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# PRACTICAL DIMENSIONS OF YOUTH POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN POLAND ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE EUROPE4YOUTH ASSOCIATION

## PRAKTYCZNE WYMIARY REALIZACJI POLITYKI MŁODZIEŻOWEJ W POLSCE NA PRZYKŁADZIE STOWARZYSZENIA EUROPE4YOUTH

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**Abstract:** This article aims to present the role and importance of youth policy, and how youth organisations can practically implement it on a local and regional level, on the example of Association Europe4Youth (Kraków, Poland). The case study method will be used to portray how youth organisations and young people themselves can shape youth policy, implement it and practice youth work at various levels. Since youth work is not recognised formally as a profession nor a function in Poland, those are non-governmental organisations that have enough space and freedom to explore various practices of youth work and advocate for youth policies while collaborating with local, regional, and national authorities.

**Keywords:** youth policy, youth, the Europe4Youth Association, Poland.

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu zaprezentowanie roli i wagi polityki młodzieżowej oraz sposobu, w jaki organizacje młodzieżowe mogą w praktyce realizować ją na poziomie lokalnym i regionalnym, na przykładzie Stowarzyszenia Europe4Youth (Kraków, Polska). Analiza studium przypadku zostanie zastosowana, aby zbadać, jak organizacje młodzieżowe i sami młodzi ludzie mogą kształtować politykę młodzieżową, wdrażać ją i praktykować pracę z młodzieżą na różnych poziomach. Ponieważ praca z młodzieżą (*youth work*) nie jest rozpoznana w Polsce formalnie jako zawód czy funkcja, to organizacje pozarządowe mają przestrzeń i wolność do eksplorowania różnorodnych praktyk pracy z młodzieżą i mogą pełnić rolę rzeczników młodzieży w polityce młodzieżowej, współpracując z władzami na poziomie lokalnym, regionalnym i krajowym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** polityka młodzieżowa, młodzież, stowarzyszenie Europe4Youth, Polska.

## Introduction

Youth policy is a relatively new policy area, which recorded widespread development after the Second World War, inspired and boosted by the unprecedented process of European integration. It has been supplemental towards its primary mission of sustaining democratic ruling, developing, and spreading European values, and creating exceptional zone for citizens, including young generations who were given new international opportunities. During this process, bottom up, spontaneous and free of agenda youth activities – a training field for many competences and innovations in various fields – were about to gain legal framework, organizational and content-related resources and professional methodologies.

This article aims to present one of such structures of youth activities. While serving a space for youth participation and development, it fulfilled an important mission of enabling young people to participate in decision-making in the field of youth and through that implement, shape, and influence youth policy.

Through the case study analysis, I will portray how informal structures such as youth organizations can contribute to implementation of youth policy and play the role of key actors in youth policymaking. It will be also demonstrated how various practices of Europe4Youth and its milestone projects led to development of youth work values and principles and, finally, what are the obstacles for youth organizations to fully represent their function.

## Methodology

The aim of this article indicates the most appropriate method of analysing single practice and organisational structure – case study analysis. It will consist in in-depth analysis of the history, statutory activities, practices, and achievements of the Europe4Youth Association in order to

explore underlying principles and explain how a youth organisation can impact and implement youth policy in given systemic circumstances and to detect what challenges they may face.

Before the case will be presented, those systemic circumstances will be roughly outlined to better understand rationale of possible projects, practices, or decisions of youth organisations on the example of the Europe4Youth Association. In fact, those were the systemic conditions, gaps, and deeply rooted needs that shaped the scope of activities, statutory aims, and “the offer” of the association.

The analysis is based on the association’s documentation, strategic plans, annual reports as well as inside knowledge about organisational culture and management practices of the author of this article, who participated in development of the association from its very beginning and is taking the position of the Director of the Board at the moment.

## Terminology

The scope of terms we are going to use in this article should be clarified at the beginning. We understand **youth work**, after definitions of the Council of Europe and the European Commission, as a variety of practices aimed at development of a full potential of every young person in his or her transition period from childhood to adulthood (Youth Work Explained..., 2017). Those practices range from extra curricula activities, volunteering, and organisation of free time to running youth clubs or providing specialist services. What needs to be underpinned is that youth work, according to the EU Youth Policy and above-described approach, is value-based, happens outside of formal education system, and is grounded in partnership relation between a youth worker and young person. Youth work enables access to a range of opportunities, provides youth information based on which young

people make their life choices (selection of education path, choosing life partners, deciding about their future). Furthermore, youth work aims to support young people in becoming members of democratic societies, active citizens, bonded and integrated with other people, able to maintain healthy relations with others. It helps to develop valuable individuals, not only a “value” on a labour market. Therefore, youth work should be strategically planned and implemented in collaboration between different stakeholders, all entities participating in the youth sector.

