-process at national level, they were able to find some information from the National Ministry or via Internet. At the same time, many actors in the national youth field were not even aware of the OMC-process or didn't know how to seek out the information about it.

> The fact that only very few members of non governmental youth organizations and not associated youth in our country are aware of the OMC process, demonstrates that the OMC process has not reached the grassroots and its visibility is poor. (Q 5 Other)

> In general the process is not well known except to a few people. (Q 14 Youth council)

> It's easy to find the information about the method but it's not easy to know the method exists, so nobody never asks the information because nobody knows the method. (I 9 Ministry)

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[10] NEWGOV (2004): Intergrated project. Priority 7 - Citizens and Governance in the Knowledge-based Society 2004, 9.

Main weakness is the missing visibility of its added value to the actors in the youth field. (Q 11 Ministry)

Very few people I have ever met have ever heard of the Open Method of Co-ordination, let alone know what it is. (Q 30 Researcher)

Even if the availability of information, according to the general opinion, was seen insufficient, the quantitative data was somewhat spread. As table 1 demonstrates, three in ten respondents (28%) considered the information availability at national level to be good or excellent. At the same time, over one-third of the respondents (36%) reported the information availability to be poor or acceptable.

Table 1. The Information availability at national level (%).

	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellent	8	8
Good	20	**28**
Neither good, nor Bad	33	61
Acceptable	**8**	69
Poor	**28**	97
I don't know	3	100,0
Total	100	

One reason for having different views about accessing to information, was the various positions in the Youth policy field.

The availability of information varied according to actors:

For us in the Youth Council, it's excellent, but many young people still never heard of the White Paper and OMC-process. (Q 10 Youth council)

If people want to have information about the OMC-process, they can find them or get them without any problems from the ministry, but many actors in the national youth field don't even know about the OMC (or are not aware of the process) and don't look for information. The common objectives of OMC are not very "wide spread" into the field. (Q 11 Ministry)

The media does not cover the OMC process and there are only a few websites for insiders that mention the OMC or the White Paper. We do get all the information from our ministry. (Q 15 Youth council)

It appeared that the Ministry was the place to get the information. At national Ministries OMC-Information availability was seen excellent or good in 43% of cases, while only 21% of the "others" estimated the access to information to be excellent or good and as many as 58% of them thought that availability was poor or acceptable.

In some cases, also the Youth Councils were badly informed about the OMC:

> I have never heard about it. (Youth Council)

In some countries information was easily available from ministries, but it wasn't spread to into local level.

> The information is there, and on the national level, we speak a lot about it and the process is visible. But it has been difficult to spread the information to local level. (Q 24 Youth Council)

It can lead to the situation that the process escapes the notice of the majority of people:

> The visibility and the impact of the OMC process were extremely poor. Participation in this process was limited to the department in charge of the OMC and the youth council. There was no visibility of this process out of that. The impact of the process in our national policies is inexistent. (Q 27 Youth council)

> We have the impression that the department in charge of the OMC within the National Institute for Youth was the only governmental body having all the information on this process. Regional governments were informed on the OMC but it was not given any relevance […] Information on the OMC was not available for general public, and for Youth Council information was provided by Government only upon request.(Q 27 Youth council)

In general the ministry representatives mentioned that the OMC process should spread to local level. Almost all ministry respondents suggest that the local level should be more involved in the process.

The availiability differs strongly from country to country. It seemed that the common objectives of OMC were not very "wide spread" into the field of youth. However, at the EU-level, the information was considered to be more reachable. For example European Youth Forum was seen to be an important channel to get information:

> The European Youth Forum did an important job gathering and disseminating information about the OMC process in the different countries. (Q 25 NGO)

> It would be very useful to know this, because we could learn from the experiences of other countries (especially from good practices). The information and networking days of the Youth Forum Jeunesse are very useful to learn a bit about this, but more can be done. (Q 15 Youth council)

> We learnt a lot on local participation –local commitees- which is something that we are lacking in our Country. The problem is that we only learnt that in our European Youth Forum meetings, and not through European Commission actions. (Q 27 Youth council)

The fact that country reports on different priority issues are not public was considered as a problem. For example, it was highlighted that it would be very useful for the people who work in the field of youth information to have all the country reports on youth information at their disposal. One of the most mentioned problem at spreading the information was that the other countries reports were not available:

One major problem has been that some member states have been unwilling to publish their OMC reports and the Commission appear to be unwilling to push them on this. (Q14 Youth council)

Also the fact that the country reports on different priority issues are not public is close to a scandal. It would be very useful for e.g. the people who work in the field of youth information to have ALL the country reports on youth information at their disposal. It is also impossible to estimate now how much the common objectives are really based on the information received from the member countries or if they are based on the own ideas and preferences of the civil servants in the commission. (Q24 Youth council)

National reports/questionnaires were not available at all. Only joint reports prepared by Commission were available, but they contained much less information. Commission did not have the chance to select those experiences which were really good experiences and which deserved to be transferred to other contries, from those which were selected by national governements, but were not really an example of good practice –at least from the point of view of youth organizations. (Q27 Youth council)

Otherwise, the availability of the information considering the OMC-visibility at EU-level was considered better than at national level. Table 2 shows that at least 50 % regarded it as good and 28 % as acceptable or poor.

Table 2. The information availability at European level (%).

	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellent	5	5
Good	45	**50**
Neither good, nor Bad	23	73
Acceptable	**15**	88
Poor	**13**	100,0
Total	100	

One of the ways to improve the process is to take into consideration other countries experiences, even if the feasibility of these examples was founded problematic:

We work close with some countries so we get information about how they work, it is very different dependent on the kind of institution that is responsible for youth whether they are ministries or national agencies or just like youth boards, they have very different way dealing with this method. Sometimes they are really responsible and sometimes they are almost on their own, sometimes it is very governmental thing, when they are just part of it (I 9 Ministry)

Basing our findings on the information given by the questionnaire replies, the information of other countries experiences was not seen easily available. However 53 % of the respondents regarded it to be somewhat available. Over one-third of the respondents thought that the information was not very easily available or not available at all.

Table 3. The availability of the information of other countries experiences (%).

	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Easily available	0	0
Available	3	**3**
Somewhat available	50	**53**
Not very available	25	78
Not at all available	8	86
I don't know	14	100,0
Total	100,0	

One of the main principles in the OMC is mutual learning and pooling the information. The OMC allows for an exchange of best practises and a peer review while at the same time respecting the principle of subsidiarity. However, the results highlighted that this dimension was not seen fully workable at the moment.

