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Youth empowerment in France:
action and reaction

Translation: Erika Cooper

This opening statement will demonstrate why and how young adults choose to become active in non-governmental and non-profit organizations that work to help the French youth develop into active members of society as well as help them to learn how to run an “association”ⁱ. The RNJA (Reseau National de Jeunes Associations - National Network of Youth Associations) works in cooperation with local authorities and other volunteer associations to support youth activities such as sports, leisure, cultural, humanitarian and “solidarity” actions.

Experience gained from creating and managing projects by way of these associations is intended to help them master the knowledge, skills and abilities they will need to become active participating citizens once they are adult. This experience is intended as a sort of stepping stone to continued participation in other more formal associations. It is a practical and informal method to initiate them to volunteer work and is not compulsory as it is in some societies, but rather an act that is freely chosen and directed by the participants.

This action mainly takes place within the participants’ own age groups and gender, although adult youth coordinators provide them with needed support and open doors for them. Since responsibility of voluntary associations is not formally or legally permitted in France for young people under the age of 18, these associations may be considered as a “game”. The projects created by youngsters are collective and are often extensions of their childhood and adolescent leisure activities. While playing, children learn skills and perfect them, exchange their savoir-faire, their “how to do it”, their ways of learning and their knowledge. They attribute roles, distribute power and have fun outside of the adult world.

In a recent study of this national network of youth associations (RNJA), we studied the activities and projects undertaken in it, as well as the aims, motivations, representations, self-image and problems the youth face, including how they may be restricted and how they gain power. The question of empowerment is at the core of this study. Nevertheless, we have also taken a look at how young participants are valorized or stigmatized by adults. What do these young people learn and what do they teach their younger friends? To whom are they transmitting their projects? What are the effects of their activities on their neighborhood and on local development? How do teachers and parents react? Is the action of these junior associations seen as part of the public or private sphere? What may be the lessons of these experiments especially in terms of empowerment?

This communication will mainly focus on the question of youth empowerment in France. Empowerment, as we define it, addresses the issues of the control of one's life, the capacity to have one's actions valued and thus to gain status and power in society despite one's age or gender. However, it will also address broader research questions such as knowledge in action (Donald A. Schönⁱⁱ), a youth's ability to be the actor of self, as well as different sociological analyses of the participation and "autonomization" of young citizens, that's to say the acquisition of self-directedness.

This Kind of Knowledge held out the prospect of the transfiguration of life by improving man's control over the resources of nature and overt he powers that weaken his body; it offered the prospect of better understanding of society which it was thought would lead to the improvement of society" wrote Edward Shils quoted by Donald Schön page 35ⁱⁱⁱ.

Our hypothesis concerning the production of knowledge (i.e. the educational role) of organizations as well as the "autonomization" of their members is supported by our observations. Like with the French "Education Populaire" movement, this role is often hidden, passed over in silence.

Quebeckers, define "empowerment" as a consequence of collective community action. Surprisingly there is no french term for *empowerment*. Despite the reluctance of Quebeckers to use English^{iv}; in this case they nonetheless use an English expression "empowerment"^v. "To be able to act" (*capacité d'agir*) might be one possible translation of this concept but in France as in other French-speaking countries, sociologists and other academics have not yet come to consensus on an accepted expression. To

“empower” somebody entails a system of action that is far from assistance or support, or any tutorial form of help. It means to enable the obtaining of power by somebody unaccustomed to it: power to do but also power to define self and one’s own purposes and needs on one’s own terms. But even the translation “to be able to act” does not reflect the exact meaning of the concept of empowerment. Perhaps this conference in China could help to find a better one?

« Empowerment has been related to personal and social development: “the act of strengthening an individual’s beliefs in his or her sense of effectiveness”^{vi}(Conger, 1989, p.18)

Power of action... to be able to act... empowerment allows empowered people to be confident, to have a better self-image and to find a better identity. In helping relationships founded upon empowerment, people trust those who empower them and those who empower trust empowerment’s beneficiaries. In “Rules for Radicals”, Saul Alinsky^{vii} describes how deprived people in poor areas have been helped to react collectively to landlords. This social educator explains empowerment within grassroots movements.

The use of the concept of empowerment has not become widespread at the academic, political and professional levels of social work, social psychology, and administration organization in France! French voluntary organizations and institutions prefer other concepts because mainly voluntary associations are managed by leaders and the professionals and the volunteers are assisting people. Generally standard social practice are not empowering people.