This approach roots back to post-war Europe and is closely related with the history of European integration and one of its core purposes – integration of citizens in the spirit of tolerance, understanding, solidarity, and democratic values to eventually prevent wars between countries and secure democratic ruling in Europe. The European Communities decided that the most effective way to achieve that is to give the young generation open possibilities to self-organise, be active, participate in democracy, with no surveillance, no directives, no political agenda (unlike state-organised youth movements of totalitarian regimes). Of course, we cannot say this approach is a product of European integration. We may refer back to the Scout Method. It says that “the purpose of the Scout Movement is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual potential as individuals, as responsible citizens, and as members of their local, national, and international communities” (The Scout Method..., 2019). It is also good to mention Janusz Korczak’s pedagogical approach and his concept of child’s autonomy and children’s rights (Smolińska-Theiss, 2010, pp. 9–10). However, this is the EU that inserted this approach into political strategy, EU Youth Policy, from which many countries derived their own methodologies to the national youth policies.

Polish legislative tradition from before its access to the EU takes up rather different

perspective, with terms like didactics, upbringing, re-education (Matyjaszczyk, 2014, p. 10). After the Second World War Polish policies directed to young people aimed at preventing and fighting social pathologies among young people. The aim of the state was to (re)educate and form young people, which was the task of formal system of education, even with extracurricular activities embedded in this system. The term *young people* was narrowed to *children and youth* under formal education system and teachers were responsible for their development (Polityka młodzieżowa..., 2019, pp. 8–9).

The shift of this approach was triggered by the access of Poland to the EU in 2004 and boosted with Polish presidency in the Council. This is when Polish National Council of Youth Organisation, PROM, was established (Polityka młodzieżowa..., 2019, p. 8). First strategic plan at a national level for 2003–2012 was not prolonged, but the work of different Ministries, councils and committees started to work on sectorial plans for youth development in specific areas like employment or housing. The workflow of those bodies was, however, dependent on political fluctuations, and their continuity was rarely protected. The body that continued its work, although the members had changed, was the Parliamentary Working Group for supporting Youth Councils operating next to local authorities, established in 2015 and reconstructed in 2019. This group consisting of parliamentary deputies collaborated to a great extent with youth councils’ representatives, foremost Polish Council of Youth Organisations (PROM) and Youth and Children’s Council next to the Minister of Education (RDiM), who had been advocating for strengthening and specifying competencies of local youth councils. The process of amending the act on local youth councils has been completed just recently with a novelisation reformulating certain competencies of such bodies. In the scope of those years, the number of youth councils all over Poland has tripled, and this form of youth participation became quite

popular (O młodzieżowych radach..., 2018, p. 15). The effectiveness, quality, and general conditions created for young councillors were, however, very different from municipality to municipality.

Also, several ministries have invited young people to establish Youth Councils for their sectors (e.g. climate, defence). All those examples may be taken as sectorial steps towards more integrated youth policy in Poland, which lasts till now. Today, the Council of Dialogue with Young Generation founded by the Prime Minister's Office (Rada Dialogu z Młodym Pokoleniem) and the Government Plenipotentiary for Youth Policy (Pełnomocnik Rządu ds. Polityki Młodzieżowej) in collaboration with youth councils and representatives of different ministries are coordinating the national process of establishing integrated and strategic youth policy at a national level. At the same time, many municipalities and regions are developing their own strategies based on specificity of their regions and profile of young people living there.

All those legislative processes seem to be building up on almost 20 years of practice developed by youth movements and organisations benefiting from EU programmes. Moreover, they are often developed together with those movements and organisations, including the Europe4Youth Association. This is why this article dares to present its practices as an example of youth-led self-governance in answering to needs of young people, developing youth work and bottom-up approach to youth policy development.

**Youth policy**, based on above-described approach, is defined as a set of regulations, programmes, and legal basis for activities fulfilling the aim of supporting young people in the transition period. Youth policy in European countries tends to be more and more integrated (as an opposite of sectorial), treated holistically covering all decisions that affect young people in all spheres of their lives, including employment, housing, education, health, leisure, culture, and influence. As mentioned before, in Poland youth

policy understood this way is in the development phase. Many municipalities and regions adopt their own policy documents regarding youth issues, having no binding national strategy to be rooted in. Hence, developing own approaches, sometimes refers to European tradition and practices of youth organisations, movements and formats provided by the EU programmes. In this article, we will be promoting integrated approach to youth policy. Essentially, youth policy should be a legal basis for youth work, defining its role, giving framework for practices, recognising its value, allocating appropriate resources, and defining qualifications of youth workers.

**Youth sector** will be understood as all assortment of entities – private or public – that work with young people along the principles and values of youth work (e.g. a European Charter on Local Youth Work). The term *sector* indicates certain level of integration of those entities and at least basic level of coordination. The sector as a whole should deliver all necessary services, organise settings for youth activities, or produce useful tools. The context of its functioning is a broad and holistic diagnosis of youth situation in a specific territory. The whole youth sector should participate in the cycle of youth policy-making, from the beginning of decision-making process, through implementation and monitoring, until evaluation.

How can we define *young people*? Because of the practical aim of this article, I will resign from extensive review of different theoretical approaches and instead use the term *youth* which can be analysed in biological, socio-cultural, psychological, and other contexts. The boundary of 18 years old is the oldest, however, simplistic definition. We may use biological definition stating that youth ends with the last stage of cognitive development of brain (19–21 years old) or systemic one – participating in education system may suggest being a child and being employed may be understood as being an adult (what about unemployed – dropouts?). We may claim that

dependent status is a feature of a child and that social/institutional/financial independence constitutes an adult. Yet, last years the transition period has been prolonging. Young people combine education with employment, live longer with their parents, due to many reasons become self-sustainable and independent later. This is why the term *youth* does not define clear boundaries, yet for the practical purpose includes people from 13 to 30 years old, according to the European Youth Policy documents. Some state policies or regional/local youth programmes define it differently (e.g. The Young Krakow 2.0. Programme puts the barrier on 26-year-olds).