3.2 How to improve the availability of the information?

There have been some attempts to spread information about OMC, in some cases at individual actors initiative:

> We decided to have the information day because we noticed that nobody knows anything. (I 3 NGO)

Also the formal information channels were seen useful, but there was need for further promotion:

> An important instrument in the field of the Youth information has been developed by the Commission - European Youth portal. This instrument has largely influenced the development of the national portals in Member countries. Still, the Europan Youth portal needs furter promotion to become an useful and known instrument among youth. (Q 35 Ministry)

> There should be more promotion for the youth portal, because young people don't know that is exists and there should be more active information on the OMC. (Q 15 Youth council)

> There could be more done to spread the synthesis reports that the EC writes after having received all questionnaires. (Q 10 Youth council)

One point that came up repeatedly in both questionnaire and interview answers was that the information should be more "active": the existing information should be brought out more and the present channels of information need to be improved. But it's not sufficient to only spread information, it has to be understandable and meaningful:

> The OMC process is too abstract to attract people. It makes it very hard to make local youth organisations enthusiastic about the OMC. (Q 15 Youth council)

The report should be translated in a public language, not European language, not in the one of Commission or what so ever and publish for European citizen. It is so important. (I 7 Youth council)

The information availability can promote the involvement in formal political processes or different kind of communities. One possible measure suggested spread the information was better use of the media:

There should be more visibility in the media, because OMC should be democratic process of course youth organisations are participating but it would be more democratic if young people should know about this. (I 2 Youth council)

Media-visibility was seen unsatisfactory. A total of 76 % of respondents reported that it was poor or acceptable. On the other hand it was mentioned that the process doesn't have to be visible for all, for example young people can interested in the same issues, with or without knowing of OMC:

In the youth field the OMC-topics are (partly) similar as their own topics. In that way they are visible. They probably are not visible as OMC-topics. I don't think that is a bad thing. (Q 20 Ministry)

The consensus was that improved recognition of the method was seen to be at least a good start to develop the process in a more effective direction.

The OMC is a new instrument, therefore it is not well known at every govemerntal and non-govenemental level. There is a need of extra- resources, which are not easily availible at every level. Yet the outcome of the OMC is not visible for every participant of the governemental and non-governemental institutions and organisations. (Q8 Ministry)

The level of public awareness around the OMC is negligible. More resources are needed to support a communications strategy to raise awareness amongst the key stakeholders, which in turn would improve the effectiveness of the OMC. (Q9 Ministry)

Maybe we could promote the networking between youth field actors who want to realize positive actions in the framework of OMC to give the actions greater visibility and more direct impact on the workers and the youngsters. (Q 11 Ministry)

3.3 Summary

The themes that came up from the data sources raised questions about the aim of the process: Is it supposed to involve everyone or just experts and officials involved in youth policy?

Although people normally know a lot about the social systems in which they live, there are no principal, empirical or conceptual reasons why individuals could not take part in the functioning of social systems without being fully aware of it (Nieminen 2005, 16). In such

cases social relations may be mediated via political hierarchies, money, commodity markets or mass media (see Calhoun 1992, according to Nieminen 2005).

One of the OMC's ways to affect the youth policy, the exchange of information of practices between different actors and between the countries, has been successful at some level. Information about the process and of other countries experiences were somewhat available but only for certain actors. The information seemed to get stuck in the ministries and the next step to intensify the prosess could be improved by giving *more information to the national and local actors* in the youth field.

It is said that OMC has democratic potential. One possibility for OMC to be more democratic is to design it in such a way as to enable citizens' equal control over public policies to which they are subject. (Friedrich 2006, 370-371.) And in the youth field if the actors want to see the process become more democratic, the information should diffuse to the youth organisations and more widely to young people and to the local level.

The commission's analysis observes: "a sufficient flow of information from the local and regional levels to the national level can enrich the basis upon which decisions are taken. Yet, there are *hardly any examples of a transfer of experiences from the bottom to the top* where nationally designed programmes have been modified according to the experiences or needs of the lower territorial levels".[11] The potential for such "bottom up" and "horizontal" learning from local and regional experimentation could also be improved in the youth field.

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[11] European Commission 2002a Impact Evaluation of the European Employment Strategy: Technical Analysis supporting COM (2002) 416 final of 17.7.2002 (Taking Stock of the Five years in EES).

IV. PROCESS AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

The debate over the Open Method of Coordination has reopened discussion of the role of 'soft law' in the process of European integration. In recent years, a new formally non-binding but potentially important normative system has emerged through the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC). The OMC employs non-binding objectives and guidelines to bring about change in social policy and other areas. OMC, which has general and open-ended guidelines rather than rules, provides no formal sanctions for Member States that do not follow the guidelines, and is not subject to judicial control, but thought of as 'soft law'. Member States have an interest both in sharing information, but also in monitoring each other's policies to ensure that this does not become an area for intra-European rivalry (cf. Trubek & Trubek 2005).

In the youth field the Council of the European Union and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States stresses that:

> " The OMC will be applied with *a flexible approach* in a manner suited to the youth field, *with due regard for the competencies of the Member States* and the principle of subsidiarity" (2002)

In this section we will examine the features of the process and progress of the implementation. In the end of the section we define the analysis to cover the consultation as it has been one of the main tools during the OMC-process and has taken several forms at both European and national levels.

4.1 The role of Member States

During the OMC process, youth policy has received visibility, and despite the fact that the method is new in the youth field, some positive consequences were already possible to notice:

> There are at least some common objectives that the member states CAN use in their national (youth) policy. (Q10 Youth council)

> The process is positive in the sense that coordination is needed and the common objectives provide an interesting roadmap covering the most important issues to be implemented in the youth field. (Q13 NGO)

> It is a very good framework to cooperate and to build national youth policies The help of the commission is very important for this cooperation. (Q36 Ministsry)

> This process has maintained youth policies in the agenda of decision makers for years. It has given some visibility (not as much as desired, but acceptable) to youth problems, which issomething that did not happened before the White Paper Process and the OMC. (Q27 Youth Council)

Other interviewees noted similarly positive consequences, but they also stressed the intensification of youth policy in general:

The strength is that it brings some areas or issues of youth work into light and strenghtens their position.(Q24 Youth council)

The process can strenghten the visibility of the genuine aims in youth work and by this re-initiate actions or promote new actions. (Q11 Ministry)

The OMC-process has strengthened youth-political topics in general. In addition the OMC is an instrument, which supported the topics of participation and information of young people and gave them a higher meaning in the public discussion. (Q8 Youth council)

Some regarded the willingness of each member state as crucial in deciding upon the direction of the process:

The strength depends on which weight the national authorities give to the process. In our case, it was understood that the OMC process has to be matched with the national priorities in the youth policy area. This way, the OMC can best be implemented. (Q 19 Ministry)

In the end they [Member States] decide if things are going to happen or not. (I 1 Youth Council)

These discussions included concerns about the fact that the OMC gives the member states too much freedom with regard to becoming active:

Since OMC process is not binding then it is up to each member state how is going to address it and whether is going to make efforts to develop a field under discussion. (Q 6 Other)

It is up to the good will of the member states to try to improve their performance and to take more effective measures for achieving the desirable results and the common objectives set.(Q 5 Other)

It's not at all obliged for the member states, so they can just do nothing...and so there's lots of work for nothing. (Q 10 Youth council)

One of the main concerns of the Youth Council was the lack of control over the results, potentially leading to a situation where neither the Commission nor the national governments are able to make effective improvements. However, even in connection to these concerns it was noted that the process offers a whole range of new opportunities that would not be available without the OMC.


4.2 The characteristics of the process

Figure 2 provides a rough indication of the basic characteristics of the process as most likely to be connected to OMC in the youth field.

The majority of respondents saw the OMC process supporting mutual learning (70 %) and to be sensitive to national policy (68 %). In addition, 63 % of respondents agreed that the OMC has shown capacity of sharing member states' experiences and almost same number of respondents (60 %) regarded the OMC as flexible.