Some authors criticise voluntary action in social work on the grounds that it is often envisaged as the consequence of, or the solution to, a reduction of public expenditures. Thus, the according of status to volunteers is seen as a symbolic reward to those who could not be paid. This might be the case of volunteers or any able person willing to be involved for example in a voluntary organization. Indeed this is the reason why systems of voluntary action have developed in countries without welfare and where paid staff in social work is not numerous.

In countries and societies where family and primary links, neighbourhood and community links have declined as a consequence of emigration or changing norms and ways of living, voluntary action is a solution to the decline in “ability to act” or empowerment. Young adults would help their own age group or older people on an unpaid basis in a complementary role to welfare state and paid services. It really is impossible to offer any

explanation why this altruism is not more studied and supported by public agencies. European policies focus only on European voluntary programs that are complementary, and often subsidiary, to public welfare.

One of the outcomes of volunteerism in non-profit organizations is the reinforcement of the social fabric. The way many organizations are rooted in the community and in the neighbourhood –meaning the geographical proximity – is a precious social capital for the society. Many needs could be answered at this micro level. Even in societies where the welfare state is powerful and even when it is wealthy, the production and benefits of community action is important in the long term as a source of conviviality. Community action binds individuals and furthers partnerships between citizens and their organizations and collectivities. Especially young adults involve themselves and act inside those communities where they have friends, family and solidarity: where they trust and are trusted. The desire to be useful and help others could be satisfied among family or friends.

To volunteer, to advocate or militate, to donate money to needy people or to sustain a political or social cause... These are in the same universe of actions in terms of active citizenship and positive contribution to the society. Yet, to give time or money or to be an activist also has very different dimensions and characteristics. Young adults who give their time, are also giving their energy, their life, "*Ils se donnent en gage*: they commit themselves". Often, they would be called activists. Many societies and sociologists would study "time giving" and volunteering with the same enquiries and the same surveys. But the variations in results and attitudes would raise the question of the differences in revenues. Different people do not have the same financial capacity to offer money. The wealthy may give more money and may practise philanthropy, yet are not always full of generosity. Not all citizens, even those who are young, are volunteers and many not always willing to give of their time to help organizations or their communities. They may be either egocentric or prefer to pursue their own hobbies or leisure activities, to augment their earnings or spend time with their own families. Altruism and social involvement are contradictory to other main utilitarian norms and values^{viii}. Though it satisfies the human and social need to help, people and young persons especially may look for relationships on an egalitarian and not hierarchical basis, outside of processes such as competition, performance or other market system and with a desire for personal autonomy. The categories of empowerment in voluntary associations are consequences of involvement inside ethically valued actions.

Does this mean that so long as young adults don't look or search either for altruism, generosity or involvement, they would not be empowered? In our conceptual frame, they could be powerful in term of money or power, of culture, or reputation, or celebrity... but we would then not use the term of empowerment to describe their action. This concept of empowerment implies involvement in good and ethical values in the society in which they live and are being educated.

Young adults are often quite generous. They give time and money to other young people either in their community, among groups of friends or to humanitarian actions and non-governmental organisations (NGO's). Even young people who have not a lot of money may be generous. Many young adults are sharing cigarettes, drinks and lodging within the same age group. They may give money or help people begging on public transportation or in the streets. In a recent study of an older generation – university students – we observed that they would not accept money offered by the non-profit organization where they are volunteers^{ix}. They volunteer and therefore don't accept any financial compensation^x. Their action is a “total act”, or a global one. In a form of utopian ideal action they offer both time and money. This way of acting is high valued in our society. It thus reinforces the characteristic and effect of its empowering action.

Eventually, as a part of this generation is taken into care by the welfare state and local authorities at high cost for the society^{xi}, the prestige of those who take care of themselves and who “serve” society is reinforced. One can point to the contrast between, on the one hand, public programs that provide leisure, sport activities, cultural ones, education and training and, on the other, the sorts of self help groups or autonomous organizations where users are actors and have responsibilities. The latter act on a horizontal basis with mutual and non-hierarchical relationships. In the former type of organisation, young adults are consumers; in the latter they are actors. In the former, there would be paid social workers; in the latter the paid staff either would be very few or even none to support the young adults.

All societies have divided responsibilities between adults and young people. Those who go to the army and give their blood or their lives are most often the young. In many cases, this sacrifice is compulsory. Perhaps this gift relationship^{xii} finds a new dimension in the voluntary association. It is a non-compulsory action but whereby young adults may find fulfilment, affiliation, identification and empowerment. Young people are more enthusiastic and also more fully enthusiastic than their elders. They make fewer concessions. Some might be extremist in their opinions, judgements and even in their acts.