The Europe4Youth Association has adopted the definition of youth after EU Youth Strategy (the age of 13–30), bearing in mind subcategories based on various criteria:

- age: teenagers (13–19), young adults (20–25), late young adults (26–30);
- legal: 13–18 with limited rights and 18–30 with full rights;
- life situation: young people in schools, students, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training), young people having families, singles, living alone or with parents, independent financially or not;
- territory: urban, rural, small town environments;
- socio-cultural: minority groups, cultural, ethnic, sexual, religious minorities, people of different identities, social backgrounds;
- human capital: young people with fewer opportunities and young people from families of a high human capital (Fatyga, 2004, p. 39).

Variety of programmes and projects of the Europe4Youth Association are directed to different categories of young people, based on their specific needs, profile, characteristics, aspirations, and expectations. Holistic approach to youth policy implementation does not involve embracing with the same activities all young people, but creating equal, yet adapted opportunities of education, development, and inclusion for all.

## Youth Policy in Europe and Poland

In order to explore the systemic background for activities of youth organisation on the example of the Europe4Youth Association, let us briefly take a look at the structure of youth policy – a basis for youth work – in Europe and Poland.

The most important actors and decision-makers in the field of youth in Europe are the European Union, the Council of Europe, and states. Next to them we may list the European Youth Forum and International Youth Organisations active in the field of policy-making. The Council of Europe has a long tradition of supporting youth field under the section of democratic participation and the aim of building common European culture. The alliance with the European Commission in the field of youth brought to live “The partnership between CoE and EC in the field of youth” with separate structure, budget, and activities supporting quality developments in this field all over Europe, running research, co-organizing European Youth Work Conventions. The conventions organized every couple of years define the path of youth work development known as “the Bonn process”, leading towards recognition of youth work, development of its quality and common framework in Europe.

Because the Council of Europe operates on a level of providing with resources, spaces and know-how, and the European Union holds supporting competencies in youth policy, those are the states that define legal backgrounds for youth work development in their countries. It is natural that states define youth policy differently, having different traditions, history, challenges, and priorities. There is, however, consensus at the level of Ministries of Youth (the EU Council) that young people all over Europe have the right to access EU opportunities and that certain level of coordination of national youth policies is duly justified.

The Maastricht Treaty (endorsed in 1993) launched wider collaboration of member states in the field of youth – member states declared that it is essential that young people have access to youth exchanges and educational opportunities across Europe and gave competencies to the EU to build such programmes. The Lisbon Strategy (2000) gave foundations for the Open Method of Coordination – a mechanism allowing comparative “peer pressure” onto the states in achieving commonly defined aims in the youth policy. The states are sharing the current state of youth wellbeing through chosen indicators, monitoring each other’s progress in implementing all-European recommendations. Next to it, the EU Youth Dialogue (former Structured Dialogue) started to engage youth organisations, young people, and all relevant entities to massive consultations leading to defining new priorities for EU youth policy and defining indicators they want to observe. In this way young people, youth organisations, and all relevant stakeholders have chance to contribute to development of the EU youth policy and participate in a process of developing recommendations from the grassroot level through the EU-level onto their own countries.

The EU Youth Dialogue, as a method of co-creating EU youth policy, has been reformed since then, its architecture was widened, more actors were added and the role of youth organisations and young people extended. It consisted of round of consultations on local, regional, and national level in every member state, coordinated by the National Working Groups, including the relevant Ministry, National Agency of EU youth programmes and the National Youth Council. In Poland this function was originally held by Polish Council of Youth Organisations (Polska Rada Organizacji Młodzieżowych – PROM), running the Youth Ambassadors Programme. This way young people and youth organisations such as the Europe4Youth Association could be parts of this process, being the voice of young people from their countries, participating in

the EU Youth Conferences, and contributing to development of EU youth policies.

The newest EU Youth Strategy for 2019–2027 – Engage, Connect, Empower – is based on 11 Youth Goals – a set of priorities chosen and described by the participants of the EU Youth Conference (a part of the EU Youth Dialogue process) during the sixth cycle of the Dialogue. Those priorities are:

1. Connecting EU with Youth,
2. Equality of All Genders,
3. Inclusive Societies,
4. Information & Constructive Dialogue,
5. Mental Health & Wellbeing,
6. Moving Rural Youth Forward,
7. Quality Employment for All,
8. Quality Learning,
9. Space and Participation for All,
10. Sustainable Green Europe,
11. Youth Organisations & European Programmes.

All EU youth policy instruments are now directed to implement these goals, and the EU Youth Programmes (also being reformed after adoption of every new strategy) include them as cross-indicators, quality checks, or priorities. These programmes are the main tools implementing EU youth policy accessible to young people and youth organisations. They can directly materialise the goals of the EU youth policy organising youth projects in several accessible frameworks and receive funding for it within financial schemes of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Programmes.