As indicated in the table, only minor support was given to the characteristics "uniform" (10%), "static" (25%) and "self-governing" (35%).

Figure 2. How the following concepts become materialized or describe the process? (%).
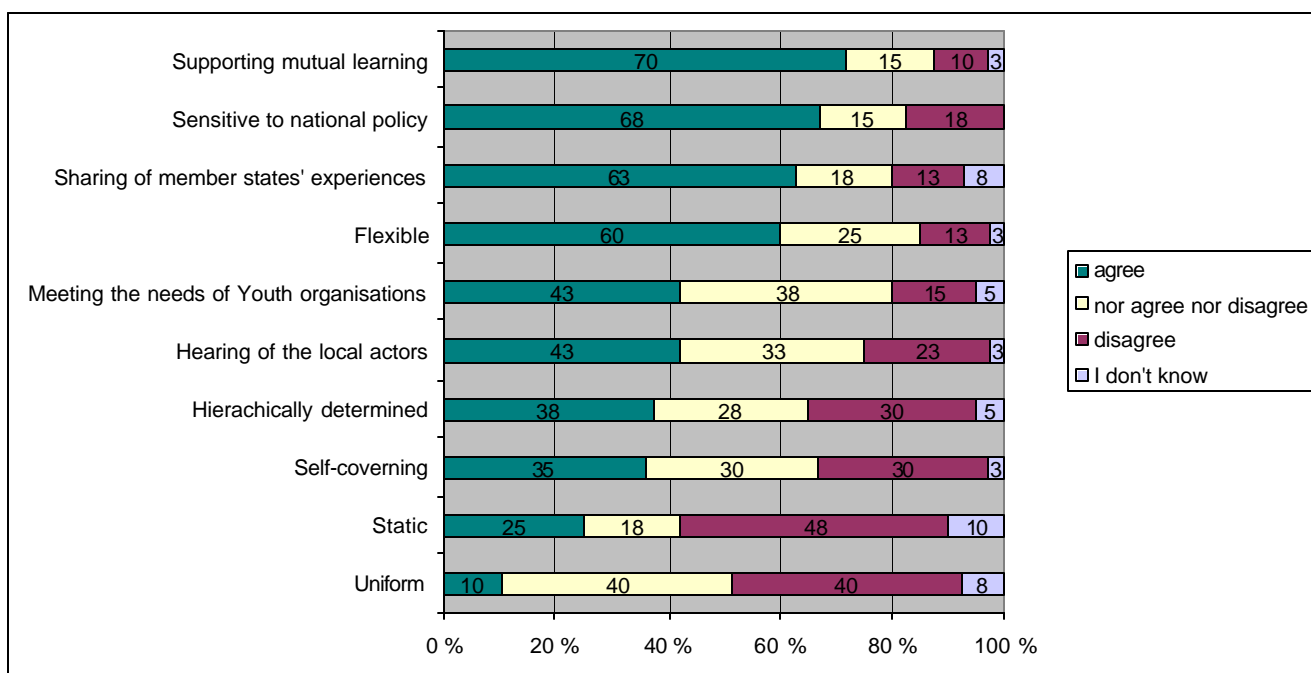
However, in a closer analysis even the supported areas of the OMC were seen as problematic. For example, as was seen in the previous chapter (4.1), sensitivity to national policy was treated as both positive and negative. On one hand, it can build and improve the national youth policy, and on the other hand it gives too much freedom to member states: it is up to the good will of the member states to try to improve their performance.

Mutual learning

Open coordination is a mutual feedback process of planning, examination, comparison and adjustment of the social policies of Member States, all of this on the basis of common objectives (Vandenbroucke 2002).

Experts in the youth field raised similar issues about learning from other countries as well as other institutions and organisations:

It promotes the exchange of good practices among the member-states of the EU and enhances cooperation amongst several actors in the field of youth affairs at the local, national and European level. (Q 6 Other)

At the national level the OMC has provided all players with a framework around which to establish an on-going dialogue with policy makers. It gave an additional structure to policy discussions between different actors. (Q 9 Ministry)

[Positive side are] the informal contacts with other youth councils to see how they approach OMC […] and to see how can we lobby and how can we make the common objectives stronger. You can learn from pears and that is very good thing. (I1 Youth council)

There were also some difficulties in mutual learning because of the unavailability of other countries reports (see chapters 3.1 and 5.1).

Meeting the needs of Youth

The Council proposal is that young people need to be involved in the cooperation. It is recommended in the Resolution of the Council (2002) that:

Young people, *whether organised or not*, as well as youth associations as representatives of youth, *should be associated with the cooperation framework* both at the European and national level. (Council 2002)

In the Council resolution (2002) it is stated that:

The European Parliament and the Council adopted the 'Youth' Community action programme, on the basis of Article 149 of the Treaty, implemented by the Commission, in order to allow young people to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies which may be one of the foundations of their future development, and to exercise responsible citizenship so as to become an active part of society. (Council 2002.)

It seemed that within the OMC active engagement was possible at some levels. As the respondents declared:

The Open Method of Coordination is a must in today's world. This is because young people have to feel that they own the decisions and lines of actions taken and if they do not how can these be effective….(Q4 Ministry)

Young people and youth organisations have been given more input into the youth policy design. (Q14 Youth Council)

It [the OMC] has put youth on the European Agenda. (Q15 Youth council)

On the other hand: Respondents thought that young people should be given a more active role:

[There have been] Small willingness to really involve youth organisation and share ownership in several member states. (Q28 NGO)

Young people should have had a bigger say in the text of the common objectives and the shaping of the OMC processes. The process and the content of it where determined by the Member States and a bit by the Commission. Young people should have a bigger say in this, to make the method more effective. Bottom-up learning is also very necessary to let the method be effective, so their should be more attention for local experiences. (Q15 Youth Council)

The youth from organisations and from the local environment should get more involved, so that there is a broader field of all kind of students. (Q17 Other)

One proposal was that the Youth Councils should have more recognition as a voice of youth:

…and policy makers have to realize that what we [Youth council] say as a youth organisation is also good for youth in general. We are not limited target group, so participation is good for young people in general. (I2 Youth council)

In the resolutions of the European Council, the role of the Youth Councils is emphasized. Consultation was one tool to get young people involved in the OMC process.

4.3 Consultation with youth

The preparation of the White Paper was based on consultation among young people, reflecting the determination to bring citizens closer to the decisions affecting them, thus contributing to bringing political institutions closer to the public. During the OMC process the consultation has taken several forms at both European and national levels.

At the European level the Commission has organised consultations on the questionnaires, summary reports and draft common objectives involving the main parties concerned. The European Youth Forum has been consulted throughout the process, without excluding other forms of consultation, and as an addition to its contribution the Forum has organised consultations with Member Organisations. The latest consultation days took place in Brussels on 24 - 25 March 2006. Around twenty Member Organisations attended the meeting and gave their input regarding the draft of the guide presented.

Moreover, it has been recommended that consultation should take form in all Member States. For example, a questionnaire for each priority, including key issues, has been transmitted to the Member States. Before responding to the Commission's questionnaire, the Member States were asked to set up such channels as they deem appropriate for consultation with young people, youth associations and, where applicable, national youth councils or similar bodies.

