

**Book Review - Youth in Contemporary Europe, by Jeremy Leaman and Martha Wörsching (eds.)**

**2010, Abingdon, Routledge, 291 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-87817-3**

In *Youth in Contemporary Europe*, the editors present a collection of chapters highlighting economic, political, social and cultural tensions impinging youth cultures in contemporary Europe. In the introduction, the editors provide an overview of some perceived challenges for young people in their 'youth' to 'adulthood' transitions within contemporary Europe, with a particular focus on a wide range of insecurities. The objective of the volume is to provide the reader with a multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary view of youth cultures in Europe through presenting a variety of recent research in several countries. The contributors to the volume originate from several European countries and disciplinary backgrounds (including sociology, geography and education among others). Some of the contributions provide comparative studies, while others focus on individual countries. The volume overall is an engaging text containing much diversity in terms of research approach and subject matter.

The book consists of 15 chapters organised into four parts: Life chances and socio-economic determinants of youth today; Youth and socio-cultural transformations; Youth as a problem group; Youth and political culture. In part one, Kairi Kasearu *et al.* provide a comparative study of three towns located in Estonia, Germany and the UK, investigating connections between perceived social exclusion and parental family backgrounds. Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska *et al.* summarise the results of an eight country comparative project examining the risks of youth disadvantage evaluating the successes of different countries in fighting child poverty. Jeremy Leaman examines differences in the approaches of Germany and the UK in confronting youth unemployment providing thoughtful observations in detailing policy stances. Part two opens with an examination of educational mobility of British students by Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters, contextualised within European literature, revealing a range of perceptions and experiences of 'Overseas Study'. Peter Kraftl provides an appealing dialogue for *Children's Geographers* in considering contemporary British childhoods as a series of identifiable 'events', informed through a proposed axis of 'hope-crisis'. Barbara Stauber then, in the light of late modernity, focuses on the de-standardisation of youth transitions to adulthood highlighting the agency of young German people in using youth culture as a means to manage these transitions. Andreas Vossler and Terry Hanley provide an overview of two online services available to young people in Germany and the UK illustrating new forms of support available to young people in late modern societies.

Chris Lewis *et al.* begin part three with some insights into violent youth crime in England within the context of UK Government social policy, comparing approaches to address criminality with policy in Japan. Alan France *et al.* provide an interesting discussion detailing the emphasis given to 'active citizenship' within UK (New Labour) social policy. They then consider notions of 'risk' and 'risk-taking' indicating the different understandings of such ideas from 'youth' and 'adult' vantage points. Concluding part three, Andreu López Blasco explores young people's experiences of leaving the parental home in the context of ('yoyo') transitions between youth and adulthood in Spain, and argues that importance lies not with time taken to 'move out' but rather with the benefits of living in, and individuals' positioning when leaving, the parental home.

Part four opens with Gudrun Quenzel and Mathias Albert sharing an overview of 'Shell Youth Survey' data from 2006 in Germany, underlining changing attitudes towards integration within the European Union. Daniel Faas illustrates differing knowledge levels about Europe when comparing English and German educational reactions to Europe. Wolfgang Gaiser and Johann De Rijke reveal young people's political participation in Germany and illustrate differences based on educational background, gender and between historic 'East' and 'West'. Martha Wörsching argues that young people in the UK participate in politics less than their EU peers and suggests that past and present 'neo-liberal' policies that sought to contain, discipline and control 'them' intensified(ies) experiences of alienation and powerlessness. The book closes with a fascinating insight into the political engagement of young 'neo-fascist' activists in Italy as Stéphanie Dechezelles details a major change in the political positioning of the party; from political exclusion and marginality to being politically present and active in the exercise of power. Overall, the range of subjects addressed means that readers may be attracted to the text for different reasons. For those who are drawn to the volume, there are some limitations to note. Firstly, an imbalance is evident in the volume which leaves the reader with a sense that the piece may not be representative of contemporary Europe as a whole. With the exception of the research presented in part one; the chapters gravitate toward studies within *Western* Europe. In particular, the empirical examples and comparisons focus predominantly on youth cultures in the UK and Germany. Insights into youth cultures within *Central* and *Eastern* Europe would provide interesting data to supplement the empirical examples from within Western Europe.

Secondly, little attention is given to economic, political, social and cultural changes in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly with regard to countries'

recent accession to the European Union and the impacts of these transformations to young people. For instance, Walker and Stephenson (2010) suggest that ideas of opportunities and risks for young people continue to be influenced by social and spatial links/divisions between countries within Eastern Europe, but also between that of historical 'East' and 'West' Europe. The changing circumstances of and opportunities for young people in Central and Eastern Europe are not discussed at length in the volume, but would have provided interesting and relevant contrasts to some studies presented.

Finally, the book would have benefited from some concluding remarks by the editors to make explicit the connections between chapters within each part. The reader would have welcomed a return to the overall objective of the volume in discussing the importance and contribution such a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach attains in exploring '*Youth in Contemporary Europe*'. The chapters presented in the book are strong individually, raising a number of interesting topics and perspectives into 'youth', but collectively feel disjointed as the links between some chapters are ambiguous. However, despite these suggested limitations, the range of subjects and approaches adopted within the volume will make the book of interest to children's geographers and it contributes to a growing body of literature on youth experiences within Europe.

## Reference

Walker, C. and Stephenson, S., 2010. Youth and social change in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13, 521–532.