Erasmus+ came to being in 2014, merging all education and youth-related programmes that had existed before and that turned into 5 main sectors of the Erasmus+ programme: Higher Education (the sector that finances students’ exchanges – semesters abroad), School Education, Vocational Education, and Training, Adult Education and Youth. The last one is dedicated to young people, youth workers, and youth sector and funds hundreds of youth projects in Poland

every year. The operator of those funds is called the National Agency of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Programme, and this role is played in Poland by the Foundation for the Development of Educational System (FRSE). Erasmus+ programme Youth sector until 2021 consisted of three Key Actions, and now it is slightly reformed. Key Action 1 gives possibilities to fund a project in which groups and individuals can gain educational experience in the intercultural environment. Projects can support mobilities of young people (youth exchanges, soon also participation actions or Discover EU action) or mobilities of youth workers (training courses, seminars, study visits, job shadowing, etc.). This way youth workers can professionalise themselves, gain competences from the catalogue of Youth Workers competences and catch up with newest trends in youth work and non-formal education. Young people are also encouraged to meet with their peers from other countries, work on chosen topics, learn together, discover new things, and gain intercultural experiences. It is essential that youth exchanges are organised along non-formal learning methods – learning by doing, using creative methods, being supported by a youth leader or facilitator.

Key Action 2 in Erasmus+ Youth is called “strategic partnerships” and gives possibilities for youth organisations to collaborate transnationally with each other or with different sectors entities (schools, think-tanks, public authorities, or private entities) to:

- a) exchange best practices, methods of working with young people, good strategies, and tools;
- b) develop those practices, methods, strategies, and tools as Intellectual Outputs – innovations in the field.

Within those projects whole organisations are strengthening, professionalising, and equipping with innovations and the whole youth sector benefits. From 2021, in order to apply for strategic partnership leading to innovations (option b), organisations will have to turn to the Executive

Agency of Erasmus+ in Brussels and exchange of best practices projects, and small-scale partnerships (option a) will be funded at a national level – by the National Agency. This way youth organisations may contribute to development of the whole field – producing an added value and sharing it with the sector through various tools.

Until 2021 there was also Key Action 3 under Erasmus+ Youth sector – enabling young people to organise projects leading to reforms of youth policy. Young people could organise debates with decision-makers, researchers – problems diagnosis, events strengthening youth participation or competences of young people to shape the world around them. This year, the new Erasmus+ programme has been launched for the period of 2021–2027. Small participation projects are now funded in the section of educational mobilities (under Key Action 1) and big advocacy projects reforming significantly youth policies can be founded from executive agency of Erasmus+ EACEA in Brussels. Both are accessible to youth organisations.

The second instrument of the EU Youth Policy that enables young people and youth organisations to organise youth activities and through that implement EU youth strategy is the European Solidarity Corps (ESC). It was established in 2018 basing on the vast experiences of an action called “EVS – European Voluntary Service”. In ESC it is called “voluntary activities”. Inside of this action, organisations may host a volunteer from another EU country to work together with the organisation on solving some local problems, supporting local society. At the same time, it is an opportunity for young people in the EU to go for a year to another country and work for the sake of communities other than their own, gaining international experience. Within ESC they can also get professional experience enabling their access to the EU labour market (jobs, internships, and traineeships) as well as organise local initiatives called “solidarity projects”. The whole ESC programme is dedicated to young people at the age of 18–30.

## The Role of Youth Organisations in Implementing Youth Policy

Based on the structure and rationale of EU youth policy, its core values, and underlying assumptions, I will dare to say that **young people and youth organisations are not only beneficiary of youth work, but rather co-providers of youth work and main shapers of youth policy.** Thanks to EU programmes enabling young people to self-organise, associate, organise their own projects, and participate in the EU Youth Dialogue, young people are in possession of all instruments to act on their own.

In the development and implementation of EU youth policy young people themselves (unaffiliated young people) and youth organisations (affiliated young people) play a big role – give incentives, participate in consultations and formulation of recommendations. It is a political choice rooted back in post-war era when European integration was heading towards preventing any violent ideology to overcome European countries ever again. They decided that it was essential to secure the right and resources for young people to self-organise themselves freely, with no coercive, directive umbrellas of a state, a party or any political organisations. It was thereby assumed that to protect democracy young people need to be free, have rights to associate, develop themselves how they want, and influence the world around them. This was revolutionary turn of paradigm (after traditions of Prussian system, “upbringing” young people, shaping them to obey the rules of the society – appeared current thoughts and ideologies) and we consider it as a moment of birth of post-modern approach to youth policy.

The EU has adopted this model too by creating EU youth programmes, prevailing function of which is to secure young people’s rights to choose freely their paths, empower them to make their own choices, and encourage to openly co-decide about the system, state, and society they are living in. Within those programmes young people can

engage in a dialogue with their peers from other countries on any topic of their interest, they can solve problems diagnosed themselves, they can also simply realise their passions, spend nice time, travel, get to know the world, be young, make mistakes, and learn. All these things are essentially democratic, inclusive, participatory, and give power to young people as integral parts of the democratic society.