Consultation with youth is one of the practical policy implementation ways in our country. Representatives are different youth NGOs, mainly the National youth council, as well as health issues NGOs. (Q 2 Ministry)

In the Declaration of Vienna and Bad Ischl (2006) emphasized that young people themselves want to have a two-way process and that consultation alone is not enough. The report stressed that a structured dialogue needs to be established on an equal basis between youth representatives and decision-makers and that the aim is to create a real dialogue. This should be implemented in all political structures from the local to the European level. As stated in the Declaration, "young people should be involved in every aspect of the decision-making process, from the beginning to the end. This is only possible if the structures allow for participation in a democratic and transparent way".

Our data indicated that consultation *as a concept* was characterised as an active process, even if decision-making is in the hands of other actors:

> For me it [consultation] means that I have given a change to react, to express my opinion but it's not up to me to decide what it is in the end. But if somebody decided something really different what I think, at least I should receive an explanation or justification. (I 3 NGO)

However, respondents involved in the consultation, were reporting that the consultation so far has not to meet their expectations:

> The consultation is difficult because you are often invited to say what you think but you have to wait what is done with it. They always give you space to say what you like, but do not really get in dialogue to come to sense together. (I 1 Youth council)

> Young people should be consulted of course, but not in a form of a political show. If a conference is organised, there should be a possibility to a true dialogue between. (Q 24 Youth council)

4.4 The usefulness of the consultation spaces to engage with young people

Respondents were also asked to indicate their opinions about the consultation spaces to involve and engage with young people. The responses are shown in Figure 3.

As can be seen in Figure 3, the vast majority of respondents (85 %) stated that the Consultation with youth in shaping the common objectives was a good or excellent way to make young people's voice heard, followed by meetings and conferences (70%), research on youth (68%), forums (55%), European Youth Portal (48%), and Internet surveys (38%). Internet surveys and European Youth Portal were seen as relatively less fruitful spaces for consultation.

Figure 3. The share of opinions about the consultation spaces that actors have found good or excellent (%).
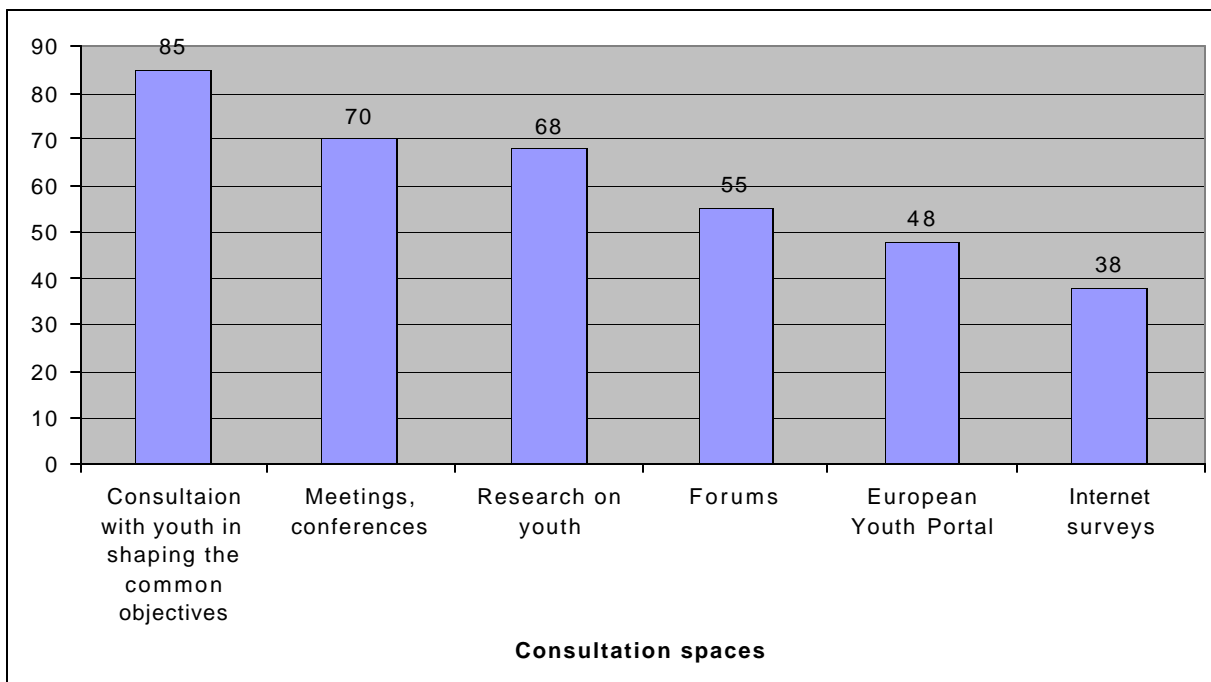
In general, consultation with youth in shaping the common objectives was stated to be good because of it's participatory potential, as the quote below illustrates:

> For my point of view it [the OMC] applies us to be more participative and to consult more which we don't really do in our national policies except on certain matters […] This process is kind of an educational process even for national organizations. (I 9 Ministry)

Meetings and different kind of forums around the OMC were seen as good spaces to consult. If actors had taken part in regional, national or European level conferences or meetings, they considered those to be at least somewhat useful. 7 in 10 respondents (73%) were aware of national level meetings or had themselves participated in those.

Figure 4. How would you evaluate the usefulness of the national/European level meetings in implementation of the OMC? (%).
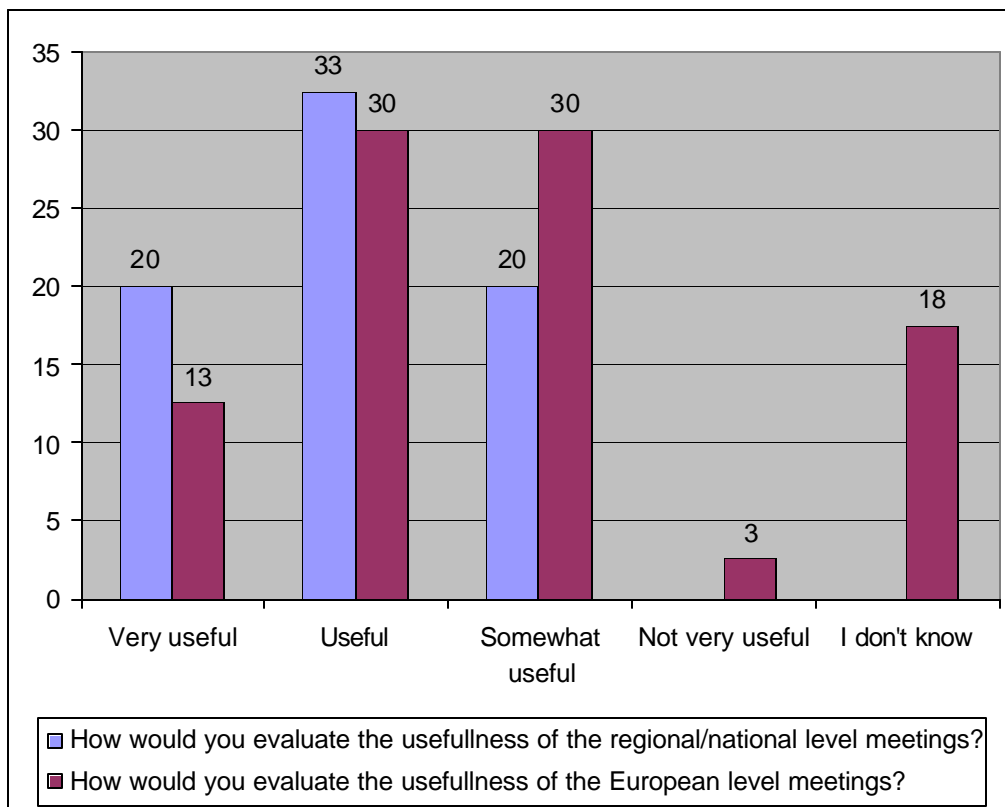