Young adults are volunteering and acting with various motivations and more or less altruist motivations as well as more or less pragmatic ones. Statistics are lacking in France as regards this relationship between altruism and volunteering.

Motivation, considered that which pushes one to act or to not act, thus *de facto* constitutes the driving element of individual commitment in the dynamics of action.

Youth may take up action to be allowed access to public facilities such as stadiums, skate parks or rooms in a public building. Or they may engage themselves in order to socialize and meet friends. They might also act out of ethic or religious motivations, or out of altruism. Many active youth are fanatical and extremist and endorse violence or criminal behaviour. Others preach love, peace and harmony. Many are racist and others are willing to fight racism and all forms of discrimination. Many become involved in their communities; others in the global sphere. Many are looking to begin a career inside voluntary organizations, others are just looking to have fun with friends and groups. Many are searching to be independent from their families and to become adults. Others are very much tied to family links and bonds and, even within the context of a voluntary organisation, would be involved with their brothers and sisters. Young adults who begin their participation as users of public agencies may eventually become active in management. Sports participants may become volunteer coaches and leaders and so learn community action and active citizenship.

Young people take on responsibilities themselves, even though they accept or seek the help and support of adults who serve as the middlemen in regard to the administration and financial establishments. They are not looking for help or assistance in itself. Some of these youngsters seek a structure to solve a problem they've encountered such as not having a place to rehearse; others do so in order to obtain instruments or sports equipment and others for humanitarian or social reasons. Once they have entered into an "association", usually for practical reasons and sometimes even for consumer services, they discover a project and learn how to become responsible and committed to it, while at the same time learning to manage it.

Young people get involved for pragmatic and practical reasons^{xiii}; however they develop a sense of civic responsibility once they have spent some time working together within a group. And if they take root in the community or neighborhood, they then, thanks to the networks of connections, have the

possibility of entering into the greater community, and even into life itself, like part of an initiation ritual, as stated in the first part of the title of a book by Georges Lapassade “L’entrée dans la vie...”^{xiv}.

We can therefore say that they have learned to act and thus we find ourselves back at the central theme of this conference: empowerment, that’s to say “mastering that which is important”^{xv}.

The youth and “associations”

“Children have the right to freedom of expression” as is indicated in the International Convention for Children’s Rights. However, French law does not necessarily allow for children to associate. The 1901 Act “postulates the incapacity of a minor” without however providing more details.

In general, “associations” do not open their boardroom doors to young people due to distrust, for traditional reasons and to keep jobs and tasks for older people and for people who have seniority within the establishment. Even though “associations” are the structures that usually provide services to the youth, they are more often than not managed by adults, who are both volunteers and salaried workers. Young people are neither allowed to have a say nor allowed to take on responsibilities within these structures and thus cannot take action. This, however, is part of a general trend: the expertise and know-how of those concerned is often undervalued because of a problem^{xvi}; they are rarely allowed to voice their opinion and take part in decision making, especially when they are considered as young, or old, or without revenue, etc. In the case of structures that help the youth, the “professionals” rarely consult the beneficiaries and they are rarely included in the decision-making process. Few people say anything in regard to this since it involves the protection of minors, and because the administrators are more concerned about the social-cultural activity aspect^{xvii}. Yet, under the impetus of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Research, a new program called “Envie d’Agir” (The Desire to Act) was launched a year ago. This is a novelty for France

And yet, young people get involved in legitimate and constructive projects. Difficult conditions don’t only lead the youth into delinquency. Rather, it should be noted that young people are more inclined to set-up associative networks and get involved in “community actions” which result in local social development.

The research community, in particular sociologists, has looked into the forms of delinquency: gangs^{xviii} or violence and the problem of failure at school and withdrawal from society. However, the “secret” life of those

who take part in legitimate projects and who contribute to solidarity and humanitarian actions for disadvantaged social groups, are not very well known. Indeed, little is known because this type of action isn't taken into account when it is not part of formalized associations or groups.

This nearsightedness and semi-ignorance discreetly hide the truth: society still does not know how to deal with the problems of its youth who are in difficulty and suffering, and who are usually dealt some form of punishment or "assistance". Furthermore, successful initiatives are not even noticed, since they are often "out of the norm" and considered as "not standard". They are not valorized by the media which dwells on a negative image. Some attempts at self management may also place professionals in a difficult situation where they may lose their social value and who may be destabilized because the youth have gained power. Young people are the object of and are subject to policies that are set up by social and insertion programs; they are supervised yet they are mostly accused and rarely praised. They also suffer from an anthropological phenomenon: they are often envied because they are at the start of the rest of their lives. Little is known or said about knowledge and learning, the extra-curricular training and experience that is acquired within the framework of "associations", and which should be validated. Our study shows that parents and teachers often ignore and do not promote the experience young people obtain from these "junior associations".