Young people and youth organisations are thereby encouraged to use those opportunities, act on their own, self-organise, fight for their causes, participate in learning, political dialogue and exercise their rights to have a voice. They are also encouraged to use those resources (EU youth programmes) to engage in youth policy-making in their own societies, in their countries, maintaining relations with municipalities, expressing their needs, shaping, and building with bottom-up direction healthy, sustainable system.

But this is not all what young people can do within the EU youth policy system. Youth organisations, through their activities, can offer to other young people educational and development opportunities shaped for their specific needs, formulated in accessible format and in their own language. They can simply provide services for young people using resources and support given within EU youth programmes. Such an approach gives youth organisations a possibility to professionalise and to young people to receive tailor-made services based on their true interests. Youth organisations have in fact better insight into the lives of young people, their expectations, needs, and aspirations. They speak “their language”, can reach out to them better than any adult-led institution. Youth organisations need, however, great support in that mission provided by youth sector professionals (specific trainings, capacity building), coaching or mentoring of youth workers, but foremost they need systemic and stable access to resources: financial, organisational, and human.

There is another benefit of young people taking up a role of youth work providers. Young people

associating themselves in youth organisations are in fact training democracy – decision-making, strategic management and answering with youth projects to the needs of their peers, fellow-youth. The potential of young people in implementing youth policy is thereby crucial and requires the highest investment from the side of the state and local authorities as well as professional, institutionalised youth work.

## The Europe4Youth Association – History and Mission

Europe4Youth is one of the youth organisations that attempted to be a part of the processes leading to adoption of youth policies at lower level of administration in Poland – in Kraków and Lesser Poland. The association from its very beginning has promoted this understanding of youth work: supporting young people in their own paths, empowering them, enabling, creating opportunities, and – not directly – teaching or bringing them up.

At first, it started off as a typical youth organisation willing to use youth opportunities (organising youth exchanges, travel, meet people, learn the world, volunteer abroad) and show them to other young people. The association was “sending” young people to youth exchanges and organising its own youth exchanges in Kraków. The main topics were: democracy and the nature of democratic participation of young people, European identity and what it truly means to be European. Several projects based on youth exchange format were organised: “Do democracy!” or “Snapshot of European citizenship”. The purpose was to explore various topics together with young people, e.g.: to what extent people can integrate with each other and how cultural identity is encrypted in people, how interreligious dialogue can look like today, etc. Young people had a chance to get to know other cultures, meet friends everywhere in Europe and... discover so

many issues that motivate to do more “serious” social projects than just youth meetings.

These activities engaged international partners or youth organisations, some entirely youth-led and some supported by professionals – youth workers. The figures of the partner youth workers from other countries (Germany – from East West East Network, Italy – Binario Uno or Georgia – Droni Association) made a serious, long-lasting impact on our own attitudes and practices. By participating in international youth-led activities, being supported by professionals who in Poland were difficult to find, the staff of the association – young people at the time – we developed key competences in the field of youth and became equipped with basic tools to implement the serious mission. Those experiences shaped educational and professional paths of main members and directed next stages of the association’s development.

The second stage was the establishment of youth information office in Kraków and joining one of the support entities for the European Youth Policy – Eurodesk Network. Eurodesk is a network of organisations whose predominant task is to reach out to all young people, especially with fewer opportunities, with information about the opportunities they can use: volunteering, their own projects, youth exchanges, scholarships, and jobs/internships abroad. The staff of the association learned to be youth consultants and got to know many more EU opportunities. This is when the regular work started – the office on Urzędnicza street in Kraków, facilitation of hundreds of info-workshops for Kraków high school pupils, participation in numerous fairs, conferences, info-events, and campaigns, again getting to know many people in the field.

This stage went in line with a deep exploration of diversity of young people in Lesser Poland. Thanks to the project “Eduaktywacja” (founded from the governmental programme FIO 2014) and opening youth-info office, we were meeting them on a regular basis. The consultants engaged

themselves in often interactions, built strong relations with young people and with time started off a regular, systematic research of young people's needs, aspirations, expectations using workshop settings and board game that was created exactly for that purpose – the first edition of “Crack IT!” (Rozgryź TO!). The game engaged young people in diagnosing social needs that resonate with them and proposing solutions – strategy of intervention indicating innovative approaches and fresh perspective of people untouched by bureaucratic procedures. This generated plenty of project ideas on various social problems detected – from radicalisation to recognition of non-formal learning outcomes. This required next step – a need to act politically, to advocate and engage in the dialogue with decision-makers.

Therefore, the association that joined the Polish Council of Youth Organisations (PROM) and its members became Ambassadors of the EU Youth Dialogue, started to represent Polish youth during EU Youth Conferences as well as advocate at a local level. As a fresh enthusiast of the Structured Dialogue and EU youth policy-making, we were a part of dozens of social consultations with young people, acted as their representatives, advocates. Thanks to that the association has embedded itself in the sector, understood how the policy-making works and how we, still young people ourselves, can influence it along the needs of all young people we represented.

The third stage of development came after realizing how much there is to do in the field of youth policy at a local level. Having collaborated with Kraków municipality, the association started to work on development of youth policy programme, counselling, advising, acting as youth representatives and researchers. Together with other youth organisations and organisations working with young people we have initiated and executed the right to establish the Committee for Citizens' Dialogue for Youth in Kraków and kicked off the process leading to the establishment of the youth strategic programme of Kraków towards

young people called Young Krakow 2.0 (Młody Kraków 2.0). About this process I will elaborate in the next chapter.