Figure 4 shows that both national and European level meetings were supported. 73% of respondents thought that both kind of meetings were at least somewhat useful. National level meetings were identified as important for the co-operation of different kind of actors:

> Regional and national level meetings are the best method for consultation with all actors of youth policy - researches, policy makers, youth leaders, etc. with direct impact to youth policy. (Q 16 Ministry/(researcher)

> Before the drafting of the national reports, we organised a hearing to people who are from the youth organisations or municipal youth work and also the civil servants and youth researchers were present. The discussion and the dialogue was very good and useful and brought a lot of ideas to the national reports. (Q 24 Youth Council)

European level meetings were seen as areas for mutual learning as well as potential places for consulting youth:

> These [European level meetings] can help to have an overview on best practices and give ideas for the implementation and the consultation on national level. (Q 19 Ministry)

During meetings at the European level we had the chance to face representatives of each country, exchange ideas, and see clearly which countries really had an intention of improving their policies and which did not have any will. These meetings were useful as progress evaluation moments, and as exchanges of good practices. (Q 27 Youth council)

[There could be] more open participation [at European level] from NGOs would help to ensure that it would become less of a top down process. (Q 9 Ministry)

As figure 3 demostrates, 48 % of respondents agreed on European Youth Portal being a good consultation space. However, an examination of the written responses reveals that respondents were critical of the way it reaches young people and the Portal's potential to inspire youth:

Nobody knows it! (I 7 Youth council)

In the Commission there is the belief that merely by spending 20 million euros on a Youth Portal website you are reaching out to a cross-section of young people. The portal is not a hub of information and activity for a cross-section of young people, it is an island.(Q 32 Youth council)

All in all, a "better use of the European Youth Portal" appears to be generally called for. The research was seen a good way to reach young people in general and particularly those who are not otherwise easily attainable. As one respondent argued:

It is always good to consult with youth, still knowing the young people you consult are the most committed ones in public life, and they also are sometimes lobbying for youth organizations more than for young people. That is why, it has to go with informations from research on youth. (Q 36 Ministry)

Our research data indicates that experts in the youth field described the consultation to be a noteworthy development trend, but the form of consultation needs improvements. Therefore respondents were also asked which elements make the consultation to be workable.

4.5 The characteristics of a good consultation

In my view workable [consultation] means that young people are provided the opportunity to be consulted.(Q 3 Other)

Consultations with youth are workable and useful everytime that youth organisations, and especially National Youth Councils and the European Youth Forum are involved in the preparation, implementation and follow-up of these (Q 13 NGO)

There seemed to be confusion between consulting "youth" as a social group versus hearing young individuals. Targeting the consultation group was not seen easy, as youth can not be generalized to a collective singular. It is also impossible to consult every young individual. Therefore, the significance of consulting representatives was emphasized:

Consultation should be always done selecting well informed young organised people. Consultation done with non organised youth, who does not have any information on the process, on the previous steps, on the consequences, etc. does not give qualified results. (Q 27 Youth Council)

I don't really believe in the meetings directly between the Government an non-organised youth people...it's just like hey-hey...That's is why youth organisations exists, that is their role. (I 7 Youth council)

The opinion of taking only organised youth within the policy making process was emphasized especially in the comments of youth council representatives. The opinions about more widespread participation were also common, and this challenge of connecting non-organised and organised youth groups has been taken seriously in some countries:

To improve the procedure it needs a complexive strategy which links organized and non-organized young people of all ages, social and cultural backgrounds. Of course a lot of energie and resources are necessary to manage an effective and convincing consultation process. (Q 8 Ministry)

The consultation of good quality needs careful examination and time for reaching the target group:

Effective consultation with young people takes time, as well as solid preparation. The easy option is to go through only established youth councils/forums/parliaments and this invariably excludes the vast majority of young people from having any voice at all, even if those bodies are, at least in theory, democratically composed and constituted. (Q 30 researcher)

The worry about the usefulness of the consultation was expressed also in the form of demand for regular meetings and follow-up:

I think it's good to have regular contacts with organizations.[...]Consultation really depends also on how are these structures working, because we have always same people front of us: two or three people from organizations which know the method and everything us much as we do. (I 9 Ministry)

The European level meetings for implementation OMC are good, but when it's finished, everybody goes home and that's it. There's no (or very little) follow-up and the quality is very dependent on which youngsters are there. It's also a 'participative moment' and NOT a 'participatory process'. (Q 10 Youth council)

The process was regarded as not easy to carry out; it was stated that it would need both more efforts and investment of resources to make the consultation work.

4.6 Summary

The evidence in this section indicates that the role of member states in implementing the process is noticeable. The OMC gives member states considerable freedom to become

active and to choose their means of action. At the same time, it was seen that the process in the youth field, as such, is too open and loose, and there were proposals that the process needs to be strengthened.

A workable consultation was crystallized to mean a more active involvement of youth organisations and non-organised youth, as well as responsible data collection during the whole process. There seemed to be two views on the composition of the consultation group. Some actors stressed that consultation can be successful only with well informed and organised young people, while some demanded that also young people outside these qualifications need to be heard.

What is more, youth organisations, for example youth councils, were interested in having more effect on decision-making. The European Youth Forum (2006) notes that the consultations used so far have been useful, but they emphasize that too many measures have been implemented by public authorities in a top-down manner. They state that involvement of youth organisations and the recognition of their legitimate role as major stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of the policies affecting youth, has to become reality. The European Youth Forum believes that such a genuine partnership and mutual understanding can be developed through a method of structured dialogue.

In the next chapter we will specify our analysis to cover the dimensions of how to strengthen the visibility of the process as well as making it simultaneously easily reachable for the leading actors related to these issues.

V. THE POSSIBILITY TO COMPARE THE INFORMATION

One element of the OMC is based on mutual learning. In the youth field there seems to be some factors that complicate peer review. The factors that facilitate or complicate mutual learning or pooling of the information will be analyzed in this section. The process seemed to lack in transparency at some level, which complicated learning from other countries' experiences. The most often mentioned reason for this was that the national reports were not public. Furthermore, most of the respondents thought that some kind of indicators are needed to improve and strengthen the process.

Information such as annual reports from the governments and the Commission on implementing youth policy should contain measurable elements, which allow the actors from social partnerships to monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies affecting young people. When the OMC in the Youth Field was still under development, the European Youth Forum demanded indicators. This was seen by the Member States as an interference with their competences.