Youth and the age category that corresponds to this term are constantly being redefined: an age group that is subordinate, yet also perpetually affirming an identity which is both proclaimed and denied at the same time. It's a fragile age, which is both protected and attacked. The youth see the indicators of its age group being shortened or extended depending on what society's needs are at a given time or because society does not know how to include them in its ranks. There are very young soldiers. There are very old students... There are very young mothers... and there are "Tanguys^{xix}". The youth is recognized when society needs young people; however, most of the time, a wager is simply placed on their future in the form of training and education, and the youth is thus denied its own specific identity as an autonomous age group. The word youth, is a word with a definition that is subjected to fluctuations and the logic of supply and demand.

To be young is to be part of the same cohort which adopts the same conflicts, the same happiness and the same historic moments. Young people experience the same collective situations and try hard to build situations together so as to form a "group".

It is difficult to group all young people together for research purposes. Many studies are specified and categorized by age groups. Another problem is that the youth is often divided into two sub-groups: boys and girls, who are very different in their approach. However, they are complementary when it comes to life styles and the way in which they assert themselves.

“All the boys and girls around my age, they hold each other by the hand in pairs ...^{xx}”

We also place them into various social-economic groups and categorize them as belonging to one of many communities or religions. At the same time, and in a paradoxical manner, the youth is a social category that transcends many identities and affiliates actors with multiple profiles and gives them the power of those who are together and who act together.

The image of the youth given by the media is often negative and conflicting. The media and certain politicians stigmatize young people, and preferably, those who come from the suburbs and from low-income neighborhoods. These young people are accused and victimized. A finger is pointed at them. They may feel like they are living in a conspiracy, in a world of “relegation” according to the expression by Jean-Marie Delarue.

The young president of an association once said that he was happy to have federated a certain number of young people together so as to prove that “young people aren’t just ‘good for nothings and scum that hang around the streets’”. The youth want to readjust the power of those less-fortunate, and so they are empowering themselves, as described by Yann le Bossé^{xxi}, which allows them to defend such values as equality and fraternity.

Guy Bajoit^{xxii}, professor at Louvain demonstrated that the relationship between the youth and other age categories is fragile because to have confidence in the world you must first have confidence in yourself. Young people lack social capital and suffer from multiple tensions: between desire and reality, between globalization and local identity sometimes even withdrawal, between a call for citizenship and political role models who are often scandalous, between the link to work and the relationship to fun and even in regard to consumption. Social institutions and authorities no longer have any signposts which they can follow.

Yet these views on disgust, on receding altruism and on an environment of anxieties, does not really and truly depict the youth that we saw and who we would qualify as being inventive, strategic and creative, and who are struggling to gain new rights.

We met several groups, here are a few examples.

Nine young women gathered together money to go to Senegal. They are preparing a medical-social baccalaureate. Many of them want to become nurses.

“We didn’t go on a tourist trip over there. We lived like they do. I think we were there to discover and learn and not to tell them: this is how you should do it.”

Another group wanted a place where they could set-up cultural activities for the young people in their neighborhood. Recreational activities of course, but some of them even have a charitable aim.

“It’s important to have activities; otherwise they get themselves into trouble.”

One group wanted “public walls” and free spray-paint. “Ever since we painted a mural in the neighborhood, the old people and other young people have changed their minds about us. They see us in a different light. Before that, they thought we were little hoodlums.”

The youth have an image of the image that society has of them, and changing this image is important.

There are female dance groups that contribute to expanding and promoting the hip-hop culture and which participate in fashion shows.

Some young women created a group to pay tribute to a friend who died at the age of 15. They dream of founding an association to help alphabetize children in Haiti, where their friend was originally from. They appear mature and seem to have experience; however, they are concerned about creating the type of association that the French 1901 Association Act allows. They are also a bit worried about opening up their group to outsiders who don’t know the ties they share.

One group of youngsters wants to make robots so that they can participate in the TV science show “E = M6”. It is made up of young people who refuse to hold “honorary” positions and who make decisions as a group.

Another group project, from thirty young people, is to provide Internet initiation sessions to a large number of their buddies. The President is 16 years old and has a volunteer outlook and a sense of responsibility.

Another group acted as the basis for a request for funds to build a skate park (\$65M). Before this project, they skated in the streets. Their aim? To

better themselves, to improve their skateboarding skills, to play music and to meet other groups. They provide classes to justify the investment.