The fourth stage embraced the need to innovate in non-formal education. Experimenting with theatre, drama, and storytelling has shown how powerful educational tools that combine high emotional investment, total change of settings, special conditions of learning and openness, and vulnerability in controlled environment can be. This is how the association started to develop educational methodologies based on gaming and eduLARP (live action role playing games). It was observed that through such activities young people not only gain huge knowledge about social mechanisms, processes, phenomena, but also critically test various attitudes, experiment, risk and engage themselves completely in the education process that ends with deep attitude changes and more critical self-reflection. In this spirit we created the world of “Edinu” – in Berlin, at the youth centre of our partner Fahrten-Ferne-Abenteuer Abenteuerzentrum (Azig). Edinu is a postapocalyptic world where various tribes of entirely different cultural heritage and history are pulled to. Young participants in the roles of those tribespeople have to build a society from the scratch – ally in terms of political governance, cultural norms, and practical aspects of living together. The learning outcomes showed us how eduLARP as a method of non-formal education can interact with radicalisation processes – bring more criticism towards deeply rooted beliefs and ideas taken for granted, raise awareness of socio-political processes leading to violence, how polarisation can be prevented and what attitudes are effective in building peaceful societies. We were fascinated by Nordic style of LARP and started to mix it with more gameistic tools: chamber LARPs (creating a nice hybrid), board games, or escape rooms. This gave the association another incentive to research on effectiveness of eduLARP methodology, codify it in line of youth work, describe the methodology, and develop it further on

for specific purposes. Therefore, in 2019 the association coordinated a strategic partnership project “DiveIN – developing eduLARP methodology to prevent violent radicalisation of young people” in which several eduLARP scenarios were created.

European context of associations’ activities is still present. It manifests itself in topics of youth exchanges (EU values, solidarity, intercultural learning, EU issues), aspects of youth workers training courses (how to bring young people closer to Europe), but also the mission of raising awareness about the EU institutionalised system itself. This is fulfilled by the popular game we created – EU on the Board. Young people can thereby familiarise themselves with EU institutions, law making process and make their own mind about crucial topics on the EU Agenda (Green Europe, Sustainable Development, Digitalisation, etc.).

The newest development in the Europe4Youth Association’s life refers to development and moderation of youth open spaces. Since 2015 the association as a member of the Committee for Citizens Dialogue for Youth in Kraków advocated for opening youth centres in a form known in other EU countries, but rather absent in Polish legislative tradition. Youth centres are open spaces for all young people from a neighbourhood, town or city where they can spend time, relax, engage in social and cultural activities, and use opportunities to get a free and non-coercive support in all aspects of their lives (The Quality Label..., 2015). It should be public places, easily accessible and with secure and stable finances to maintain continuity of its mission. Youth centres can play various functions in youth policy, but foremost it should be a cradle for civic activeness, platform for social interactions, and training field for active citizenship. In Kraków’s strategic plan, this function will be given to a network of “Youth Workspaces” (Pracownia Młodych).

In conclusion, in 2021 the Europe4Youth Association works in 4 strategic fields:

1) Educational mobilities (supporting learning of young people and youth workers);

- 2) Non-formal education tools (developing innovations, creative methods, testing them and delivering to educational institutions);
- 3) Youth information (running youth club, youth centre, and youth information office);
- 4) Youth policy (supporting, advocating, advising, researching, working with decision-makers in the field of youth).

Its mission is wide and multidimensional: to support young people in discovering and realizing their full potential in personal, social, and public life in the spirit of empowerment and partnership. Next to this, we aim for high quality and standards by developing the whole youth sector in Lesser Poland and beyond: youth workers, organisations, and youth policies. Europe4Youth’s vision is a European civil society based on the conscious participation of young people in political, social, and cultural life at local and European levels. It is a society where young people have the right, resources, space, competence, opportunity, and support to participate in decision-making on matters that affect them. This indicated a set of values deeply rooted in the European approach to youth work and youth policy: autonomy, empowerment, democracy, solidarity, openness, and tolerance. The association practices partnership and equality in its activities through:

- supporting youth-led activities;
- investing in young volunteers (hosting and sending within the European Solidarity Corps);
- providing conditions and spaces for youth activism;
- providing training and capacity building for young people, youth leaders;
- equipping with youth information, especially about youth rights;
- reaching out to all young people with no divisions.

Next to activities involving young people the association invests in developing youth sector (training youth workers, networking, exchanging best practices, and collaborating with various

stakeholders) and youth policy (participating in policy-making and enabling young people to be active part in those processes). Now the association runs dozens of youth projects on European, national, and local level (educational for youth or professionalizing youth work), runs a youth center in Kraków, youth club and youth information center, develops, implements and monitors youth policies in several cities in Lesser Poland, and supports young people in achieving their own goals.

