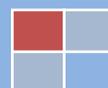G8WAY

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Learning and exploring with web 2.0 - the bridge to educational transition

Policy paper

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Forward

This policy paper is an outcome of the reflection processes during the G8WAY Project, co-funded by the European Commission, under the KA 3 program.

The policy paper comprises a set of policy statements, based on a new approach of transitions from schools to work in Europe. The policy statements are based on the results of a cross-country qualitative research that was focusing on a better understanding of the young people's particular learning strategies in educational transition stages. The Web 2.0 approach for educational transitions was a challenge and in the same times a source of inspiration and new ideas for helping young people during their journey to educational transition.

The policy paper is addressed to a wide audience, from decision makers, to mentors, counsellors, teachers, educational experts and web developers.

Last, but not least, this paper is also addressed to the young people in transition. They are now all over in Europe struggling with their future career prospects through their own particular learning strategies.

The paper is also based on two research reports produced in the framework of the G8way project: *Transitions in focus. Key issues report* and *Persona Report*, which are available for reading and downloading in the library of the project website: http://g8way-eu.net

1. Transition in focus

Educational transitions are biographical key passages that have significant impact on future life paths. The transition to employment is one of the main challenges in youth and places high demands on young learners.

In the past there have been enormous efforts in European countries to build up complex support structures for the needs of young people entering employment.

However, individual learning experiences and new opportunities of technology enhanced learning still are neglected.

Today´s educational transitions feature a certain openness regarding the new position which shows in a broader spectrum of job related latitudes. At the same time, longitudes widen and young people undergo extended periods of finding individual conceptions of working life. However, national and institutional structures remain major framing contexts of these individual paths.

Individual latitudes are considerably delimited by determinants such as educational possibilities, the demand and supply situation at the labour market, socio-structural contexts and institutional norms. In European Societies, there are great differences according to these parameters, leading to different social and individual trajectories.

Transitions to work are part of growing up, of looking for a place in society. They are a very sensitive and decisive phase in the life course. The success in taking up employment in order to be able to earn a living is seen as one of the key developmental tasks for young adults.

2. Changes and challenges for transition

What kinds of challenges in transition are facing our young people in Europe?

Lacking job perspectives

Unemployment rates show that newcomers to the labour market are an especially strongly effected group.

De-standardisation and fragmentation

Life and career paths are becoming more diverse. Young people find it increasingly difficult to know what the successful management of transitions looks like.

They are faced with high expectations, but at the same time are offered less and less direction for the arrangement of their job life entrance.

Lack of knowledge on structures and opportunities

Support, learning and working opportunities are partly rich in Europe but lacking structure and transparency, while partly they have been found incomprehensive and fragmentary. Individuals in educational transitions struggle to have access to information and to assess the information flood.

Barriers

Individual options are restricted by external barriers such as different institutional standards and procedures. (age, place of residence, income of learners etc.). Apart from external boundaries, there are individual barriers such as early dropouts, low education level, low resilience/ tolerance to stress and social disadvantages that limit the scope of choice.

High competition level

The competitive situation on vocational and employment markets aggravates the integration for disadvantaged youngsters. Young people with low educational achievements are likely to be dispossessed by better qualified competitors, even if their own educational attainment is sufficient for the desired position.

Dramatic changes in life spheres

Young people in transition are in a volatile situation. In order to take up a new education/job opportunity, they often move out from their parents and relocate to another town and face the requirements of a new stage of learning/working quality.

Extended influence of technologies

Learning opportunities are increasingly linked to new technologies, but at the same time there is no equal access to them.

Divide between formal education curricula and labour market requirements

When qualifications from school or university are not sufficient for job entrance, this might not only lead to hindrances in the transition period but also to inadequate employment.

Individualization of decisions and risks

The successes or failures in transition processes are seen as the individual's responsibility. This situation adds more stress and pressure on the shoulders of individuals.

3. Web 2.0 approach in transition

Web 2.0 refers to a new understanding of the INTERNET as a means of distributed and self-organized vs. centrally and linearly organized processes of content production, editing and delivery. The term "web 2.0 " basically refers to interactive applications or services serving the purpose, including "mashups" which allow connecting a wide range of technologies through the use of standardized programming interfaces.

Web 2.0 covers a wide range of basic technologies, such as weblog, wiki, podcast, social networks, social bookmarks, social news and media sharing which shall allow for a decentralised generation of content and its circulation in communities of users.

Transition processes could take advantage of the fast growing availability of web 2.0 tools and services, and elaborate a pedagogy driven web 2.0 environment for a variety of learning activities taking place during educational transitions.

Using web 2.0 as a base for learning could improve learners' knowledge, skills and key competences acquired in order to successfully cope with the most crucial challenges emerging from transition processes.

4. Young people learning strategies in transition

When looking at the cases of people that are currently undergoing, or have completed, their transition from school to work or from higher education to work, similar sets of strategies could be identified. From individual cases, patterns of typical transition pathways and learning experiences have been identified in the G8WAY research. This has lead to the development of 3 transition "personas" (archetypes of young people in transitions): The Determined, The Meandering and The Stagnant.