At a local radio station, two young men demonstrate exceptional organizational skills and amazing professionalism as well as a great deal of motivation. One wants to be a journalist, the other an actor and they established this radio station. Both of them hope to learn to be more confident and more about their future jobs. And what's even better than most of the other cases is the fact that their teachers acknowledge their activity by listening to their radio station!

For many, an "association" is the means to obtain help, in the form of a place to meet, and recognition, in the form of a positive image, which is important in their eyes because they need to be recognized. An association provides them with managerial and organizational skills and with a sense of consistency and responsibility.

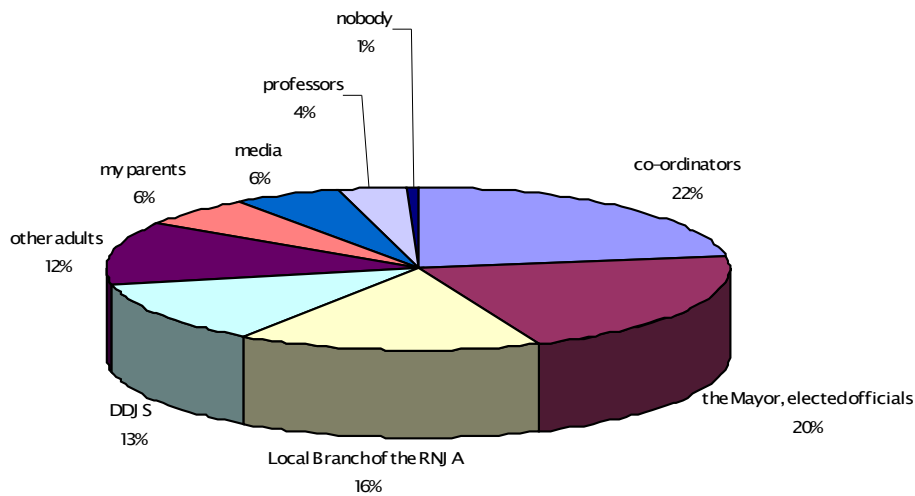
Effective coordinators are adults who support them while at the same time allowing them to be self-sufficient. A lot of young people, often very young, want to transfer something to and teach the "little" ones, and they say that they do not learn a lot from the trainers^{xxiii}.

They aren't really perplexed by the paperwork and administrative procedures. According to our study, only half of them seem to be discouraged by the administrative paperwork and the slowness of bureaucracy and only a fourth of them by the responsibility entailed and by the fact that they have to open a bank account.

Innovative, strategic and creative

Their first meeting at town hall, which represents an establishment and another world - the adult world, often makes them aware of the need to be structured, and of the necessity to formalize their ideas into an "official" organization. Becoming part of an organizational network provides them with recognition and self-esteem, and the groups also mentioned that they became more at ease in their relationships with adults.

From whom did you get support in order to carry out JA projects ?



Becoming a “1901 association” may be discouraging for young people. Yet, we were struck by their sense of responsibility, their maturity, the energy and activity that they put into their project as well as their seriousness including the accounting aspect. Even though groups complained about the slowness of bureaucracy, and the tedious nature of certain tasks, they were proud of what they’d done. The association gives them the satisfaction that they may not always get from Public Education and they invest the energy and creativity which are often stifled in their schools.

Some of them are good students, others have “given up” (cause or consequence?). For the good students, the association takes away from their free time, but not from classes^{xxiv}. There is a type of self-reliance that comes from the appropriation of knowledge, as we’ve already seen in organizations where adults are involved.^{xxv}

“We don’t learn that at school!”

For example, the dancers and skateboarders learned from cassettes.

“They don’t think they can learn a lot from their teachers.”

As in the study on European volunteer services^{xxvi}, we realize that young people invent their own forms of learning, and the results are often unexpected since the knowledge obtained is sound and significant.

In our study of the RNJA, almost all the groups were pretty much at the start of the process, approaching the more enthusiastic moment when they will be able to create: they are in the “realization” stage. They are involved and committed.

The birth of a project and motivations

The former alliance is broken; man at last knows that he is alone in the great indifference of the Universe from which he emerged by accident. No more than his destiny, his duty isn't written anywhere. It is he who must choose between the Kingdom and darkness^{xxvii}.

Luck and necessity and the will to do something, to act at last, a project emerges from a meeting, from the need for equipment or a place. Somewhere between a creation that is more or less programmed and nurtured by coordinators and a fortuitous birth, the “associations” of these young adults do not always mature in the way that they were created. Some of them take off again when they enter the “associative” ranks. Others die out, like choked out plants or perhaps because the young people couldn't deal with the constraints and conflicts they encountered. Several of the associations we called could be categorized as “absent subscribers” for they are on the official list supplied by the RNJA, yet there is no one to answer our questions.