5.1 The question of transparency

> Answers submitted by member states should have been made public to allow for a scrutiny by other stakeholders and encourage honesty in answers. (Q 28 NGO)

> As the results/reports have to provide overview and directions to all the Member States, it is difficult to see for every individual country concrete analyses or targets. (Q 23 Ministry)

A common statement was that all documents should be public, all "documents from national responses to questionnaires to final evaluations of each country", as one youth council member puts it. Moreover, easy access to these sources of information was regarded significant in acquiring an overview of the process and of different countries' experiences concerning the implementation. The discussion carried out in European level meetings and during the situations of consultation was also mentioned as useful to know, and an increase in openness was in demand:

> "We don't know what they are talking about in Youth Working Party. (I 1, Youth council)

> For me consultation would be approached to have more transparency, to have more real meetings and to enough time to fulfil the first questionnaire, to meet with government, to discuss that...and I think transparency is important. If you don't show what you have written, we can not trust on. (I 7 Youth council)

Some respondents longed for more speculative reports:

> Commission should publish critical reports on progress as well as good reports. (Q 14 Youth Council)

5.2 The question of indicators

Need for consolidating the process and to seeing some results was pronounced in the suggestions concerning developing the indicators:

> The process should also go deeper, and really make clear indicators how to make things better.(Q 24 Youth council)

> It needs to be stronger (e.g. indicators etc) to have a real impact. (Q 25 NGO)

In general, most respondents thought some kind of indicators are needed. As one interviewee puts it:

> Common objectives makes it too soft. Common objectives themselves are very vain. They don't really have targets, so they can say that are doing something and we can not deny that but we would like to see that they do more. (I 1 Youth council)

In some areas the indicators need not be strict but more practical, and generally they will be an improvement to the situation at the moment:

> For example, that every young people should have an access to Youth Portal, it is not maybe an indicator but it is very concrete, there is an target, there is a an area and you have been giving time…(I 7 Youth council)

> Also I was maybe waiting a bit more from the common objectives, i.e. that they would be more concrete (Q 24 Youth council)

Figure 5. Should there be common indicators, according to national ministries and other representatives answers (%).
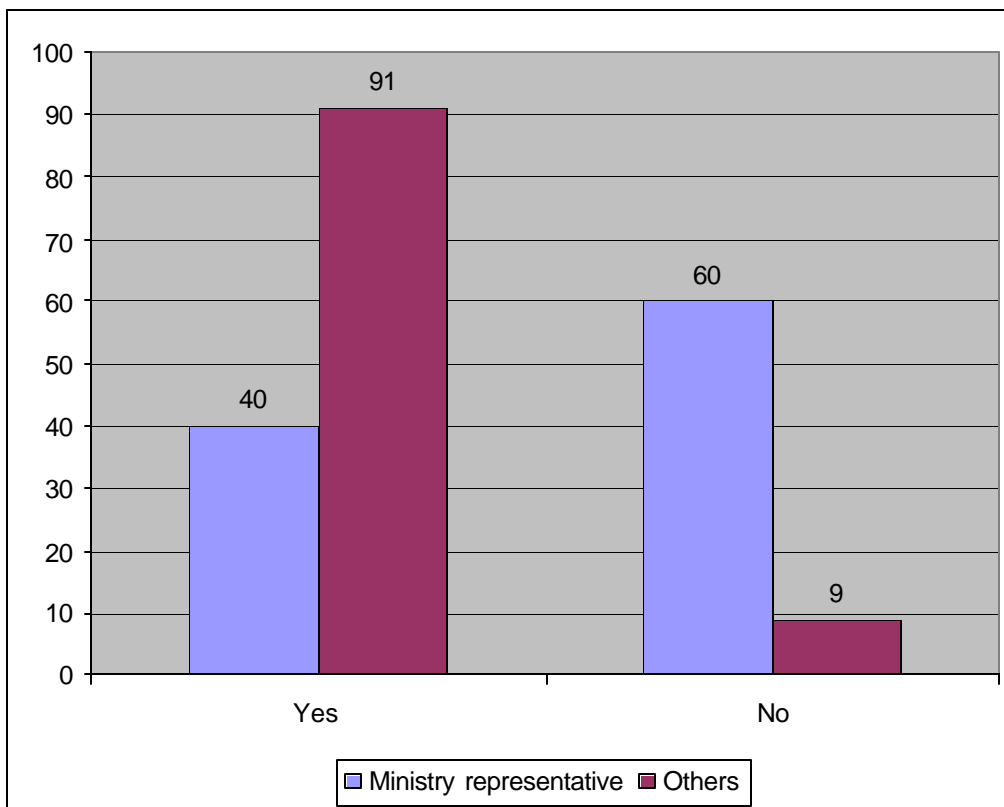
As indicated in Figure 5, there were differences between the answers of national ministries and other representatives. Only 40 % of ministry representatives wanted to have indicators in the youth policy field, whereas among the other representatives the proportion of "yes"-answers was more than twofold (91 %).

Those who supported indicators illustrated the following four types of arguments:

1) Indicators facilitate measuring the progress

> There needs to be some common indicators or benchmarks, otherwise how can we measure success or progress? (Q 14Youth council)

> Only with common indicators you can measure the performance and progress of the member states. Now they often report what they were already doing on a national level. They do not plan to reach certain European targets.(Q 15 Youth council)

2) Indicators promote the evaluation of effectiveness

I would hope to have something like the Pisa process in the field of education; the countries would be told clearly if their youth work structure is good or bad and what fields they should develop.(Q 24 Youth council)

Common indicators could assist in evaluating progress achieved by the member-states of the EU and increase the effectiveness of OMC. (Q 6 Other)

Without common indicators the effects of the entire process are left unclear. Indicators should be completed and compared with Eurobarometer survey results to establish causalities between well-managed youth policy and satisfaction of young people in the country. (Q 28 NGO)

3) Indicators enable the comparison of different countries and different situations in the field

Common indicators would make the cross-country (international) exchange and comparision more easy.(Q 11 Ministry)

Generally it would make the situation in the fields of common objectives more comparable and maybe more targeted, however the process of setting common indicators would be very sensitive and time-consuming, as well it is not clear weather it is possible and provides comparison after all. (Q 23 Ministry)

4) Indicators encourage peer pressure

It is a prerequisite to set common indicators with the aim to facilitate the evaluation of each member state's performance in meeting the common objectives and in order to be able to construct league tables and to encourage peer pressure. (Q 5 Other)

Common indicators could be complementary to common objectives and peer pressure will result in being more effective. (Q3 Other)

Those who saw the indicators unnecessary or difficult to apply emphasized the following three aspects:

1) Member States subsidiarity principle:

Youth policy should stay important, but not centralized and strict, it should be up to Member States show much they wish and are able to implement OMC. (Q 2 Ministry)

2) Unique situation in each country:

Each Member State has its own particular unique situation and therefore having Common indicators might be misleading. One has to adopt the Common Objectives according to national priorities. (Q 4 Ministry)

Common indicators could be 'strict' and too 'quantitative'. Also there might be not enough attention for the local situation in each country. (Q 39 Researcher)

The life style of the youth in the EU-countries is too different. (Q 17 Other)

In general common indicators were seen difficult to implement because of the different situations and structures between European countries.