"The Determined"
...rich resources, passionate, motivated, congruent steps, early decisions, independent, confident, clear aims, ambitious, no plan B...

"The Meandering"
...complex pathway, distractions and indirections, multiple plans, aware of the desired outcome but unsure of how to get there, deal with problems as and when they occur, look for appropriate help, motivated, active, experimenting with different strategies, less resources, no plan A …

"The Stagnant"
...limited personal resources, multiple family, social or financial issues, need of support on a general social and personal level, lack of enthusiasm, unable to prioritize, late decisions for a field of interest, low self esteem, rather pessimistic career...

5. Policy statements as conclusions

> **Young people need to build their own transition journey by exploring personal life experiences of learning, knowledge and aspirations.**

Young people need a chance to explore, by diverse learning tools and experiences, their previous learning experiences, both formal and informal, personal job/career preferences, life situations and future life choices.

New technologies could help by developing tools for exploring, annotating and rating job and career content and pathways for instance through:

- accessing job descriptions and multimedia;
- talking with peers interested in the same jobs/careers or who have already started careers/education and training;
- talking with those working in similar jobs;
- comparing jobs/careers with career and qualification pathways;
- exploring jobs through Multi User Virtual Environments (e.g. Second Life) or advanced visualisations (e.g. Google World)

Moreover, tools for individual and collaborative storytelling could take a multi media form, for instance through video or audio.

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Access to local, regional and national labour market data allow young people to make informed career choices based on opportunities, trends and future predictions.

Structured information and access points to data on labour market for young people can lead to a more informed decision and career prospects.

Access through mobile devices as well as through internet browsers and visualisations and query tools are only a few easy information searching tools to be developed creatively for the future.

A better way of searching for information and resources is needed to make transition easier and in order to find suited educational routes, job opportunities, possibilities for internships or educational mobility within or outside their own country.

Exploiting intergenerational resources by straightening the mentoring approach could be a relevant help for young people in transition.

There is a wide range of intergenerational resources that can facilitate transitions: volunteering mentors, vocational teachers, career advisors, older colleagues, neighbours etc.

All of them can provide individual support to young people in transitions and can work as "bridges" to web based services.

Using new technologies, the mentors can come closer to mentees, to have a common communication channel, to implement a more informal, playful approach, and to make the process of guidance, mentoring and counselling more interactive. The mentees have competences of using web technology, but especially those with lower school qualifications do not make sufficient use of them in favour of their transitions.

On the other hand, mentors often lack the competences and knowledge to use technology in order to make learning more attractive for young people; and to be informed about actual developments at the vocational training and labour markets.

Web 2.0 is a way for strengthening the value of non-formal and informal learning experiences of young people during their transition journey.

The value of non-formal ways of learning, through the use of web-based technology, including learning at home or in small groups of trainees can become more visible through web 2.0 technologies.

There is a lot of information online posted by young people, but this information remains more on the playful side of using the web and less on the constructive side of using the web in order to improve yourself, to bring forward the strong points you have and to improve your weak points.

Trainers/teachers can help to analyze the existing information posted on-line by young people and give them feed-back in two main ways: showing them what they already have in terms of skills, knowledge, competences and attitudes and helping them to develop on a personal and professional level.

A possible model of the use of information posted by young people online would be to create a portfolio showing how they see/what competences and what knowledge they have, by bringing in, through their posts, information that can prove their interests and abilities.

Make work experience more widely available for young people by opening up work experience in schools, companies or communities and creating new jobs.

One of the most important barriers to entering the job market in the case of young people is the lack of work experience. The combination of learning and working is still a challenge for vocational training systems and companies.

Some jobs that will be in the (near) future on the labour market have not been defined yet. In order to anticipate certain working transition, in order to prepare young people for working, the only way is to make a more creative, explorative use of their competences during their studies or during the internship periods.

Self assessment and self-reflection are crucial for young people on their way to working life.

There are a lot of assessment and self-assessment tools already posted on different electronic platforms on the INTERNET. Developing the competency management skills of young people is the key issue in using those tools. Young people might strengthen their own personal development and confidence on their way to transition using tools for reflection and self-assessment.

Inter-connecting existing online platforms in order to make a more pragmatic and economical use of the technology.

The focus should be put on accessibility and connectivity, in order to integrate, unite, and make common and more efficient use of the different existing platforms at European and national level.

This is a measure useful not only in terms of efficiency of the use of existing resources, but also in terms of bringing together, in a reflexive, multicultural manner, the different national experiences of educational transition and also the European ones, from educational mobility.

Producing inclusive tools instead of creating new separated services may increase also the ease of access to data and services for educational transition.

Learn from good practices in Europe by promoting exchange of good national online services in vocational guidance in Europe.

There is evidence of positive experiences from different projects and initiatives across Europe connected to learning, inclusion, and use of web 2.0 tools. All those initiatives improved accessibility and availability of learning opportunities for young people. The key factor supporting these positive effects appears to be how well the needs of users and the technological and pedagogic choices made, and the availability of effective support fit together. From this perspective, more cross-country exchanges and collaboration could enhance the value of services for young people in transition.

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