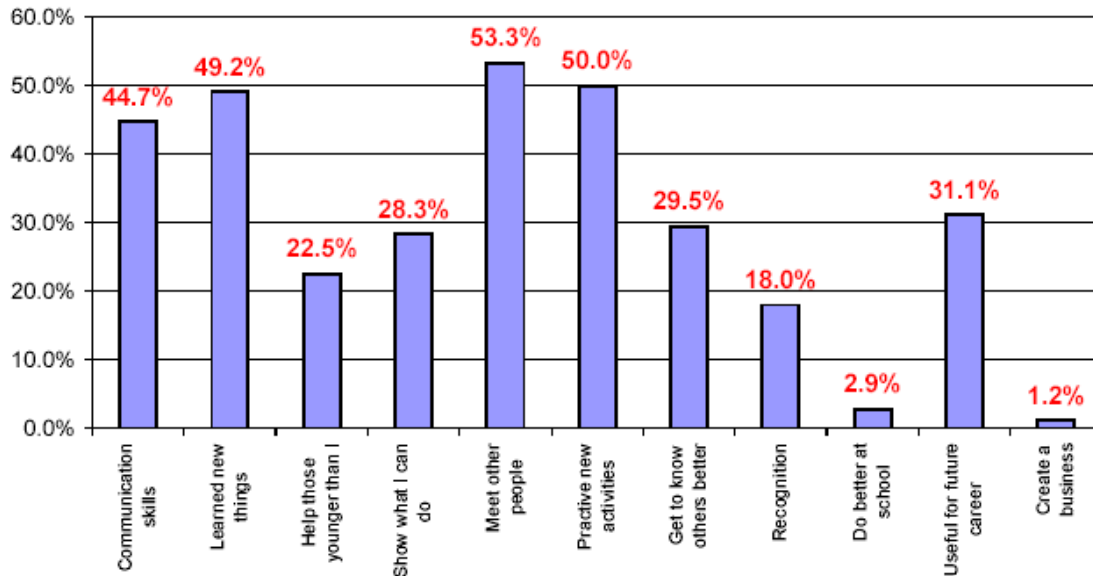
Some say that the non-profit aspect is un motivating, because they can't see the fruit of their efforts. According to one coordinator, even at the age of 16, “when you invest in something 40 hours a week, you're happy to get a little something out of it!”

The need to express themselves, to carry out a temporary or durable project, to search for partners, the need to be seen, to be recognized, to affirm their identity and the need for socialization and empowerment. The youth would like to make a certain practice official; they want to perfect their skills for work purposes or for a project based on solidarity. There are a multitude of reasons between what they say and why they actually do it:

- To do what you want with your friends.
- This avoids hanging out and getting into trouble.
- To invest in the neighborhood.
- To advance together.
- Many people speak poorly of the youth; we want to change the “ghetto” image of our neighborhood and show them that we're capable of doing something else and that there's more to it than just money.
- Renounce rather than do business.
- To prove to yourself that you can do something.

- Music, we're born with it, but at school we only learn history.
- This is better than what we do at school.

Accomplishments and Gains due to the Junior Association



Young people learn associative experience and learn rules.

Decision-making	
unanimous	24.2%
with a member majority	24.2%
with a board majority	6.6%
the president decides	8.2%
no answer	21.7%
Sub Total	100.0%

Organizational tools	Answers
Internal regulations	118
A notebook	126
A contribution	131
Statutes	131
A Charter	14
Total	244

On the whole, the experience is a positive one for 91.4 % of them because it constitutes a sort of initiation to working in an association and more than half want to continue to participate in associative activities after the age of 18.

Parents have various attitudes concerning the commitment of their children. Not all parents are for this practice, fearing that associative or volunteer work will hinder their studies. Some parents even restrain them! Some of them are encouraging.

We saw that the women elected at the “Ligue^{xxviii}” sometimes complained that their children weren’t involved. Are there possibly children who don’t follow their parents’ example?

Teachers are often unaware or, possibly, youngsters don’t feel like they are being supported by them^{xxix}. The image of these associations is not really known, even in the educational field, thus is not yet credible.

Schools often categorize a student as being a failure instead of asking itself if it weren’t at fault and questioning itself on the classical and traditional educational program. Knowledge is vertically transmitted: teachers teach students. Yet, some young people feel that this scheme should be questioned, since they have a different definition of the situation and what school ought to be.