It really depends on the structure and we can not change the structure, so we have experiences from other countries but what can we really do, except knowing it, it is difficult to get applied even if good in your country because the structure is very different. (I 9)

3) Different kind of definitions of concepts:

There was a problem with youth statistics; in many cases, youth does not constitute a particular statistical category, or, in other cases, the national definition of youth is not identical with the EU definition (Q 34, Ministry)

It is difficult to find a common definition of objectives at European level, for example voluntary objectives among young people does not mean voluntary work or voluntary service [in our country] (I 3 NGO)

Overall, these results suggest that the establishment of common indicators demands solid preparation and careful clarification of concepts in order to assure the validity of indicators: to measure accurately what it is supposed to measure and to perform the functions that it purported to perform.

5.3 Summary

An examination of the written responses and questionnaire answers suggests that common indicators are one means to strengthen the process. This option was favoured by youth organisations in particular. Our survey data indicates that respondents from youth councils and youth NGO's support common indicators more often than other actors. Qualitative data introduces at least the following four views in favour of indicators: they measure progress, evaluate effectiveness, enable the comparison of different countries as well as different situations, and encourage peer pressure. What is more, the European Youth Forum is convinced that the effectiveness of the process can be boosted through the development of measurable indicators and a benchmarking system for the implementation of the Common Objectives, along with the introduction of national action plans. According to the European Youth Forum (2006), as the Open Method of Coordination represents the voluntary political cooperation of Member States and is used only in fields where European Union competence does not exist or is limited, lack of competence should not be an issue.

The question of common indicators, however, seemed to be rather an ambivalent one. Member States wanted to adhere to their own policy action lines and manifest their own will and ability with regard to implementing the OMC. It was also stated that the prevailing situation in the country determines to what extent they can implement the common objectives. Additionally, the preparation of indicators was seen to be challenging, as the definitions of concepts vary from country to country.

On the other hand, it was seen that simply improving the transparency and openness of the process was enough or at least a good start to make the process more dynamic and easier to follow up.

VI. Implications for Future

The results of this study indicate that the OMC has proved to be a potential method to reach the actors conducting and implementing the process. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that non-informed actors as well as non-organized young people are at least partly excluded from its scope. Information about the process was relatively accessible, but only for certain actors.

The OMC gives member states notable freedom to become active and to choose their means of action. Since the member states have absolute freedom of choice concerning weather to implement the common objectives or not, stationary youth policy was one of the biggest worries as an end result. One proposal suggested to support openness by involving youth councils and youth organisations to each stage of the process more intensively. According to Williamson (1999) integrated youth policy and youth participation requires structures which both incorporate political and professional decision-making across sectors affecting young people and engages with representatives of young people who are likely to be affected by those decisions.

Another suggested way to strengthen the process was to apply common indicators. Also the means of increasing the transparency and openness were mentioned to operate at least as a good start.

6.1 Information, knowledge

Democracy means government controlled by the people. Democracy can be direct, where people actually participate in town meetings or vote on referendum to make rules and laws and provide for their execution. Or democracy can be indirect, where people elect representatives who act as their agents in making and executing laws that govern society. In either case, it is assumed that participants in direct or indirect democracy know enough about the situations with which they are dealing to make intelligent, rational decisions. In simpler times, when political units were small, democracy could work through face-to-face contacts or written interpersonal communications. Most of the situations with which citizens were dealing involved matters with which they were personally acquainted. In modern democracies, involving millions of people living in widely dispersed locations, democracy via direct or even two-step contacts between citizens is impossible. (Graber 2003.)

It is said that the OMC has a deliberative nature and it allows for the definition of objectives to better reflect the opinions of the actors, therefore ensuring better regulation as stakeholders are part of the decision-making process. The process of deliberation among diverse set of actors fosters exchange of information; policy knowledge and experience. Simultaneously, citizens have expressed their need for increasing the common knowledge about the operation of the EU as well as for a greater understanding of the EU policy process. Public confidence in the EU institutions has been quite low (Sloat 2003). The OMC in the youth field has responded to this desire for knowledge by promoting the flow of information concerning the EU youth policy. However, in the youth field the information

seems to get stuck in the ministries. One step forward to intensify the process could be by giving *more information to the national and local actors* in the youth field.

Some researchers have tried to estimate to what extent political outcomes might be different if all citizens were well informed. Bartels (1996), for example, argues that there would be fewer democratic votes and fewer re-elections of incumbents during national elections if all voters were well informed. Partisans are apt to disagree about whether that would be good or bad. In contrast, the research of Wallace et al (2001) points out that citizenship education leads to stronger interest in European integration. In light of the low turnout in the European elections, they showed that young people are more inclined to vote if they feel they can have an influence, which, in turn, happens if they have a good grounding in citizenship education.

In the OMC, forums and meetings conform the main channels to spread information. For example, meetings at the European level were seen as important spaces for discussing youth policies, but at the same time it was emphasized that these events do not have a defined structure and that the results of the previous meeting are not taken into consideration when organising them. What is more, the meetings do not follow any agenda. One way to improve these occassions is to create pre-determined issues to discuss, and to follow up the results of the meetings afterwards. Furthermore, the forums and meetings concerning these issues could take place more regurlarly.

6.2 Actors and flexibility

It was generally regarded that the development and progress of the OMC is in the hands of national governments. It was considered as a weakness that there is no control over the results, even if one of the main aims of the method is to bring national representatives together to discuss their national youth policies. It might be a good first step towards a more solid youth policy to really concentrate on the content of the policy, now that national governments and actors have become accustomed to gathering to discuss these issues. It was stated that presently the good will of each individual in the field defines their degree of involvement and their eagerness to get also other actors involved, as well as how seriously he/she takes the role and opportunity. It was argued that the Commission more often needs to hold member states to account for failing to implement.

According to Zeitlin (2005b), the effectiveness of the OMC processes depends on the participation of the widest possible range of stakeholders in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation at all levels (EU, national, subnational). However, the results show that there was no clear structure for youth participation and consultation. One of the concerns was that not all of the EU member states have a communication strategy for promoting the consultation processes, and therefore the OMC process does not reach the grassroots but is elite-driven. Moreover, in some statements the involved participants were not regarded as representatives of the average youth.

Broad-based participation during all phases of the OMC processes is of crucial importance here. Not merely national administrations and the traditional social partner organizations representing youth but also other non-state and sub-national actors with relevant interests and expertise, notably NGOs/civil society organizations and local/regional authorities ought to participate (cf. Zeitlin 2005b). William Walters (2005) has stated that through the

consultational genre, there is a rhetorical move to recruit young people into the cause of a more citizenship-oriented, inclusive European project. This is a significant move and, according to Walters, should not be seen in isolation from the broader concerns about a legitimacy problem or a citizenship gap. The workable consultation was crystallized to mean more active involvement of both youth organisations as well as non-organised youth and equally responsible data collection during the whole process. At national level, for example, one suggestion to improve the situation was to create OMC national groups, composed by national governments and youth organizations, compulsory, in each country to follow this process. It was also emphasized also that regional and local governments should be taken into the process, as for most of the countries the aim has been to decentralise youth policies to the lower level, the closest to young people.

6.3 Effectiveness, transparency, indicators

Familiarising democratic institutions and experiencing how democracy works is important for citizens to become willing to involve themselves in politics. Thus, the promotion of transparent and efficient democratic structures and consolidation of democratic procedures are going to be important (Letki 2004, 674). But since there is already a substantial democratic deficit in this regard at the national level, where legislatures have long experienced grave difficulties in exercising detailed control over policymaking and administration in complex, specialized fields such as employment and social protection. Hence the OMC's democratic legitimacy must rest on an alternative basis: openness, transparency, and broad participation in public problem-solving activities, aimed at promoting mutual learning through coordinated monitoring of decentralized experimentation in pursuit of common goals (Zeitlin 2005b). According to Booth and Seligson's (2005, 537) research, trust in local governments increases civil society activism. One key step to improving the existing OMC processes would be to increase transparency and make information about them more freely available.