## The Role of Youth Organisations on the Example of Europe4Youth in Developing Youth Policy at a Local/Regional Level

Europe4Youth started to invest in systemic conditions for young people and youth policy after realising that many youth programmes at a local level focused on youth as a problem (drugs, alcoholism, prevention of social problems), as indicated previously in the paragraph on youth policy. It was difficult to acknowledge that the model of working with young people based on democratic values, freedom, partnership, and empowerment that the association practiced is not a default option for municipalities in Poland. The first attempt to raise interest in youth as a separate social group that requires different attention than children was the meeting of different NGOs and municipalities (the Division of Social Affairs at the time) organised by an association called “The Dialogue Breakfast” (Śniadanie Dialogu) in 2015. The call for collaboration of different entities in Kraków to expand current youth policy and reformulate its assumptions went to the wall. It took several years to convince local authorities about the absolute necessity to shift paradigms in youth policy and start to invest in young people as a great asset for the city.

We started years of networking and advocacy, first in Kraków. Initially, assembling with other youth organisations from Kraków to establish the

Committee for Citizens Dialogue for Youth – an advisory body consisting of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from one field that functions with chosen department(s) of a municipality to work together, consult each other, inform, or build working groups on one branch – in this example on youth policy. Committees are public bodies that municipality should turn to when working on any of the issues from the area of interest of the members of the Committee. This is the way to use resources and expertise of NGOs to manage public policies and open possibilities for NGOs to collaborate with municipalities on policy-making.

The group of NGOs we invited for the collaboration gave the whole consortium a good negotiating position to convince key decision-makers about the need to re-shape the current strategy. Thanks to years of collected experiences, participating in the EU policy-making, hundreds of young people we worked with and the support of other organisations in Kraków, it would be hard to convince the officials that the consortium has legitimacy and competences to represent the voice of young people. But having collected all those experiences and knowledge, it was an obligation to contribute to the systemic level, the conditions in which young people in Kraków access their opportunities and rights. The association believes that youth organisations are to the same extent responsible for it as a public sector.

Participation as a duty. This was the note the association stroked and it reflected the way the association is engaged in many other participation, advisory, or counselling bodies – if they have a potential and certain decision-making power to improve the conditions of the youth sector, the association allocates resources to participate. To give examples: SALTO Youth Information and Participation think tank, the Lesser Poland Partnership for Young People (Małopolskie Partnerstwo na Rzecz Osób Młodych), or already mentioned Committee of Citizens Dialogue for Youth. Through participation the association

develops cross-sectorial networks, strengthens opportunities to make an impact, extends its access to knowledge, and raises the potential that at the end is used for the benefit of young people.

Participation is thereby not only a value promoted, but also a practice of managing the organisation and projects. The example of participatory project management would be another practice: the Youth Workspace Council (*Rada Pracowni Młodych*). It is a decision-making body consisting of young people and moderators of the Youth Workspace (staff of the association) that decides about the whole programme of the Workspace. The decisions of young people are binding for the operators of the project, and the role of moderators is to support its implementation and co-manage the space together with young people – the highest level of Roger Heart's participation ladder (Farrow 2018, pp. 7–8). On the side: this role mirrors the classic role of a youth worker and by practising it this terminology reaches the mainstream. We may conclude that creating a space for participation for young people in all possible places, structures, and existing institutions is another role of young organisations and a good practice.

Stepping back chronologically, it is worth to mention a practice introduced in the process of developing Kraków's youth strategy, enabling young people to participate in initial stage of decision-making processes in the field of youth. In parallel to the social diagnosis before establishment of the Young Kraków 2.0 programme (the youth strategy of Kraków), the city in collaboration with the Committee for Citizens Dialogue for Youth opened a public event, inviting young people to participate and design various answers to main needs of young people in Kraków. What was important, youth groups were defining those needs themselves and during the event they were prepared to find the appropriate city response to it (projects, programmes, design of an infrastructure). The first event YouthKraHack, a social projects hackathon, was organised in

2018 in Manggha Museum in Kraków. Over 50 young people took part and designed 10 proposals presented to the municipality officials. Some of them are already in the implementation phase (e.g. Youth Workspaces), some served as an inspiration for a similar solution (e.g. structured support for school governments), and some were directed as a recommendation for private entities (e.g. mentorship programmes). All of them were, however, recognised and considered when designing the Young Kraków 2.0 programme. Next editions of YouthKraHack hackathons in 2019 and 2020 were already sectorial – their topics were narrowed down to either a chapter of the youth strategy (the case of culture) or a hot topic in 2020 – remote education. Young people were invited to innovate, be creative, be bold and dare to reform municipality policies. The association was a part of this process first as an organiser, then as a part of organisation team, and then as a supporter in accordance with its values and philosophy.

The role of youth organisations in developing youth policies, based on given case study, would be also to innovate in this field and enable decision-makers to catch up with newest developments and trends regarding young people's needs, preferences, and communication practices. Innovative tools such as hackathons, enable direct communication between young people and decision-makers, bring them closer together, and help to develop public trust and culture of participation. What is important to consider is inclusive approach of such events, so that all possible groups of young people can be a part of the process, support for those that require assistance and accountability – translation of results into actual policy-making steps. Transparency of such processes was provided by the Committee of Citizens Dialogue for Youth that served the role of an information hub about further implementation of the proposed youth recommendations.