Some of the youngsters from one of the groups, “the restless”, no longer attend school. Since they do hip-hop, they were advised to sign up at an expensive classical dance school. And yet, these youngsters have know-how, knowledge and skills; the only problem is that it is neither recognized nor validated in their school courses.

Conclusion

Olivier Galland reports on the debates on the cultural unity of adolescents. Juvenile culture can orient mass culture and above all filter into it by “juvenilising” the dominant models. Of course the problem has engaged the debate of many media and authors and even politician.

We saw the emergence of new and innovative practices from young minors and their will for self-sufficiency and their desire to act. For certain groups, a “junior association” is simply a way to obtain equipment, a place to meet, support, or something else, but once they are “caught in the net”, they establish and implicate themselves in some of the most open-minded and interdependent projects. The network that organizes junior associations is located at the cross-roads of the adult and youth worlds, and is caught between the desire to “laissez

faire” and at the same time the desire to be available, to listen, and to simply be side by side with them.

Certain practices should be considered in terms of acquired knowledge. We find that it would be interesting and beneficial if the Public Education sector were to consider the know-how of its youth. We need to take a look not only at the standardized knowledge that is learned in school, but also at the competencies and skills that certain young people acquire through their extracurricular activities. We feel that elementary and middle schools should better consider the fact that these youngsters bear civic and civil knowledge and competencies.

Training for associative and volunteer work, civic involvement and citizenship is necessary. If, through funding, junior associations can serve as a stepping stone for the young so that they may have their own activities, we feel it is necessary to prepare them to assume, if they want to, the continuity of their activity in an association of the 1901 act type, and this without hesitation. They need to be able to obtain the elements that will allow them to appropriate the management aspect of their associations. The focus should be placed on upstream training.

Since this study, the number of junior associations has strongly increased, which only proves the dynamism of this network and of the youth themselves.

Young people regroup around common practices and sectors of involvement that belong to their age groups; the simple fact of living in a socially uniform neighborhood does not really lead to a great social mix. We saw this for ourselves in our interviews.

Traditional structures, sports groups that are the most attended and the “associations” from the “Education Populaire” movement certainly play their role since we noted that junior associations developed themselves even more in innovative fields.

Phenomena linked to power develop in these groups and young people take on strong leadership roles.

Even if we can't see the protests behind this, we do note their solidarity which demonstrates their rejection of certain forms of inequality. The tendency to invest oneself paradoxically on a day to day basis both locally and on a global level can be found in this category.

The youth is bringing about new ways of living, of getting involved and of tapping into new networks, yet at the same time young people are inclined to associate with family, i.e. their sisters and brothers.

There's a lot of talk about individualism and tribalism. In reality it's half and half. These youngsters form groups together where individuals find themselves

in the same project for which they share a common representation that is specific to their age group.

Groups are indeed a means of social integration; however they are limited in time and social space and territory.

Some of the youth are users, others are actors; some of them are innovative and others just copy the modes and the modes of being an actor.

Note on methodology

In order to understand the stakes that lead young people to form a project under the auspices of a junior association that was initially based on a vague idea, we developed a methodology consisting in 4 stages:

- Familiarization with the subject: a bibliographic analysis and meetings with the people in charge of the structure and associative experts. We met several people at conferences with French and foreign researchers.

- A qualitative stage based on interviews: we wrote up a chart and used it in over thirty semi-directive interviews (some were rapid) of members from junior associations^{xxx}. The aim of this qualitative stage was to start from the viewpoints and opinions of the youth themselves and not from our ideas or those of the RNJA, in order to construct a better basis for our study and to prepare the quantitative stage.

- Analysis of the administrative authorization files^{xxxii} that are often completed in function of the expectations that the youngsters seem to have: they want to obtain an administrative authorization and do their best to do so, which is a good way to learn about life. These files provide a different light to the interviews and questionnaires since they are compiled before the in vivo activity in the Juniors Associations.

- A quantitative stage which was based on the observation of a larger sampling after having sent out a questionnaire (244 were returned)^{xxxiii}. This stage was punctuated with observations and with interviews during regroupings organized by the RNJA and with interviews of junior associations in rural areas^{xxxiii}. The questionnaire gathered semi-urban and semi-rural responses.

Lastly, a final report consisting of several chapters.

ⁱ In France, practically all non-profit organizations fall under the umbrella term “Association loi 1901”, which refers to the 1901 Act that enables and governs volunteer organizations. These associations may range from recreational centers which provide activities to the local community, to sports clubs, and even to organizations with a humanitarian aim.