Transparency means the citizen's right to know not just what the authorities are currently deciding but also, as a procedural safeguard, the evidence and arguments motivating their decisions. Another important dimension of transparency is that citizens are entitled to know the reasons for public decisions, and the deliberative quality of OMC processes, for lack of transparency and visibility tarnishes the OMC's democratic legitimacy and also inhibits participation, integration into domestic policymaking, and mutual learning. One broad avenue of reform would be to open up the work of the EU committees responsible for running OMC processes to greater public scrutiny (Zeitlin 2005b; Sabel & Zeitlin 2003).

A more efficient monitoring system would also be welcome. The member states have to periodically report on the actions and initiatives taken to implement the decisions emanating from the OMC, which regarded positively and seen as making the whole process more accountable. All reports should be openly available and not kept in secret by the member states. Lack of openness and transparency were named as the main difficulties in following the process.

Transparency is, both a procedural safeguard for European citizens' right to know the reasons behind public decision making, and a source of reliable information on which actors at different levels can draw to drive the policy coordination process forward. (Zeitlin 2005b.)

An examination of the written responses and questionnaire answers suggests that one way to strengthen the process is do it by applying common indicators. First steps in developing indicators for youth policy have already been taken. The EUYOUPART12 project, for example, has been developing European comparative data on the political participation of young people. (European Youth Forum 2006).

At the same time, common indicators were seen difficult to implement because of the different situations and structures between European countries. Overall, our results suggests, that establishment of common indicators demands solid preparation and careful clarification of concepts in order to assure the validity of indicators.

6.4 New Citizenship?

Young people in Europe are more likely to identify themselves as European citizens, and hold local and national identities simultaneously. Nevertheless, the idea of citizens of Europe is still rather vague and abstract. Europe remains a supra-national state without a well established identity: "A majority of young people in Europe are managing to make their way more or less successfully and a significant minority have highly disadvantaged lives now and very poor prospects for the future" (Wallace 2001, 12). The pluralisation of youth challenges the common youth policy and the organisations and institutions involved in it to think over the ways and devices to reach young people. It was suggested that institutions and organisations could reconsider their actual capacity to engage young people and promote a more diverse, devolved approach to information and communication.

Youth transitions are different in various parts of Europe, in rural and urban areas and they differ according to social background, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender and social and economic circumstances. Heterogeneity often means inequalities, risks and vulnerabilities. In this sense, the conceptualisation of 'youth' may vary from country to country. Furthermore, the challenge to diversify youth policy to meet the needs of the increasingly heterogeneous youth scene has a resource and competence dimension (Siurala 2004). Youth policy and youth work need to provide strategies and services in order to achieve all the different youth groups. During the OMC process, youth councils have been one of the major co-operators and partners in implementing the objectives and in representing youth. One question raised in this research is: does it suffice to involve merely the youth councils in implementing the process? Naturally, this is one available opportunity; the strength of these organisations is aiming at giving a voice to each young citizen.

However, an examination of the written responses and questionnaire answers suggests that it is difficult to communicate with those young people who do not participate in youth policy on their own initiative. On the other hand, the forms of participation have diversified and it can be assumed that citizens tend to participate in different arenas at least partly outside political instituitions and other formal organisations, for example in local communities, civil society, voluntary activities and demonstrations. The condition of political disengagement of youth is expressed, for example, in a relative lack of knowledge and interest in European integration. We have suggested that by promoting greater knowledge of European issues (for example, by publicising the documents and reports on the process) as well as by giving young people the feeling that their voice counts and that policies respond to their needs (workable consultation), it is possible to make youth policy

more democratic, since it then enables the citizens' equal control over public policies to which they are subject.

The Council of Europe proposes that youth policies should provide a minimum package of opportunities and experiences to which young people should have access in order to promote the probability of their role as actors of democracy and to their successful social integration. Based on this argument, co-ordination of youth related affairs on national, regional and local level should be guaranteed in order to enable successful integration of young people into society (Siurala 2004). There is strong evidence that individuals who develop citizenship skills in one domain transfer them to other domains (Nieminen & Lahti 2003, 10). Youth Forum (2006) suggests that national youth policy actors (ministries responsible for youth, youth agencies) should take a stronger strategic planning approach into their youth policies. For example by setting concrete objectives, providing support to their implementation, assessing the outcome and feeding this evaluation back to reforming the original objectives.

6.5 Summary

Presently it seems that time and additional experience is needed before any far-reaching conclusions about the functionality of the method can be drawn. Moreover, many issues and themes need deeper and wider analyses and discussions in order to consolidate the process and develop the realization of the method and the common objectives.

However, some outlines for characterising the processes can be drawn. The evidence of this study indicates that the OMC is dominated by the member states, although some participation of youth councils and NGO's was identified. Participation of youth councils was seen important and having potential for being one of the key actors in implementing the OMC in the youth field. At least at the moment, however, it seems that the OMC has failed in guaranteeing access to information concerning their operation as well as in establishing clear structures and rules about how consultation should be organized; therefore, the voices of those concerned are difficult to register. We believe that participation by the widest possible range of actors in the OMC processes at all levels, is essential in order to ensure the representation of diverse perspectives.

European-wide analysis of youth as a social group should be based, for example, on views expressed by broadly mandated youth consultation structures that are democratically established by young people themselves. These views cannot be, however, considered as personal views of the elected youth representatives but as a collective expression of youth interests. One way to collect the personal views of young people could be through surveys such as Eurobarometer.

In general, it was seen that openness should be a guiding principle of the OMC. One way of ensure the, justifiably deemed necessary, 'transparency and democratic character' of the OMC would be to include explicit requirements for transparency and broad participation in the OMC processes. It would be useful if these requirements could be added in the European Council resolutions.

There was also discussion of the continuity of the youth policy. One of the main strengths of the OMC is that it has kept the issue of youth on the decision-makers agenda for years

after the White Paper, and possibly retain the idea of youth policies alive in the future. Furthermore, most of the respondents thought that some kind of indicators are needed to improve and strengthen the process. It is worth considering if the effectiveness, measured with indicators, can reveal something about the active citizenship as an end in itself. Modern-day active citizens have stated to hold a strong sense of their place and responsibility in the world, and are driven by a sense of commitment to other people, rooted in notions of justice and care (Laitinen & Nurmi 2003; Wallace 2001, 22). Additionally, the forms of participation have diversified and it can be assumed that citizens tend to participate in different arenas at least partly outside political institutions and other formal organisations. The new forms of participating in the society are something that can not be easily measured with simple indicators.

However, the OMC process has strengthened youth-political topics in general; it works on objectives that are genuine in youth policy and, furthermore, have resulted in attracting greater societal attention to young people. An interesting by-product of the OMC in some member states is the improved and enhanced co-operation between youth ministries, national youth councils and youth organisations. At the very least, the OMC has created a space for different actors in the youth policy field to work together.

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