In this co-management model youth organisations deliver unique resources – access to young people, knowledge about their needs, knowing

their variety, remembering about marginalized/underrepresented groups – they have a right and a duty to collaborate with public authorities to make conditions for them better. Youth organisations can propose adequate methods of working with young people, consult public calls for tenderers, initiate policy-making, participate in social diagnosis, even organise it.

In conclusion, in order to raise the voice of young people at a local/regional level youth organisation such as Europe4Youth pays attention to fulfil following criteria:

- inclusiveness for all possible ranges of young people (providing representativeness);
- transparency of the process – easy access to information;
- active approach to reaching out to young people – played by moderators, animators, supporters (classic role of youth workers);
- accountability of all partners – active execution of this accountability (youth recommendations should be binding for decision-makers, and youth organization has better position and more tools to execute it).

## Challenges for Youth Organizations Connected with Fulfilling Their Role in Youth Policy-Making

Given the conditions of functioning of youth organizations and non-governmental organizations in general, there may be difficulties of different nature connected with fulfilling described role in boosting youth participation, moderating participation, and being a guarantee of its effectiveness, innovativeness, and quality. Categories mentioned below come from the analysis of the historical milestones of the Europe4Youth Association.

First category of challenges is lack of formal recognition of youth work and youth policy. The association has faced criticism when advocating for integrating municipal departments under the

title “youth sector” and attempts (finally successful) to establish interdisciplinary Committee for Citizens Dialogue for Youth. As mentioned before, this sector is not clearly defined in Polish law which makes it difficult to connect practices with its purposes and outcomes in the context of the whole area of what we call a youth sector. To give a hypothetical example: if a public programme on prevention of violent radicalization of young people (inherently requiring interdisciplinary approach and cross-sectorial toolbox) was launched in a social policy framework, there would be a risk of narrowing the possible activities in the scope of what competences the social policy department has to perform (with staff used to certain methods and toolbox used for specific profile of beneficiaries) within its separate budget. Even if any cultural or sport division in the same entity recognized similar need and kicked off their own programmes with activities relevant for their departments, they would have different legal basis and would be analytically segregated from the social programme, despite working on the same social issue. Monitoring and evaluation of such programmes are thereby hindered and embraced with a risk of excluding important dimensions of the same problem. Therefore, integrated approach to youth policy and recognition that the holistic, interdisciplinary, cross-sectorial programme is implemented along the values and principles of youth work gives possibilities to all youth work practitioners to use toolbox relevant for this problem and recognize its outcomes from the perspectives of many dimensions (sectors).

Without integrated approach to youth work and its formal recognition this field is condemned to be function in a “grey zone” somewhere between social, education, sport, and cultural policies on various levels of administration. This implicates that municipalities, regional, or national authorities do not have competences to operate in this field and existing practices are a part of other sectorial policies (mentioned social policy, cultural, education, or sport). Alternative cost of such systemic

conditions is a missed opportunity to implement or delegate public tasks embracing all interconnected field of youth development – disconnection of sectors inhibits effectiveness and deprives from access to various instruments characteristic to other fields. Moreover, the youth sector operating informally has developed great instrumentarium, specific methodologies and tools that avoid classification in existing sectors. This is the challenge that the Europe4Youth Association has also faced, and this experience is well described in this environment as a “bubble” of Erasmus+ world or worse – the sector that no one understands.

Another category of challenges is strictly connected with the lack of recognition for the sector. Because of this fact youth worker as a function/profession has blurry brackets, no clear conditions, entry threshold, or educational path that leads to it. This situation involves many benefits (open access, diversity of practices or flexibility), but eventually deprives from significance and condemns for adapting to existing brackets (e.g. Qualification Framework). This way municipalities or other public entities do not hire youth workers (although they should) but separately animators of free time, professional counselors, or specialists in the field of social policy. The place of employment must be thereby private – private companies or NGOs having freedom in defining their positions. Although the access to this function may be open and the knowledge of this possibility is not common knowledge. Many suitable candidates may choose thereby different disciplines.

The last category of challenges is connected with financial stability, sustainability, and continuity. This is a common issue with the whole non-governmental sector relying on grant system and various sources of finances, which indicates unstable employment and risk of high rotation. It takes a lot of determination and entrepreneurial spirit to develop the organization till its sustainability. Due to the size of this article, this problem will be briefly drafted and its exploration may be left for another analysis.

**In conclusion**, there are many tools that youth organisations can use to shape youth policies at a local or regional level. This is not only an opportunity existing in democratic countries, but also a duty of an entity that assembles young people, knows them, their aspirations, needs, and expectations.

Taking from the case of the Europe4Youth Association, youth organisations can contribute to the implementation of youth policies through:

- participating in its development, using existing structures, or creating their own (associating with other organisations, networking, collaborating with public and private institutions from the sector);
- enabling young people themselves to be a part of decision-making processes by developing/supporting participation structures;
- using the knowledge and experiences collected through work with young people to develop adequate solutions in public sphere;
- opening within its own structures, programmes, and projects to practice participation and democratic management.

In order to play that role in a long run, the organisation may face difficulties of systemic, organisational, and financial nature which can be overcome by... developing nurturing conditions for youth civic sector, enabling easier access to resources for youth organisations specifically. The systemic support for youth associating should be a standard in democratic states caring for sustaining the future of civil society.

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