ⁱⁱ Donald A.Schön, “*The Reflective Practitioner, How Professionals Think in Action*” Basic Book, 1983

ⁱⁱⁱ Edward Shils, *The Order of Learning in the United States from 1865 to 1920: The Ascendancy of the Universities*” Minerva XVI,2, Summer 1978. p 171

^{iv} They speak of a “parking” lot as a « stationnement », or of “shopping” as « magasiner »

^v Dan Ferrand-Bechmann, *Travail social en cette fin de siècle*, Conférence à Hull, Université, Ciriec, 1998.

^{vi} Conger, J. (1989). Leadership: *The art of empowering others. The academy of management executive*, 3(1), 17-24. in *the preparatory paper of the congress*

^{vii} Saul Alinsky, « *Manuel de l’Educateur Social*” Paris le Seuil 1976

^{viii} Alain Caillé, *Critique de la Raison Utilitaire*, La Découverte, Paris 2003

^{ix} S dir/ Dan Ferrand-Bechmann « *Motivations et engagement des étudiants bénévoles à l’afév* » CESOL 2000

^x Guillaume Houzel, *Les engagements bénévoles des étudiants* », La Documentation Française, Paris 2003

^{xi} In France the “missions locales” are public agencies giving jobs, counselling and training to young people between 16 and 25 years old

^{xii} Richard Titmuss “*The Gift Relationship, From Human Blood to Social Policy*”, London, Penguin Books, 1970

^{xiii} Alain Caillé, *Critique de la Raison utilitaire*, Manifeste du Mauss, La Découverte Paris 2003.

^{xiv} Georges Lapassade (1963). *L’entrée dans la vie, essai sur l’inachèvement de l’homme*, Paris, éd : Bourgeois C. & D. de Roux.

^{xv} Yann le Bossé, « *Empowerment et Pratiques Sociales : illustration d’une utopie prise au sérieux.* » *Nouvelles Pratiques Sociales* N°1 1994.

^{xvi} Attila Cheyssial, *La Quantité Négligeable*, Thèse de 3^e cycle Université de Paris 8, 2002

^{xvii} In France there are numerous public structures that help the youth and “associations” that organize activities for them.

^{xviii} William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society*, La Découverte Paris 2002, 1ere édition en anglais 1943.

^{xix} Allusion to the recent film titled *Tanguy* concerning a young adult who still lives with his parents and who won’t or « can’t » leave.

^{xx} Title of a song by Françoise Hardy which was popular in the ‘60s

Tous les Garçons et les Filles
Françoise Hardy

Tous les garçons et les filles de mon âge
Se promènent dans la rue deux par deux
Tous les garçons et les filles de mon âge
Savent bien ce que c'est qu'être heureux
Et les yeux dans les yeux
Et la main dans la main
Ils s'en vont amoureux
Sans peur du lendemain

In a free translation :

all boys and girls of my age
are walking in the street together
they know what is to be happy
and eyes in the eyes
hands in hands
they are in love

They are not afraid of the day after!

all boys and girls of my age
are walking in the street together

^{xxi} Yann le Bossé, « *Empowerment et Pratiques Sociales : illustration d'une utopie prise au sérieux.* » *Nouvelles Pratiques Sociales*, vol 9, N°1 1994.

^{xxii} AISLF conference in Lisbon, 6 September 2002

^{xxiii} We consulted the thesis paper by Renaud Camilleri «Hip, Hop and the Transmission of Knowledge» University Paris 8, UFR 8 2003

^{xxiv} It should be noted that some of these young people are good students are very active in Junior Associations (JA) and on top of this they work (but this doesn't appear in the statistics) ,

^{xxv} Please refer to the CESOL report and study on "the paths of knowledge in associations" under the direction of Dan Ferrand-Bechmann.

^{xxvi} Evaluation for the French part of the structure realized in 1998.

^{xxvii} in Jacques Monod, « *Le Hasard et la Nécessité* » Essais Point Paris 1973 Jacques Modon has been a Nobel prize.

^{xxviii} Under the direction of Dan Ferrand-Bechmann, *Pratiques Associatives au Féminin*, CESOL for the Ligue de l'Enseignement. 2003.

^{xxix} The Ministry of Education is here too being innovative by launching an educational commitment program.

^{xxx} See the part of this report that shows parts of the interviews

^{xxxi} Summary by Marc Marciszever in the full report.

^{xxxii} Conducted by Ronald Melchers, Professor at Ottawa.

^{xxxiii} Alexandra Audoin in particular, who conducted them in the framework of his thesis.